Conceptualizing Toxicity in Women Twitch Streamers' Communities

by

Olivia Rines

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Karen Adams, Chair
Sarah Florini
Cindi SturtzSreetharan

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ABSTRACT

The livestreaming platform Twitch allows users to engage with one another and

with content creators, known as streamers, in real-time, creating a cyclical pattern in

which viewers and streamers simultaneously influence one another and co-construct the

livestreams. While this active engagement has resulted in numerous benefits, it has also

led to a surge in toxic behavior – actions meant to disrupt the flow of the livestream and

harm the streamer and viewers involved. Toxic behavior is often directed at individuals

who do not conform to the norms of a space or community. Because Twitch evolved out

of an interest in video game spectatorship, and video game culture is burdened by the

gamer stereotype, which typecasts gamers as young, white, male, and cishet, Twitch

users who do not fit this identity category (e.g., women; black, Indigenous and people of

color [BIPOC]; queer people; etc.) are labeled as threats to the perceived homogeneity of

video game (and Twitch) culture. This project examines toxic discourses surrounding

three women Twitch streamers, considering how the streamers' performances,

community-building efforts, and methods of regulation impact the levels and types of

toxicity in their livestreams. A critical technocultural discourse analysis of 30 hours of

livestreaming data reveals diverse approaches to managing toxicity. While all three

streamers expressed that they neither liked nor approved of toxic behavior, their methods

of addressing it varied greatly, from active channel moderators and explicit rules to

public acts of moderation. Furthermore, the manifestation of toxicity differed across the

three streamers' communities, signaling that the streamers' strategies impact not only

users' willingness to engage in this behavior but also other viewers' responses to this

issue. Twitch's positioning as a service provider, which places most of burden of

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regulating user behavior on streamers, further complicates this problem, as streamers are largely responsible for enforcing Twitch's rules as well as their own, leading to disparate and conflicting social norms and enforcement patterns. This project underscores the need for Twitch and its streamers to create standardized methods of behavior regulation that are inclusive and hold users accountable for their behavior.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Phyllis Goldenberg.

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CHAPTER 1

THE GAMER STEREOTYPE AND THE PRICE OF NONCONFORMANCE

Crowdsourced media – media created by large groups of people – has become increasingly popular in recent years, as many individuals are turning to digitally mediated platforms that allow users to create and share their own content. An excellent example of such media is the livestreaming platform Twitch.tv (hereafter known as Twitch), which allows individuals to broadcast content live to viewers who tune in and participate through interactions with the streamer via a synchronous chat system (known commonly as 'chat'). Crowdsourced media platforms such as Twitch offer a unique perspective on online communities, as distinct differences are embedded in these platforms when compared to traditional online communities, such as those created on social media sites. Livestreamers (more commonly called 'streamers') are dependent on active participation and monetary donations (typically in the form of channel subscriptions) from viewers to be successful and are therefore heavily reliant on their interactions with said viewers. In addition, many livestreaming platforms developed out of a gap in legacy media. In this case, Twitch was born out of a rising interest in video game spectatorship, and a predominant number of streamers on Twitch stream themselves playing or talking about video games. The interactive nature of Twitch's platform combined with increasingly diverse genres of livestreams available on the platform have made livestreams a new form of entertainment on its own (Kaytoue et al., 2012) and therefore worthy of further analysis.

Despite the popularity of Twitch, which averaged over two million concurrent users in 2020 (TwitchTracker, 2021b), the platform has increasingly become the focus of media attention for a less than favorable reason – toxicity. Toxicity – aggressive, hostile, and sometimes even threatening behavior typically aimed at individuals who do not conform to one's expectations or broader community norms – has become rampant on Twitch, despite the company's efforts to curb such behavior (Batchelor, 2017). One such group that regularly experiences toxicity is women streamers, who have been delegitimized, objectified, and harassed on Twitch, leading the platform to crack down on streamers who encourage toxic behavior and users who continuously engage in said behavior. However, thus far, little scholarship[1] has explored the experiences of these streamers or considered the ways in which a streamer's community-building efforts and norms can impact the level of toxicity. This project explores toxic discourses surrounding three women Twitch streamers – Pokimane, PaladinAmber, and Dexbonus, emphasizing the types of toxicity present in their communities as well as their methods for moderating and preventing such behavior.

Twitch

While most of this explanation is reserved for chapter two, it is important to offer a brief overview of the platform that stands at the center of this analysis. Twitch is a livestreaming platform that emerged in the early 2010s due to heightened interest in video game spectatorship. Averaging 6.9 million monthly streamers in 2020 (TwitchTracker, 2021b), Twitch offers diverse content from equally diverse streamers.

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[1] Twitch has received increasing scholarly attention in the past two years, and the platform's issues with toxicity have also been mentioned in academic conversations. Thus far, however, there has been little formal documentation of streamers' experiences with toxicity.

Although content largely focuses on video games, Twitch also welcomes podcasts, creative streamers (who stream themselves working on projects, such as art, carpentry, music, etc.), and real-life streamers (who stream themselves going about their daily lives, including going to the gym, shopping, etc.). Because content is streamed live, users can interact with other viewers and with the streamer using chat, an instant messaging component of livestreams. While viewing content does not require the user to register an account with Twitch, posting in a streamer's chat does; however, these accounts do not require personal information, apart from a valid email address. As the next section discusses, this contributes to a felt sense of anonymity for viewers, which may contribute to toxic behavior.

Streamers who meet specific parameters laid out by Twitch, as discussed in the next chapter, can monetize their livestreams in several ways, including viewer subscriptions. Only a small portion of streamers financially support themselves completely through livestreaming, although many see the potential profit, however small, as an incentive for streaming. The streamers examined in this study have made careers of livestreaming, an important point that must be kept in mind when considering not only the issue of toxicity but also more broadly the emotional labor that goes into livestreaming and the parasocial relationships that may develop between streamers and their viewers.

Toxicity in Online Communities

Although the relationship between viewers and a streamer is most often one-sided, known as a parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956), streamers who develop

regular audiences will inevitably see community attachment forming between viewers (Ren et al., 2007). Streamers' communities, like all online communities, have the potential to facilitate positive interactions and create strong attachment between community members. At the same time, some streamers' communities have become burdened by toxic behavior. Online video game communities specifically have become known for aggressive, hostile, and sometimes even threatening behavior amongst community members and towards outsiders. Such behavior is labeled as *toxic* because of its negative impact on the community as a whole (Kwak & Blackburn, 2015). Toxicity often targets an individual or group's identity and covers a variety of behaviors, including using slurs and discriminatory/derogatory language, spamming messages (sending a message repeatedly), and typing in all-caps (equated with shouting), as well as certain in-game behaviors, such as rage-quitting (abruptly leaving) a game in the middle of team play. Because it spans diverse behaviors, potential toxicity must be analyzed within the context in which it occurs to determine whether a behavior is toxic and what impact it may have on others who are present.

Toxic behavior in online communities is fundamentally tied to a sense of anonymity or online unidentifiability. On Twitch, users are only identifiable by their usernames. This anonymity, which is primarily grounded in a perceived disconnect or dissonance between one's offline and online selves, may encourage some participants to engage in toxic behavior because of a felt sense of online disinhibition – a lack of restraint due to the online environment in which one is interacting (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). Because viewers on Twitch enjoy online unidentifiability when

participating in livestreams, toxicity has become a significant issue on the platform, leading to the generalization that livestreaming communities are toxic, hostile spaces. In response, Twitch and some of its streamers have attempted to challenge and curtail this behavior, including the introduction of AutoMod (a machine learning tool that prevents potentially toxic messages from being posted until they are reviewed by a channel moderator) and updated community guidelines (Batchelor, 2017). Similarly, streamers have refined their community rules, increased their use of channel moderators and third-party tools, strengthened punishments for toxic behavior, and encouraged their viewers to enforce the social norms of their streams. These changes seek to reduce online disinhibition, make behavioral expectations clear, and hold users accountable for their behavior. Despite these changes, however, toxicity remains a pervasive issue for Twitch, although, as this project will show, some streamers have developed effective methods to challenge this behavior.

The Gamer Stereotype

As stated above, one motivator for toxic behavior is the presence of individuals who do not conform to the dominant group's expectations. Video game culture is plagued by the gamer stereotype, which typecasts gamers as young, cishet, white, and male. This ostracizes a large portion of the gaming community that does not conform to this stereotype and makes them vulnerable to toxicity. Women gamers and streamers, for example, are discouraged from identifying as gamers (Paaßen et al., 2017) and their authority and skill level is consistently called into question because they do not align with the gamer stereotype. This stereotype is further exaggerated in the most visible subgroup

of gaming culture – streamers and gaming media figures – and has resulted in an oppressive system that normalizes the sexualization, objectification, and harassment of women in these spaces (Gray et al., 2017). Twitch's positioning within video game culture has allowed this symbolic violence and the power structures that encourage it to be obscured, resulting in "a climate of inequality and complicity in oppression" (Gray et al., 2017, p. 4).

Despite this mistreatment, women have continued to stream on Twitch, and some have developed tools and resources to prevent toxicity and ensure that their communities are safe and inclusive. As the analysis of the three women streamers in this project reveals, strategies such as the use of explicit rules regarding appropriate behavior, transparent moderation of viewers in chat, implementation of Twitch tools such as AutoMod, and consistent streamer-viewer interactions, particularly regarding viewer behavior, are effective methods of challenging toxicity. Furthermore, organizations such as AnyKey, a nonprofit organization that promotes diversity and inclusion in all aspects of gaming culture, have provided crucial support for individuals who do not conform to the gamer stereotype, including publishing guides and whitepapers about how to create and support inclusive gaming groups.

Positioning the Researcher

Before turning to the significance of this project, it is crucial to consider how my background as a gamer and user of Twitch has informed my perspective on this analysis. As an avid gamer heavily invested in the culture surrounding my favorite titles, it is unsurprising that YouTube became one of my primary sources of entertainment in the

early 2010s. Crowdsourced media had always surrounded video games – from fan art to discussion boards that included detailed walkthroughs for and commentary on video games – and YouTube offered an ideal platform to expand on this burgeoning culture, with channels dedicated to video game reviews, playthroughs (called "Let's Plays"), commentary, etc. offering users diverse opportunities to interact with other fans and learn about video games, the companies that make them, and the culture that surrounds them. It quickly became apparent, however, that the inability to synchronously interact with content creators limited the user experience, particularly when it came to watching playthroughs. Users wanted to be able to comment on gameplay as it was unfolding and interact more directly with the players.

In 2011, Justin.tv, a livestreaming website that launched in 2007, premiered a new website called Twitch, which was dedicated to gaming livestreams. This provided much-desired opportunities for users to engage with content creators. Around this time, I noticed that some of my favorite content creators were talking about livestreaming, creating accounts on Twitch, and advertising their Twitch channels as an additional space in which users could interact with them. It was not until some of these creators began livestreaming their content on Twitch and later posting it to YouTube that I became motivated to explore Twitch though. Soon, Twitch became the dominant enterprise for many of my favorite content creators, some of whom continued to create YouTube content while others transitioned completely to livestreaming,[2] and, as a dedicated fan, I obediently followed them to this new space. For six years, I frequented Twitch as a

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[2] Motivations for a complete transition to Twitch, according to the content creators I watched, included increased interactions with fans when livestreaming, unhappiness with the YouTube revenue system, general burnout with creating edited content, and reduced job stress compared to being a YouTuber.

regular user, consuming content in my spare time. It was not until the US news media began raising concerns regarding user behavior on Twitch that my additional role as a researcher developed. Although I had witnessed occasional instances of toxicity on Twitch, I largely watched streamers with small, close-knit communities that actively prevented such behavior and had therefore been unaware that toxicity had become rampant on the platform and that it was actively targeting streamers who did not conform to the gamer stereotype. It was then that I turned a critical eye to Twitch and began exploring the affordances that allow and, in some cases, encourage such behavior to go unchecked. I realized that I had cultivated a method of interacting with Twitch that kept me isolated (and therefore safe) from the harassment and discrimination that was normalized by Twitch users because I did not conform to the gamer stereotype and was thus a potential target for such behavior. This realization has unequivocally aligned me with the victims of toxic behavior on Twitch and has fueled my desire to not only detail the experiences of streamers who are plagued by toxicity but also to advocate for changes to the Twitch platform and to methods used by streamers to prevent toxic behavior. As chapter three, which details this project's methodology, explains, this project is undeniably critical at heart, seeking to problematize toxicity and the power structures that normalize this behavior and relegate the prevention of it to its victims and their allies.

Project Significance

This project offers considerable contributions to current discussions of toxicity in digital spaces broadly construed and more specifically on livestreaming platforms like Twitch. Research thus far has not considered contextualized experiences of toxicity and

the ways in which livestreaming is impacted by toxic discourses. While toxicity has been discussed in relation to video games and online interactions (e.g., Aroyo et al., 2019; Fox & Tang, 2017; Jane, 2014; Kwak & Blackburn, 2015; Lee, 2016; Wachs & Wright, 2018) and several publications have examined toxicity on Twitch more specifically (e.g., Brewer et al., 2020; Groen, 2020; Poyane, 2018), thus far, very little research has explored the experiences of streamers encountering and managing toxicity nor the strategies that Twitch, streamers, and their online communities have developed to prevent and reduce toxic behavior on the platform and in individual livestreams. This project offers a contextualized analysis of three streamers' experiences with and approaches to managing toxicity. Through this analysis, this project synthesizes trends in toxic behavior and methods of mitigating and/or challenging toxicity. This approach offers a nuanced exploration that expands on quantitative and macro studies, thereby presenting intricacies in streamer and viewer behavior previously not considered.

On a more practical level, this project offers Twitch and similar platforms useful and relevant conclusions that can be extrapolated and applied to broader contexts to reduce the amount of toxicity and improve the experiences of users in these spaces. While US news media has offered anecdotal discussions of streamers' experiences, this project is a comprehensive analysis of three streamers' experiences, including the types of toxicity present in their livestreams and their methods for managing such behavior. Such conclusions should be applicable to conversations regarding platform affordances and policies and methods of moderating user behavior.

Research Aims

This project seeks to expand upon current understandings of toxicity in digital spaces through an examination of toxic behavior on the livestreaming platform Twitch. Through a mixed methods analysis that draws on the investigative frameworks of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 2015) and critical technocultural discourse analysis (Brock, 2018), this project explores how three women streamers and their communities experience and respond to toxicity and the ways in which streamers and users' interactions with toxicity encourage or discourage further toxic behavior in the these communities.

This project is divided into seven chapters including this introduction. Chapter two provides an overview of scholarship related to toxicity in livestreaming and video game culture. It begins with a description of Twitch, constructing the platform as a form of social media entertainment dependent on user engagement. Twitch is positioned within gaming culture, and the dominant ideologies and affordances of the space with regards to toxic discourses are explored. The chapter then turns to the role of online communities in the normalization of and/or resistance to toxicity within the context of Twitch.

Chapter three outlines the theoretical and ideological frameworks that inform this project, including social constructionism, intersectional feminism, critical technocultural discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis. It constructs this project as a digital ethnographic exploration into women streamers' experiences with toxicity and details the methods of data collection and analysis.

The three subsequent chapters explore the experiences of each of the three streamers – Pokimane, PaladinAmber, and Dexbonus. Within each analysis chapter, a specific aspect of toxicity or approach to its management is considered in relation to the streamer being discussed. Chapter four explores the experiences of one of the most popular streamers on Twitch – Pokimane, who averaged 20,000 concurrent viewers at the time of writing (TwitchTracker, 2021a). The size of her audience, who posted 172 messages in her chat per minute in the data, contributed to perceptions that her chat is unmoderated, which increased feelings of online unidentifiability and disinhibition. Furthermore, although Pokimane does employ some moderation strategies, such as Twitch's AutoMod, toxicity was prevalent in her livestreams, particularly spam, sexualizing/objectifying messages, and harassment. This chapter considers each of these types of toxicity in detail and reflects on how Pokimane's limited use of moderation strategies may contribute to this toxicity and the normalization of such behavior, even though Pokimane neither approves of nor encourages such behavior.

Chapter five transitions from an analysis of a large community to that of a relatively smaller one, examining how one streamer's methods of direct and overt moderation have impacted toxicity in her livestreams. PaladinAmber, who gained notoriety for her creative responses to toxicity, employs breaking news segments in her livestreams to call out toxic behavior and reprimand users for their misbehavior. This chapter dissects these segments and contemplates potential benefits and consequences of public moderation, including whether her methods can be considered shame justice and whether trolls – individuals who engage in destructive behavior simply to get a reaction –

might see PaladinAmber's public moderation as an incentive to engage in toxic behavior. PaladinAmber's explicit discussion of toxicity and zero-tolerance policy contrast significantly with 'typical' methods of moderation, allowing for an exploration of the diverse strategies used by streamers to combat toxicity.

The final analysis chapter highlights a streamer's community that successfully resists toxic behavior through the development of strong community bonds and the use of transparent moderation. Dexbonus (better known as Dodger), a former Youtuber and veteran streamer, utilizes community-building strategies to encourage commitment to the ideologies and expectations of her community. Her channel moderators – Twitch users who have been given special permissions by a streamer to regulate viewer behavior in the streamer's chat – play an active role in modeling appropriate behavior, which encourages viewers to engage in prosocial behavioral imitation (Seering et al., 2017). Dodger also regularly interacts with viewers in her chat, clarifying her rules and offering justification for them, which encourages rule-following (Jhaver, Bruckman, et al., 2019). Furthermore, Dodger's methods of moderation, which include detailed, explicit rules that are amplified by her channel bot, a third-party tool that posts customizable messages in a streamer's chat, and transparent moderation of misbehavior at the hands of her channel moderators reduces online disinhibition and encourages viewers to conform to her community's norms. This chapter draws attention to strategies for transcending toxicity through community investment in an inclusive and safe streaming/viewing experience.

This project concludes with a discussion of major themes, uniting the individual analyses of each streamer in chapters four through six to consider the most common types

of toxicity, strategies employed by each streamer to combat said toxicity, and benefits and consequences of these streamers' approaches. Chapter seven also reflects on the project's limitations and implications. Considering future directions and strategies for real-world application, this chapter emphasizes how common toxicity is on Twitch, the impact it has on users of the platform, and how it can be deterred through changes to the platform in addition to the strategies utilized by the streamers themselves.

CHAPTER 2

TOXICITY IN LIVESTREAMING AND VIDEO GAME CULTURE: A REVIEW OF

LITERATURE

Discussions of toxicity in video game culture and on Twitch exist in many spaces,
from platforms sustained by user-generated content, like Reddit, to more traditional news
sources, like the *Washington Post*, *CNET*, and *Mashable*. Streamers and their
communities have had heart-to-heart conversations regarding toxic behavior not only in
their own communities but on Twitch and in video game communities more broadly.
Scholars have also discussed this topic, both in academic and nonacademic spaces. One
rising scholar Dr. Alok Kanojia, also known as HealthyGamerGG on YouTube and
Twitch, has merged these conversations in the two spaces, interviewing prominent
streamers and offering scholarly perspectives from a certified psychiatrist on issues such
as toxicity, race, gender, and mental health. Due to the vast breadth of discussion
surrounding this topic, it is challenging to present a unified dialogue representing the
diverse, nuanced, and, at times, conflicting accounts of this phenomenon. This chapter
attempts to unite academic and non-academic discussions of toxicity in video game
culture and on Twitch more specifically. Recognizing that this analysis can in no way
touch on all aspects, the goal of this chapter is to provide sufficient context for the
analysis represented in the following chapters, using non-scholarly texts to enhance the
primarily academic conversation surrounding this issue. Beginning with an overview of
Twitch and its users, this chapter explores not only the affordances of the platform but
also the social dynamic created between streamers and users and within streamers'

communities. The conversation then turns to video game culture, which birthed and continues to sustain Twitch. Through an examination of the gamer stereotype, this chapter emphasizes the link between toxic behavior and video game culture, closing with a discussion of toxic behavior from a psychosocial perspective in order to underscore the motivations for such actions and the ways in which the platform and individual streamers encourage or discourage this behavior.

Twitch

What is Twitch?

Created in 2011, Twitch was "the first major platform to employ user generated live video streaming" (Deng et al., 2017) and is primarily utilized to stream (broadcast in real-time) video game content, including eSports (electronic sports) competitions; however, the site also welcomes creative and IRL (real life) streamers, who broadcast their artistic endeavors, such as pottery, metal work, cosplay, and video editing, or aspects of their daily lives, including cooking, eating, working out, and engaging with their viewers ("Just Chatting") respectively. Twitch has been steadily growing since its inception and in 2014 became a subsidiary of Amazon. As of June 2019, Twitch had 3.4 million active streamers and an average of 1.3 million concurrent active users (TwitchTracker, 2021b).[3] Twitch provides two ways to access content: live and on-demand (VOD), although on-demand content is typically only available for a limited time following the live broadcast. Users are not required to create accounts to watch content; however, without an account, viewers cannot post messages in a streamer's chat (i.e.,

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[3] As a result of predicted growth and the COVID-19 pandemic, Twitch has since more than doubled these numbers, with 9.5 million active streamers and an average of 2.9 million concurrent active users in February 2021 (TwitchTracker, 2021b).

chatroom),[4] follow a streamer's channels (to receive email or push notifications when a livestream starts), or subscribe to a streamer (discussed below). Therefore, many viewers opt to create a free account, which only requires a valid email address and the creation of a password and unique username. This simple process contributes to a sense of anonymity amongst users, although active users may develop reputations through their engagement in streamers' communities.

Twitch can be accessed via an internet browser (known as Twitch Web) or as a desktop or mobile application. Each offers different affordances for users. For the sake of simplicity, this dissertation will focus on Twitch Web. Figure 1 depicts a screenshot of the Twitch Web interface from a user's perspective. In their discussion of interaction on interactive multimodal platforms, Jucker et al. (2018) present a similar breakdown of the interface.

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[4]A streamer's chat is a designated synchronous virtual channel that allows viewers to type messages consisting of plain text and/or emotes that are displayed on the channel in a column to the right of the streamer's video feed. Like the livestream itself, the chat is publicly available, meaning that users can read the messages being posted without first creating an account on Twitch.

Figure 2.1

A Labeled Screenshot of the Twitch Web Interface

1   The streamer's profile picture. The red "live" icon signals the streamer is currently live.

2   The streamer's username. The purple checkmark indicates that the streamer is a Twitch partner.[5]

3   The title of the current stream. This changes each time the streamer goes live.

4   The title of the game being played.

5   The streamer's video feed. The feed is typically placed in an unobtrusive corner during gameplay.

6   The number of viewers currently watching the stream.

7   The streamer's chat.

8   A user badge (described below). This badge indicates the user is a channel moderator. See the section on user behavior regulation for more information.

9   The game being played.

10   Other streamers who are currently live.

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[5] Twitch Partners have streamed for at least 25 hours, on 12 different days, to an average of at least 75 viewers within a 30-day period and have been approved by Twitch for the partnership program (Twitch, n.d.).

Twitch is one of the many platforms that has emerged as part of the rise in social media entertainment. In contrast to legacy media – which relies on professionally generated content that is curated and distributed by companies to mass audiences via one-way technologies, such as television, radio, and magazines – social media entertainment is "an emerging proto-industry fueled by professionalizing, previously amateur content creators using new entertainment and communicative formats, including vlogging, gameplay, and do-it-yourself (DIY), to develop potentially sustainable businesses based on significant followings that can extend across multiple platforms" (Cunningham & Craig, 2019, p. 5). Social media entertainment (henceforth SME) encompasses diverse platforms equipped with unique affordances that benefit both the platform and the creators, albeit in differing and often significantly unequal ways. What distinguishes SME from legacy media or internet-distributed content providers such as Netflix or Apple's iTunes is the participatory culture afforded by these platforms, as well as the opportunities the platforms offer for 'amateur' creators to establish sustainable incomes (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). The social nature of Twitch allows users to interact with creators and viewers directly through streamers' chats and private messages (known as whispers) and previously through voice and video calls. This makes SME platforms such as Twitch a "radical hybrid of entertainment and community development and maintenance. Subscriber or fan engagement is not only critical; it is what triggers the revenue-sharing business model that replaces IP control" (Cunningham & Craig, 2019, p. 14). By providing both entertainment and social networking, Twitch creates a space in which streamers can develop unique and marketable brands that are supported by

communities of followers, allowing both Twitch and its streamers to benefit from the revenue-sharing business model.

Unlike major Hollywood television and film studios, Twitch is not responsible for content creation and is thus labeled as a platform or service provider, allowing it to be grouped under the 'safe harbor' provisions of the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act 1998, which prevents Twitch from being held liable for copyright infringement as long as they block access to alleged infringing material upon receiving infringement claims from a rights holder (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). At the same time, this makes Twitch vulnerable, as it is forced to rely on streamers creating enough marketable and advertiser-friendly content to keep the platform afloat. This lack of control forces Twitch and similar platforms to constantly pivot and reinvent themselves in response to feedback from users and changes in the market, as "[p]latform prominence, high growth, and massive scale may not represent dominance, or even sustainability" (Cunningham & Craig, 2019, p. 26). As platforms such as Twitch have become more attractive to advertisers in recent years, Twitch has increased its collaborations with major companies to solidify an alternative source of revenue. In 2018, as part of a deal worth approximately $130 million, the National Football League streamed 11 football games on Amazon Prime and Twitch simultaneously (Wolf, 2018). Twitch has also streamed syndicated content such as movies and television episodes from the popular *Pokémon* series and television episodes of Bob Ross's *Joy of Painting.* However, the most controversial marketing move for Twitch recently is most likely their "Twitch Sells Out" event in 2019, a two-day stream covering popular Amazon Prime Day deals and featuring

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popular Twitch streamers. Numerous streamers boycotted Twitch during this event to show solidarity with Amazon workers who were on strike (Grayson, 2019a). These marketing deals are evidence of the co-evolution of platforms such as Twitch and legacy media content creators transitioning to online content distribution, as these companies explore new opportunities to increase revenue and audience numbers and challenge each other to be the primary destination for content consumption and entertainment.

The Streamers

Twitch streamers are individuals from across the world who broadcast diverse content live to audiences ranging in size from zero to over 200,000. In 2019, Twitch averaged 3.6 million unique streamers every month (TwitchTracker, 2021b). To broadcast their content, Twitch streamers must create a channel. This channel provides a space for the streamer to develop an "about the channel" section, send announcements, post updates, house content and VODs (videos on demand), create emotes (discussed below), and, of course, stream their content. While some streamers create channels on Twitch as a hobby, others rely on their channel as a source of income. Streamers can profit from their channels through advertisement revenue, partnerships with companies, donations from viewers, which can take many forms, and subscriptions. However, every viewer, regardless of whether they monetarily support a streamer, is valuable, as a streamer's popularity on Twitch correlates with the likelihood that Twitch will highlight the streamer's channel on their homepage (which correspondingly increases viewership) and advertisers and companies will engage with their brand, which will further increase their revenue.

The success of a streamer on Twitch is dependent on their ability to create two things: spreadable content and a successful personal brand. To compete with other creators, both on Twitch and other social media entertainment platforms, Twitch streamers must generate media that is *spreadable*. Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013), describe the *spreadability* of media as "the potential—both technical and cultural—for audiences to share content for their own purposes, sometimes with the permission of rights holders, sometimes against their wishes" (p. 3). Focusing on the agency of audiences, Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) use spreadability to extend the definition of *stickiness*, Gladwell's (2000) term for the ability to attract an audience and maintain their engagement in one's content. Spreadability thus considers the ability to both engage an audience and encourage that audience to share the media with their social network, increasing the circulation of the content and foot traffic on the creator's landing page. Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, pp. 197-198) argue that the likelihood of content being shared increases when content follows five guidelines:

1. Content is available where and when it is desired – for streamers, this means that they create and stick to a streaming schedule that fits the needs of their audience. Depending on the time zone in which most of the streamer's community resides, this may mean streaming late at night, early in the morning, or for long periods of time (to attract viewers in multiple time zones).

2. Content is portable – Twitch users want to be able to access a streamer regardless of their locale. Since Twitch can be accessed via an internet browser or desktop or mobile application, streamers are able to reach viewers using a variety of

technologies. 'Portable' also refers to the ability for content to be edited and uploaded on other platforms. Twitch allows users to clip segments of a livestream, which can then be distributed across various platforms, making it easy for viewers to share content from streamers. Streamers are also able to download their streams and archive them on other platforms, such as YouTube.

3. Content is easily reusable – Both streamers and viewers want to circulate content, and there are endless reasons for doing so. Clips from Twitch streams have been used as GIFs and memes and recycled for lists like Livestream Fails, a website that curates videos of Twitch streamers.

4. Relevant to multiple audiences – streamers cannot be successful if their content only appeals to one target audience. Although there are examples of streamers who are known for only playing one game or doing one activity, streamers often experiment with different types of content to attract new audiences.

5. Content must be available regularly – streamers often rely on schedules that are posted on Twitch and/or other platforms to ensure their followers are aware of when they are streaming. Streamers who do not follow a schedule or do not stream for a period risk losing followers and, more importantly, subscribers. This need for regularity results in a consistent stream of material, some of which may appeal to some audience members more than others.

Streamers must carefully design the content of their stream and their stream schedule, in addition to making their content visible through notifications and advertisements on other platforms, such as Twitter. The more spreadable their content is, the higher the foot

traffic will be on their streams, increasing the views, followers, subscribers, and donors they attract.

In addition to spreadable content, successful streamers must create a personal brand that feels authentic to the audience but is also marketable. At its most basic level, a personal brand communicates an individual's values and core competencies and factors in the needs and desires of their intended audience (Rangarajan et al., 2017). Marwick (2013) defines self-branding as the application of marketing strategies to an individual so that the self becomes a salable commodity and argues that it "is intrinsically linked to the features of social media technologies that make self-promotion on a wide scale possible" (Marwick, 2013, p. 166). In the case of Twitch streamers, in addition to the Twitch platform, successful streamers will often market themselves on diverse social media platforms, such as Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Discord, and TikTok, encouraging their community to follow them there, interacting regularly with followers in these spaces, and, most crucially, notifying their followers of their streaming schedule, including each time they start streaming. By extending themselves beyond Twitch and creating new followings on these additional platforms, streamers can further solidify their brand and increase their marketability.

Successful branding is a blend of authenticity, independence, and entrepreneurial spirit (Postigo, 2016). In this context, *authenticity* refers to a streamer's ability to create and consistently replicate a performance deemed genuine by the audience. This performance may be at odds with a streamer's identity outside of their streams and may in some cases be a theatrical character created by the streamer; however, the authenticity

of the streamer is more dependent on the consistency and believability of the

performance than any potential truth value. According to Banet-Weiser (2012), this is at

odds with the claims of some scholars of consumer culture who argue that a binary exists

in which "[w]hat is understood (and experienced) as authentic is considered such

precisely because it is perceived as *not* commercial" (p. 10). In other words, while some

might position authenticity at odds with the commodification of the self, for professional

Twitch streamers, this balance is crucial to their success. Successful streamers must put

on a performance deemed authentic by their audience while at the same time monetizing

and profiting off that performance without appearing too commercial, what Marwick

(2013) calls 'business-targeted self-presentation.' This balance, argues Banet-Weiser

(2012), separates branding from commodification, which she defines as the

transformation of things into commodities. While streamers may sell goods as part of

their business, their profit-model is far more dependent on selling themselves rather than

things. Branding is a cultural phenomenon that "impacts the way we understand who we

are, how we organize ourselves in the world, what stories we tell ourselves about

ourselves" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 5). While commodities are inevitably a part of this

process, branding extends beyond the end-product to encompass the everyday, lived

experiences of the consumers. For streamers, this means the creation of a community of

followers who are dedicated to watching their content, interacting with the streamer and

other community members both on Twitch and other platforms, and supporting the

streamer monetarily through the revenue-sharing models operationalized by Twitch and

other platforms (such as Patreon[6]), as well as through the purchase of other goods and/or

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[6] Patreon is a crowdfunding membership platform that allows users to donate to creators in exchange for

services marked or sold by the streamer. This community is built and supported by the relational labor of the streamer, defined by Baym (2015) as "regular, ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work" (p. 16). The consistent interactions between a streamer and their community on Twitch and other platforms create the foundation for the streamer's personal brand and, regardless of the success of the streamer, remain a significant portion of the streamer's labor, as a streamer cannot be successful without the support of their community.

Branding within the Twitch sphere extends to the authenticity of the streamer and the transparency of the relationship between the streamer and their community. The streamer's creation of an 'authentic' space becomes their brand – with pillars such as their love of a specific video game or their relationship with other streamers or public figures becoming the tenets of their brand as well as their authentic performance. Members of streamers' communities recognize that streaming is a career, not just a hobby, and that streamers must make money to sustain themselves and their brand. However, according to Cunningham and Craig (2019), because Twitch streaming is part of social media entertainment and therefore at odds with legacy media, viewers have an expectation regarding the level of authenticity a streamer will maintain. In presenting themselves in opposition to the established fictional narratives of traditional screen entertainment, streamers challenge the inauthenticity of legacy media through their transparency and real-time interaction with viewers and their community. Followers expect that streamers will share a large part of themselves with their community, blurring

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exclusive content. Patreon is often used by Twitch streamers as an additional source of revenue, as it allows followers (known as patrons) to donate directly to creators, who receive 90% of the donations.

the line between the public and private for the streamer. Because a high level of interactivity is required to be a successful Twitch streamer, a streamer's authenticity claims are constantly tested in the "call-and-response rhetorical field" of the streamer's relational labor (Cunningham & Craig, 2019, p. 156). An example of such interaction includes when viewers post questions in a streamer's chat and the streamer is expected to answer said questions honestly and to the satisfaction of their viewers. However, more broadly, a streamer's performance is constantly being evaluated by viewers to determine whether it aligns with the streamer's brand. Any evidence that a streamer is hiding something, not being truthful, or falsely constructing themselves threatens the streamer-viewer relationship, meaning that streamers must carefully construct and constantly monitor their own performances to prevent such missteps.

As Cunningham and Craig (2019) describe, once a streamer has established a dedicated community, they can marketize this relationship through brand deals, where companies pay a streamer to advertise their product or service. While these companies are interested in profiting from the trust and commitment that the streamer has established with their community, the streamer recognizes that brand deals that challenge their authenticity will risk their relationship with their community. The brand deal must therefore be positioned as aligning with the streamer's brand (i.e., they genuinely like the product, use the service, and/or have a strong relationship with the company) and as subordinate to the relationship between the streamer and their community. In other words, as Cunningham and Craig (2019) argue, "instead of discourses of authenticity tracking across a bilateral relationship between individuals and commodity culture, the

relations are trilateral among the 'authentic' creator, the fan community that validates all such claims to authenticity, and the brand that is seeking to buy into, and leverage, that primary relationship" (p. 156). If the streamer's relationship with the brand supersedes their relationship with their community or challenges the streamer's authenticity, the community may respond negatively, which will threaten the streamer-community relationship. Streamers, therefore, must carefully navigate their interactions with advertisers and be transparent with their community when engaging in brand deals, which is why some streamers have avoided brand deals altogether and have instead turned to other forms of revenue, such as creating their own products, with many streamers advertising self-branded merchandise on stream.

The Viewers

In 2020, there were on average 26.5 million daily users of Twitch, with an average of 2.1 million concurrent users (TwitchTracker, 2021b). Although Twitch has been tight-lipped about user statistics, multiple sources have reported that 81.5% of Twitch users are male, of which 55% are 18-49 years old. These demographics contrast with the Entertainment Software Association's "2018 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data," which reported that 45% of US gamers are women, with 51% of male gamers and 47% of women gamers aging 18-49. Of course, not all Twitch users are gamers, and not all gamers use Twitch; however, the high percentage of male users on Twitch could be related to issues of visibility for women within the gaming community, where the white male gamer stereotype has discouraged women from self-identifying as gamers (Paaßen et al., 2017). This theory will be discussed further in the section on video game culture.

Unlike the audiences of legacy media, who often feel a sense of distance from and hierarchy with mainstream celebrities (Marwick & boyd, 2011), audiences of Twitch streamers are often afforded reciprocal intimacies (Abidin, 2015) with the streamers they watch. Viewers regularly have opportunities to engage with a streamer via the streamer's chat, and streamers will interact with the chat to varying degrees depending on the number of people in chat and the streamer's approach to viewer interaction. As will be shown in the analysis chapters, while some streamers may disregard their chat to a large extent, others spend a significant portion of their streams reading and responding to viewers' messages in chat (often during the 'Just Chatting' portion of a stream). The personal nature of these interactions creates a *perceived interconnectedness*, a phrase coined by Abidin (2015) to portray the impressions felt by audience members, regardless of whether the intimacy of these interaction is 'real.' Part of the draw for users of Twitch is the breakdown of the traditional celebrity-audience relationship. In contrast to the one-sided interpersonal connections fostered in legacy media, in which audiences cultivate extensive knowledge of a celebrity without any reciprocity involved (Abidin, 2015), Twitch streamers create communities that are grounded in the reciprocal nature of their interactions, allowing audience members to bond with each other and with the streamer through their disclosure of intimate information.

Miller (2008) argues that it is the other people and the connections made that drive users to participate in spaces like a Twitch streamer's chat. Through his discussion of phatic culture, which is grounded in Malinowski's (1923) concept of *phatic* and defined by Miller (2008) as social communication marked by non-dialogic and non-

informational interactions, Miller (2008) argues that there has been "a shift from dialogue and communication between actors in a network, where the point of the network was to facilitate an exchange of substantive content, to a situation where the maintenance of a network itself has become the primary focus" (p. 398). Because the success of a Twitch streamer is contingent on their ability to sustain a loyal community of followers, community-building is often encouraged by streamers, and viewers communicate and strengthen this bond through their use of phatic communication. Twitch chats, like live audiences, are groups that are brought together by a shared desire to consume content in the presence of others who share a similar appreciation for said content. The goal of interaction in these spaces is not necessarily to engage in knowledge-sharing but to participate in the shared experience of a live event. From a psychological perspective, attending live events can satisfy one's social-psychological needs (Getz, 1991); participating in chat during a livestream may be another way of meeting these needs, without the cost of tickets or travel. The shift from live event to livestream, however, has raised questions for some scholars regarding the nature of the sociality in digital spaces like Twitch and other social networking platforms. This will be discussed further in the section on online communities.

Because streamers are heavily reliant on subscribers, they must work diligently to cultivate a loyal community of viewers who consistently watch and monetarily support their channel. Viewers can show support for their favorite streamers through subscriptions and donations on Twitch, although streamers may accept other forms of monetary support on other platforms. Subscriptions are tiered: subscribers can pay $4.99

(tier 1), $9.99 (tier 2), or $24.99 (tier 3) per month, with Twitch taking approximately half of the money, although the exact division of income can vary depending on the popularity of the streamer. Subscriptions are automatically renewed monthly unless the subscriber cancels. In addition to being subscribed, users can gift one-month subscriptions to anyone on Twitch. Users can gift a subscription to a specific user or can gift up to 100 subscriptions at once to randomly selected recipients, known as Community Gifting. Viewers subscribe to streamers and gift subscriptions as a way of showing their support for the streamer, as streamers rely on subscriptions as one of the few somewhat stable forms of income available to them; these subscriptions, however, also come with benefits for subscribers, including custom emotes, subscriber badges, special alerts, and other perks enabled by the streamer. Emotes are unique emoticons created by Twitch or the streamer (and approved by Twitch) to convey emotions or actions, such as celebrate, insult, happy, angry, sarcasm, hype, laughter, etc. Examples of some of the most popular emotes can be seen in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Examples of Common Emotes Used on Twitch

Emote	Emote Name	Emote Meaning
	LUL	Laughter
	PogChamp[7]	Excitement
	BibleThump	Sadness
	Kappa	Sarcasm / Trolling
	HeyGuys	A Greeting

A streamer's emotes can be used by their subscribers in any Twitch streamer's chat, and the number of emotes that a streamer has available for use in chat is dependent on the number of subscribers the streamer has. Supporters of a streamer are therefore encouraged to stay subscribed and to gift subscriptions so that the streamer will have more emotes available for community use. Further discussion of the use of emotes on Twitch can be found in the section on toxicity.

In addition to emotes, subscribers have badges (seen in #8 of Figure 2.1) that show up next to their name when they are posting in the streamer's chat. Subscriber badges are typically customized by streamers and often change based on the number of months that a viewer has been subscribed to reward subscriber loyalty and encourage more viewers to subscribe (Stephenson, 2020). For users who gift subscriptions, there are sub gifter badges that are designed by Twitch, which appear in addition to the subscriber

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[7] This emote was recently replaced by KomodoHype ( ) after the person depicted in the PogChamp emote made statements supporting the violence that occurred during the January 6, 2021 riot in the United States' Capitol (Peters, 2021).

badge. When a user's subscription to a streamer renews every month, a special alert will appear in chat (and sometimes on stream depending on the streamer's settings) announcing the (re)subscription and the amount of time that the person has been subscribed. The subscriber also has the option to send a personalized message to the streamer, which will also appear in chat. In addition to these perks, streamers may offer other rewards, such as an exclusive chatroom for subscribers, which is particularly useful for streamers with very large audiences; ad-free viewing, which removes advertisements placed before, during, and after a stream by Twitch; and exclusive giveaways. Not all streamers offer these additional rewards, and many streamers personalize the rewards they offer based on their personal brand.

In addition to subscriptions, viewers can support their favorite streamers through two forms of donations: cheers and monetary donations. Viewers can 'cheer' for a streamer using *bits*, a digital currency purchased through Twitch. A Twitch streamer earns $1 for every 100 bits donated to them, and viewers earn cheer chat badges that change based on the number of bits they have donated. Viewers can also donate money directly to streamers, typically through the online payments system PayPal. Through these affordances, Twitch provides a space for viewers to consume content, engage with and support content creators, interact with other followers of specific content or content creators, and be rewarded for their loyalty to a specific streamer's community. In an age where content consumption is increasingly occurring in digital spaces and online social capital is becoming increasingly valuable, Twitch represents a popular site for real-time engagement and sociality.

User Behavior Regulation on Twitch

To ensure that users obey Twitch's Community Guidelines and a streamer's rules, many streamers utilize diverse strategies to moderate user behavior. Twitch divides these tools into four tiers: (1) viewer-level safety, (2) channel-level safety, (3) service-level safety, and (4) Community Guidelines (Twitch, 2021, Our Approach to Safety section).[8] In tier one, viewers have access to tools that allow them to block other users and filter a streamer's chat for profanity, discrimination, hostility, and/or sexually explicit language. Twitch also employs content warnings, which inform a user when they have clicked on a stream designated for mature audiences. Tier two houses channel moderators, Mod View, and AutoMod. Channel moderators are members of a streamer's community who have been enlisted by the streamer and given special privileges and tools that allow them to regulate user behavior in a streamer's chat. Because they are community members, moderators are often the best line of defense against toxicity, as they are committed to supporting the streamer and their community. While moderator behavior can vary widely (Seering et al., 2019), their main goals are to ensure that the streamer's rules are upheld and any misbehavior is policed according to the streamer's expectations and Twitch's Community Guidelines and Terms of Service. An extensive analysis of channel moderator behavior is available in chapter six.

Channel moderators on Twitch can use Mod View, which is a customizable interface developed by Twitch, to make the moderation process easier. It houses numerous widgets, including the streamer's chat, a list of all viewers connected to chat,

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[8] Much of the practical information in this section regarding the tiers and tools housed within them comes from Twitch's "Transparency Report 2020," which was released in February 2021.

channel actions and settings, active moderators, and the AutoMod queue. AutoMod, which is discussed in greater detail in chapter four, is a machine-learning program that filters a streamer's chat for potentially risky behavior. The program is customizable, allowing the streamer to operate at one of five levels, from no filtering to comprehensive filtering for discrimination, profanity, sexual content, and hostility. In addition, the streamer can block specific words and phrases that AutoMod will then add to its filtering process. Utterances identified by AutoMod as potentially risky appear in the AutoMod queue, which is viewable by both channel moderators and the streamer, who have the option to allow the utterance to be posted in chat or to remove the utterance and, if needed, take appropriate action against the user who posted said utterance. Due to its customizability at the hands of streamers, channel-level safety measures, including but not limited to the three measures discussed here, are frequently discussed in the analysis chapters, as the choice to use said features, along with the ways in which said features are used, significantly impact the level of toxicity in a streamer's community.

Furthermore, channel-level safety is considered by both streamers and the Twitch platform as a crucial aspect of behavior regulation because Twitch is a service provider, not a content company. As such, it is not responsible for regulating user behavior as long as said behavior does not break any laws. However, in order to maintain a positive public image and grow its business, Twitch has implemented three features at tier three – service-level safety. These include user reporting, machine detection, and review and enforcement. User reports, as the name indicates, are generated by users – both viewers and streamers – who can report any instances of behavior that violate Twitch's

Community Guidelines or Terms of Service. Twitch also has programs that scan content for violations. Twitch then has a team of professionals responsible for reviewing user reports and the results of machine detection, handing out punishments, and coordinating with law enforcement when necessary. Twitch (2021) describes their review and enforcement team as follows: "These content moderation professionals work across multiple locations, and support over 20 languages, in order to provide 24/7/365 capacity to review reports as they come in across the globe. Reports are prioritized so that the most harmful behavior can be dealt with most quickly" (Service Level Safety section). While the review and enforcement team are largely responsive rather than preventative, they can implement the most impactful punishments, including streamer channel bans and account-wide user bans, and therefore are a necessary and useful component of behavior regulation on Twitch.

Finally, at tier four are Twitch's Community Guidelines, which lay out rules, examples of misbehavior, and potential punishments. These guidelines are extensive and consistently updated and govern all activity on Twitch. All users are expected to read, understand, and follow these guidelines; however, as the analysis chapters reveal, this is often not the case, hence this project. At the same time, these guidelines provide crucial discussion of what is considered appropriate behavior on Twitch and thus impact what is or is not labeled as toxic on the platform and potentially in a streamer's community, depending on whether the streamer enforces said guidelines. Therefore, these guidelines, along with aspects of the other three tiers of tools, will be referenced throughout the remainder of this project when appropriate.

Online Communities Surrounding Twitch Streamers

The social nature of Twitch affords users the opportunity to create bonds with other users over their shared enjoyment of a streamer's content, creating communities of loyal followers who actively support the streamer through their interactions with one another. Ren, Kraut, and Kiesler (2007) suggest that these bonds are more likely to be formed when members of a community "have opportunities to self-disclose and learn about each other" (p. 388). This theory is in line with Abidin's (2015) discussion of communicative intimacies, interactions that allow followers to feel familiar and close to a public figure (or in the context of Twitch, a streamer). Abidin (2015) argues that *intimacy* is distinct from accessibility, believability, authenticity, or emulatability in that intimacies are inherently commodified, "motivated by commerce or elaborately curated as long as followers (who may or may not be critically aware of these) feel familiar, close, and emotionally attached" to these public figures. Communities that form around Twitch streamers are grounded in self-disclosure and self-presentation, as streamers talk directly to their audiences, often engage in casual conversations with participants in their chat, and are typically more willing to share details about their personal lives than traditional public figures. Furthermore, a streamer's chat provides a venue for members of the streamer's community to engage with one another and thus presents opportunities for participants to talk about themselves and learn about other members in their community.

Twitch encourages the development of communities surrounding streamers, as such connections encourage user retention: "[a]lmost all online communities rely upon people's voluntary commitment, participation, and contributions. They need visitors to

return and members to interact with others to maintain the community infrastructure, generate new and updated information, and provide social and emotional support to other members" (Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007). As stated before, in the context of Twitch livestreams, this active engagement can take many forms, including attending livestreams, engaging in the streamer's chat, contributing money via a subscription and/or donations, and/or interacting with the streamer and/or community members across other digital platforms beyond Twitch. Although some turnover is natural in any community, significant retention is necessary for any streamer who relies on their community as a source of income. Therefore, the amount and quality of interaction occurring between the streamer and community members and amongst community members themselves signal the health and potential longevity of the community.

However, despite how close a community may feel to a streamer, the relationship is inherently parasocial, defined by a "lack of effective reciprocity" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215). As Dibble et al. (2016) describe, "a parasocial interaction is triggered if media performers acknowledge the presence of the audience in their performance, adapt the conversational style of informal face-to-face gatherings, and bodily and verbally address their users" (p. 23). Because streamers directly address the camera and often interact with viewers in chat, viewers may feel that they have a close or intimate bond with a streamer, despite the commodified nature of the intimacy created by the streamer. Such feelings can be beneficial to a streamer and their community when they result in member loyalty and shows of support (both monetary and otherwise). However, conversely, these one-side bonds can be detrimental, with consequences ranging from

mild, such as donating more money to a streamer than is financially feasible, to extreme, including stalking, rape/death threats, and doxing (the nonconsensual release on a public figure's personal information online). Thus, streamers must be careful not to provide too much personal information about themselves. Streamers also often limit interactions with followers to public spaces, such as Twitter and Twitch, leaving community spaces, like Discord or Reddit, for interactions between community members.

Thus far, the term *community* has been used in this chapter to describe the aggregation of followers who watch and/or monetarily support a Twitch streamer. This term has been selected because it is consistent with the terminology utilized by the streamers and viewers themselves. However, within academia, there has been some disagreement regarding the nature of the sociality that occurs in digital spaces; in particular, Wittel (2001) argues that the phrase *network sociality* more accurately describes the phenomena occurring in these spaces than *community-based sociality*. He states that *community* "entails stability, coherence, embeddedness and belonging. It involves strong and long-lasting ties, proximity and a common history or narrative of the collective" (Wittel, 2001, p. 51). Wittel's (2001) definition of community evokes images of social groups that share strong interpersonal bonds grounded in a collective history, face-to-face interaction, and clearly defined boundaries (either physical or in terms of membership). In replacing *community* with *network sociality*, Wittel (2001) seeks to remove the historical, physical, and temporal aspects of community to better reflect current social phenomena, arguing that *network sociality* is de-localized, embedded in technology, ephemeral, commodified, and based on individualization. Twitch

communities are an excellent example of network sociality, in that they may meet some of the requirements of a traditional community – often creating parameters for belonging – but at the same time are not bounded by physical space and are inherently embedded in the affordances of the Twitch platform.

This distinction is important in a discussion of platforms like Twitch because it underscores the constructed and imagined nature (Anderson, 1983; see below) of these groups. Rather than seeing the networks created by these streamers as a *product* of the streamer's content or of the Twitch platform, Wittel's theory of network sociality is focused on networking as a *practice*. In doing so, a series of questions arise regarding the individuals involved in these networks and the social ties they create through interaction with one another:

> How do people build, maintain and alter these social ties? What means, tactics and strategies do they employ? What kind of cultural capital do they need to increase their social capital? […] How crucial is such social capital in the new informational fields that involve not the reproduction but the production of social relations? (Wittel, 2001, p. 52)

These questions situate social interaction and the bonds that are formed as a consequence of said interaction as agentive, fluid, and in constant flux. Also, because sociality in spaces such as Twitch cannot rely on a shared perception of context, social structures must be produced internally by participants. Through open social systems, participants are constantly challenged to construct and reconstruct identities deemed legible by other participants, leading to a continuous stream of 'catching up' – sharing and receiving

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information that establishes and re-establishes social contacts and positions them within

the network. In Twitch chats, this is most commonly seen through the flow of phatic

communication (discussed above) that fills a streamer's chat throughout their stream, as

viewers engage with one another and voice their presence in the group. Thus, in contrast

to traditional theories of *community*, *network sociality* is grounded in potentiality,

temporality, and commodification. All strangers are potential friends, yet such

friendships are not grounded in a shared history but rather the sharing of experience,

making bonds inherently temporal. Social capital plays a key role, with networking

representing "a move from having relationships towards doing relationships and towards

relationship management" (Wittel, 2001, p. 72). For Twitch communities, this means that

participation in the community is vital, as one's social standing and membership is

contingent on their active involvement in the group. The de-localized nature of sociality

for these groups requires members to constantly network with one another, managing

their relationships with other members and with the streamer through their contributions

to Twitch chat and on other platforms. Membership can also become quite literally

commodified, as Twitch offers badges to members who donate a certain amount of

money or who have been loyal subscribers; thus, by monetarily supporting a streamer, an

individual gains social capital in the streamer's community (visible through the use of

loyalty perks such as emotes).

Anderson's (1983) concept of *imagined communities* is crucial to understanding

the communities that form around Twitch streamers. Although opportunities for

interactive intimacies – defined by Abidin (2015) as the integration of face-to-face

interactions into the options for one to engage with their followers – exist for members of a streamer's community, the primary spaces for interaction for members of a streamer's community are digital (the streamer's chat, as well as other communication platforms such as Discord and social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram). Therefore, the boundaries of the community must be self-constructed and enforced – a product of the rules, parameters, and ideologies established by the streamer and taken up by their community, much in the same way a city-state is delineated.

Thus far, the discussion of Wittel's (2001) *network sociality* has considered the ways in which this concept is unlike community-based sociality. Yet, while Wittel (2001) argues that network sociality is something separate from community-based sociality and is capable of displacing this version of sociality, with regards to the current discussion, it is important to explore how Twitch communities can rely on aspects of both concepts. Like communities grounded in face-to-face interaction, online communities like those that form around Twitch streamers provide a space for individuals to discuss common interests, participate in knowledge building, offer emotional support and advice, and develop new relationships. In contrast to communities defined by physical proximity, however, online communities offer opportunities for individuals who would otherwise never be able to engage with each other to easily share their experiences and learn about ways of doing and being that are far different from their own. Yet, as Wittel (2001) argues, attempting to separate online communities from face-to-face communities suggests that virtual reality is something separate from 'real' reality and that 'real' reality is not mediated. In fact, all interactions are mediated in one way or another, and online

interactions, while differing to various degrees from face-to-face interactions, create

opportunities for diverse experiences. Thus, while Wittel's (2001) theory of network

sociality offers important contributions to understanding the nature of online interaction,

not all of the fundamental aspects of community-based sociality have been displaced,

leaving a version of *community* that utilizes networked potentiality and strong

interpersonal bonds. This understanding of community will be important when

considering how the streamers in this study have responded to toxicity, particularly when

examining the role a streamer's community plays in the acceptance/rejection of toxic

behavior and how strong community bonds can impact the levels of toxic behavior

exhibited in a streamer's chat.

Video Game Culture

Before this chapter turns to a discussion of toxicity, it is important to examine the

cultural ideologies that underpin Twitch and fuel many of its users. As stated previously,

Twitch was born out of a rising interest in video game spectatorship. The culture

surrounding video games, however, is difficult to pin down, as "[v]ideo games permeate

education, mobile technologies, museum displays, social functions, family interactions,

and workplaces. They are played by many if not all ages, genders, sexualities, races,

religions, and nationalities" (Shaw, 2010, p. 416). In her attempt to unpack the nature of

video game culture, Shaw (2010) argues that a definition of *video game culture* is framed

by the individuals involved and practices in which they engage. According to the

Entertainment Software Association's 2019 report, 64% of the households surveyed in

the United States own a device that they use to play video games, and 60% of Americans

surveyed play video games daily. More than 70% of the individuals who play video games are over the age of 18, with the average age for gamers being 34 years old, and of these gamers, 45% are women (Entertainment Software Association, 2019). Yet, while these statistics may present a picture of gaming as a common activity enjoyed by both men and women (notice here how such statistics do not account for race, sexuality, or other identity characteristics), the dominant or stereotypical image of a gamer is decidedly uniform (Shaw, 2012). Gamers, according to the stereotype, are young, white, cisgender, heterosexual, and male. Individuals who play video games but do not conform to this stereotype are systematically marginalized, as video games overwhelmingly feature young, white, heterosexual protagonists and are consistently marketed to the stereotypical gamer.

The gamer stereotype has led to a separation in the gaming community, in which some individuals who play games do not identify as gamers. Shaw (2012) argues that the gamer label should not be automatically attributed to individuals who play video games but should instead be seen as an identity agentively constructed or rejected on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, Shaw (2012) asserts that there are numerous factors that may contribute to one's willingness to identify as a gamer, including race, gender, sexuality, and societal stigma surrounding gaming. Because the stereotypical gamer is young, white, male, cisgender, and heterosexual, individuals who align with these identities may be more willing to identify as gamers, as the gamer identity does not conflict with their other identities; in contrast, when an aspect of one's identity conflicts with the gamer identity, self-identification is less likely. However, there are also other factors that play

into the willingness to identify as a gamer, including the amount of time one invests in gaming, the genre of games one plays, and one's in-game skill (Paaßen, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017). These later factors contribute to the hardcore/casual gamer dichotomy. Vanderhoef (2013) asserts that casual games are "discursive representations of passive consumption and femininity for hardcore gamers and as a result are treated by a significant number in the gaming community as either threatening because they supposedly herald the end of so-called hardcore games or irrelevant because casual games do not count as legitimate game experiences." In her discussion of *cybertyping* – the recoding of one's identity through their relationship with technology – Kubik (2012) argues that the hardcore/casual dichotomy relies on gendered stereotypes, positioning hardcore games and gamers as symbols of masculinity, authenticity, and superiority at the expense of casual gamers, who are positioned as weak, feminine, and uncommitted to gaming (Kubik, 2012). Utilizing hegemonically masculine terms, the hardcore gamer is defined by the genre and style of the games they play, with preference given to games that are violent and require a significant time commitment and a high degree of strategizing (Paaßen, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017). Thus, playing a hardcore game makes one a hardcore gamer. At the same time, however, legitimacy and power are withheld from gamers who do not conform to the hardcore gamer stereotype, as they are constantly required to reaffirm their status as true gamers (Kubik, 2012). Thus, one can only retain the hardcore gamer label if one aligns with the gamer stereotype; while individuals who do not conform to this stereotype may self-identify as hardcore gamers, this label is consistently questioned or rejected by other gamers in the space, who

delegitimize the existence of hardcore gamers who are not young, white, male, cisgender, and heterosexual.

Systemic Oppression in Video Game Culture

Like most media, video games reflect the society in which they are created; thus, the American narrative of the white male hero is perpetuated not only in games and gameplay but in the networks of gamers who consume this media. Gray and Leonard (2018) assert that

> [g]aming imagines a world of good and evil, of domination and annihilation, where whiteness and American manhood characterize protectors and heroes […] In this way, games provide a training ground for the consumption of narratives and stereotypes as well as opportunities to become instruments of hegemony; they offer spaces of white male play and pleasures, and create a virtual and lived reality where white maleness is empowered to police and criminalize the Other. Games provide opportunities to both learn and share the language of racism and sexism, and the grammar of empire, all while perpetuating cultures of violence and privilege. (Gray & Leonard, 2018, p. 13)

Through the dominant ideologies perpetuated in video game culture, a violent and hateful discourse has emerged to match the conduct and language seen in video games. This discourse has become normalized within this sphere, allowing "[r]ape culture, toxic masculinity, and homophobia [to become] ubiquitous to gaming, not only reflecting these ideologies but also existing as teachers, pedagogies, and platforms for the dissemination of dehumanizing representations and ideologies of injustice and violence" (Gray &

Leonard, 2018, p. 14). Individuals labeled 'deviant' (Gray, 2012) – i.e. those who do not

conform to the gamer stereotype – are subjected to marginalization, ostracism, hostility,

and otherwise toxic responses, turning what is an enjoyable pastime for some into "a

source of violence, oppression, pain, and trauma" for others (Gray & Leonard, 2018, p.

12). Furthermore, as Vanderhoef (2013) argues, "core gaming culture views casual games

as a Trojan horse for femininity to creep in and fundamentally alter the gendered game

experiences that culture values." A classic example of this behavior is Gamergate, which

began as a campaign for ethical video game journalism but evolved into the extreme

online harassment (including rape and death threats) of several women in the video game

industry at the hands of a vocal group of predominantly white male gamers, who

transformed a call for fair treatment of women and people of color in gaming

communities and the gaming industry into a 'protest' against the unfair treatment of

white male gamers. Because the original campaign represented a challenge to the

dominance of white men in a space they had previously perceived to be homogenous,

"[t]his toxic technoculture and geek masculinity positioned itself as a victim in the social

justice warrior era" (Gray & Leonard, 2018, p. 15). Thus, video game culture has become

a space in which discourse campaigning for fair and equal treatment of all gamers exists,

yet the dominant population continues to thrive and remain the visible majority through

toxic practices that encourage individuals who do not fit their gamer stereotype to reject

the label and, in many cases, retreat to solitary or more inclusive pockets within video

game culture.

Toxicity

Because such harmful ideologies are embedded within video game culture, online gaming communities have become known for aggressive, hostile, and sometimes even threatening behavior amongst community members and towards outsiders. Such behavior is labeled as *toxic* because of the games' reliance on player interactions, meaning that numerous players will be exposed to the toxic behavior, thus damaging the community as a whole (Blackburn & Kwak, 2014). Toxic behavior is therefore context dependent. Behavior that in one space might be comedic could be toxic in another space depending on the audience. Potentially toxic behavior includes slurs, insults, harassment, and other sorts of abuse that are directed towards an individual, usually targeting their identity. Kwak and Blackburn's (2015) analysis of over 590,000 cases of players accused of toxic behavior in the popular competitive game *League of Legends* revealed that the most popular words and phrases used by toxic players in this game included *fucking retard, nigger, pussy ass, fucking useless, garbage, and report noob*.[9] However, toxic behavior is not limited to words. Emotes have also been used to harass people, such as when an emote of a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken was used alongside an emote depicting a black streamer's face to evoke a racist stereotype on Twitch (Grayson, 2018). Similarly, the term *toxic* has been used to describe in-game behavior that compromises people's ability to play, such as rage-quitting (abruptly leaving a game in the middle of team play). The term *toxic* has also been applied to messages typed in all-caps (equated with shouting) or spammed (sent repeatedly), as such interactions are inherently disruptive to the flow of conversation or gameplay (see chapter four). Toxicity is therefore a phrase

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[9] The term *noob* refers to a player who is new and/or inexperienced.

that cannot easily be delineated, meaning that contextualization is always necessary when considering whether a behavior is toxic and what impact it may have on others who are present.

Unfortunately, toxicity has become a common issue for participants in these communities. In a study of 1480 German adolescents, Wachs and Wright (2018) found that 54% reported having observed at least one incident involving toxicity, 11% reported perpetrating at least one incident, and 17% reported being the victim of at least one incident, underscoring the pervasive nature of toxic behavior in broader digital spaces. Furthermore, toxic behavior is inherently tied to a sense of anonymity or online unidentifiability. In the case of Twitch, users are only identifiable by their usernames, meaning that, unless they choose to share their real names or other identifying information, it would be almost impossible for their online persona to be connected back to their real-world identity. This anonymity may encourage some participants to engage in toxic behavior because of a felt sense of online disinhibition – a lack of restraint due to the online environment in which one is interacting. In their study on toxic online disinhibition, Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) concluded that, because participants do not have to engage in eye contact and therefore feel less inhibited when interacting in online spaces, they are more willing to engage in face-threatening behavior. While toxic behavior may exist in other spaces, such as sporting events, the lack of face-to-face interaction in online communities such as those on Twitch allows much of this behavior to go unchecked.

Because Twitch and other livestreaming platforms are similarly reliant on interaction and viewers enjoy online unidentifiability when watching streams and engaging in chat, toxicity has become a significant issue, as toxic behavior impacts everyone interacting in a livestream. This has led to the generalization that livestreaming communities are toxic, hostile spaces, and, thus far, there has been little evidence to contradict this conclusion. Even when viewers are not engaging in an activity directly, such as playing a video game or working on an art piece, they still display investment in the outcome of the activity and thus will engage in similar behavior using chat. This is due to the fact that "a stream viewer is able to experience a heightened sense of escapism as they can see the actions on the game as though they themselves were clicking and selecting the keystrokes to play the game at an elite level" (Blight, 2016, p. 30). Because the viewers are able to put themselves in the position of the streamer and thus view the game or activity as the streamer sees it, gratification is experienced in tandem with the streamer, thus heightening investment on the part of the viewers.

As stated above, one motivator for toxic behavior on platforms such as Twitch is the presence of individuals who do not conform to the dominant group's (in this case, cishet white male gamers) expectations. Gray (2012) argues that "video game culture has privileged the default gamer, the white male, leading to the maintenance of whiteness and masculinity in this virtual setting; furthermore, this default setting has led to the marginalization of many minority gamers forcing the label of deviant upon their virtual bodies" (p. 262). Because the white male gamer in these spaces is the unmarked category, all other identities become marked when performed, making these individuals vulnerable

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to toxic responses. Gray further asserts that the likelihood of 'deviant' gamers (and streamers) being subjected to toxic responses is dependent on the social context and the visibility and audience's awareness of the 'deviant' characteristic. In the case of Twitch streamers, because Twitch is largely dominated by white males and the use of a webcam makes streamers' potential 'deviancy' visible to viewers, toxic behavior is rampant.

One of identity categories that has received the most attention because of its deviance from the gamer stereotype is gender. Women streamers and other video game media figures represent just 10-15% (Paaßen, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; Nakandala, et al., 2017). Women are heavily objectified within these spaces (Nakandala et al., 2017) and sexual harassment, including rape and death threats (for example, GamerGate), has become increasingly common. The sexualization of women streamers has led to the development of the term *titty streamer*, defined by Urban Dictionary (2017)[10] as:

> Girls in their late-teens to 20's who utilize streaming services such as Twitch in order to flaunt their giant breasts to a large following, mainly consisting of horny men and 12 year old's who have never masturbated before. Usually they would play mainstream video and PC games in order to increase the boner-factor, as many of their followers have never been laid before. Some titty streamers may also place their leg on their chair in order to demonstrate how gorgeous they look. While some titty-streamers are lovable and enjoyable, most of them are fakes who seek male attention.

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[10] Urban Dictionary is a crowdsourced website that provides definitions for many words and phrases not commonly found in standard dictionaries. Definitions are often grounded in cultural understandings of the word/phrase. The truth value of these definitions is therefore not always evident.

While this definition, like many on Urban Dictionary, is extreme and meant to be humorous, it also identifies key beliefs regarding such streamers, including that they are overtly sexual to attract their audience, that they are 'fakes' seeking male attention, and that they rely on their breast size as an audience attractor. This is not the only term used to describe women streamers. *Twitch thot* is used to refer to a streamer who uses her body for personal gain on the platform (Alexander, 2018b). "Thot," an acronym for "that ho over there" has been appropriated by male streamers and viewers to challenge women streamers' success on the platform and encourage others to harass these streamers, both on Twitch and other online platforms. The sexualization of women streamers is used to question their competency and authority to speak about video games, reject these streamers as legitimate gamers, and discourage their participation in the gaming community more broadly. Furthermore, such actions are part of a larger trend in the gaming community: Nakandala et al. (2017) and Su and Shih (2011) reported that women gamers incite vituperative and objectifying comments regarding their gender and that the presence of a women gamer consistently incited a shift in topic away from game-related topics and instead towards the gamer herself and her gender.

In addition to phrases such as 'titty streamer' and 'Twitch thot,' popular women streamers are vulnerable to doxing, where personal or identifying information about an individual is published to harass or otherwise expose them. The publication of such information can have a devastating impact on the streamer and their community (Giles, 2002), as some communities may feel betrayed because the streamer was not completely open with them, due to the nature of the parasocial relationship between a streamer and

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their community, which may result in community members feeling entitled to information about a streamer's personal life. In addition, doxing challenges the personal safety of the women streamer. As one streamer articulated, "My safety & well being (and those of the people around me) are reliant on some degree of anonymity" (Alexander, 2018).

This discrimination and harassment have become normalized within the context of Twitch. However, this has not stopped women from streaming. Pennington, Kaye, and McCann (2018) reported that, while women are cognizant of this discrimination and the gender stereotypes, they do not view them as an accurate representation of their own competency nor of women's abilities more broadly. In fact, women in these spaces may engage in behaviors that strategically counter or disconfirm these stereotypes. However, this pushback, along with the personal agency required to be a successful streamer, has led some women streamers to create a concrete set of rules regarding appropriate behavior in their communities and to enlist channel moderators – community members with special permissions that allow them to regulate behavior in a streamer's chat – to ensure that their community remains a positive and safe space (see chapter six).[11] The type of moderation may vary depending on the genre and popularity of the stream. Nakandala et al.'s (2017) concluded that 'less popular' women streamers,[12] defined as holding a chat activity rank between 1,000 and 16,000 on Twitch as of 2014, were more

[11] See Twitch's "Guide to Building a Moderation Team" for more information on the role of moderators in streamers' chats.

[12] Nakandala et al.'s (2017) description of these streamers as 'less popular' may not align with current understandings of popularity on Twitch, given the explosive growth that the platform has seen in the past few years.

likely to have stronger moderation in place to limit toxic behavior. This is not to say streamers outside of this demographic do not enlist moderators, as many streamers utilize some form of moderation in their chats, whether it be self-moderation, subscriber-only chats, or a team of channel moderators. However, Nakandala et al. (2017) argue that gender and popularity factor into the likelihood of streamers recruiting channel moderators to monitor chat behavior. Moderators function as a second set of eyes on chat to ensure that viewers are behaving appropriately and have more freedom (because they are not simultaneously streaming) to interact with viewers in chat and promote the ideologies of the community. In this way, moderators can be seen as the backbone of streamer-chat interaction, as they represent a line of defense between the streamer and their chat, removing viewers who break the streamer's rules and thus ensuring a positive and safe environment for the streamer and their community.

The strategies employed by these streamers to curtail toxic behavior align with steps taken by Twitch, including updated community guidelines, machine detection, and AutoMod (see the section on user behavior regulation above) (Batchelor, 2017). Such changes have led co-founder and COO of Twitch, Kevin Lin to conclude that "while toxicity may seem to be particularly common within gaming circles, there are pockets of respectful and positive users that will hopefully serve as the foundation for the wider community going forward" (Batchelor, 2017). Lin argues that, through careful management and moderation, livestreaming communities can flourish outside of the shadow of toxicity. It is these strategies that are of particular interest in this study, as they provide crucial evidence to support the argument that toxicity is not natural or inevitable

in these communities. Rather, toxicity should be seen as the product of specific ideologies that promote harmful behavior, and the strategies operationalized by streamers and Twitch users more broadly should be carefully examined not only to provide visibility to the experiences of these individuals but also to emphasize how such actions can be applied on a larger scale to impact levels of toxicity on the platform as a whole.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter contextualizes and unifies current conversations surrounding toxicity on Twitch. Beginning with an overview of the Twitch platform, including its affordances and the roles and expectations for streamers and users, the chapter shows the ways in which Twitch operates as a form of social media entertainment, fostering a culture that is embedded within social ideologies regarding content creation, fandom, and entertainment consumption. Its position as a social platform has facilitated the creation of dynamic online communities surrounding streamers, encouraging a sense not only of loyalty amongst followers of a streamer but also interconnectedness, as followers develop bonds with one another and utilize social capital created by the streamer and the platform to position themselves within these groups. From there, the chapter turns to an overview of video game culture and argues that it is Twitch's embeddedness within video game culture that has contributed to the proliferation of toxic behavior on the platform. Through an analysis of the gamer stereotype, this chapter shows how toxicity stems from a rejection of individuals who do not conform to the expectations of participants in these spaces and how such individuals must work tirelessly to challenge said expectations. The chapter closes with an exploration into the psychosocial nature of toxic behavior,

showing how and why it manifests on Twitch, how it has been challenged, and some of the strategies utilized by the platform and streamers to combat this behavior.

Without doubt, this chapter does not address all aspects of this topic, sacrificing depth for brevity. Further exploration of these theories and their implications for the analysis at hand are explored in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO EXPLORING LIVESTREAMING COMMUNITIES:

THE METHOD(OLOGY) UNDERPINNING THIS PROJECT

As discussed in the previous chapter, Twitch is burdened by the gamer stereotype and often normalizes the ideologies and experiences of individuals who conform to this stereotype at the expense of all others. This has, for some, made toxicity ubiquitous with gaming, as many of those who do not conform to the gamer stereotype are subjected to marginalization, ostracism, hostility, and otherwise toxic responses. I joined Twitch in 2012 when some of my favorite YouTubers began streaming on the platform. In contrast to prerecorded videos on YouTube, which only allow interaction through the comment section, Twitch encourages users to interact in real time with streamers and other viewers, which made watching my favorite creators' content feel more social and engaging. However, I quickly recognized that, while many viewers were using real-time engagement to show their support for these content creators, some took advantage of this opportunity to post hurtful comments, disparaging the streamer and/or mocking their viewers. Such comments had the potential to taint the viewing experience because they were being read in real-time. Sometimes, the streamer would be visibly affected by these comments or other viewers would engage with the offender, shifting the focus of the livestream to the person acting negatively, a level of attention that seemed to fuel said individual's desire to harass the streamer and their viewers. I questioned the motivation for and nature of this behavior. It did not feel like cyberbullying, although it had some of the same traits, and seemed to be grounded in the affordances of the platform, which

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encourage direct interaction between streamers and their viewers and thus create unique opportunities for viewers to see the real-time (and therefore unscripted and unpolished) responses to their behavior. As I watched more livestreams and became more familiar with the social fabric of Twitch, I realized that certain streamers were more likely to be the target of this negative behavior and that the behavior had been given a name – toxicity. Women streamers and streamers of color appeared to be the most common targets; however, non-cishet streamers and streamers with visible disabilities were also regularly targeted. The more time I spent on Twitch, the more torn I felt. I loved the sense of community felt in many of the livestreams I frequented, but I was disturbed by the toxic behavior of a select few who seemed determined to disrupt the livestreams and spoil the experience for other viewers.

Furthermore, when I realized that very little scholarship was being published on livestreaming, let alone on the associated toxicity, at that time[13] and that Twitch itself was struggling to respond to this issue, I decided to pursue this topic, hoping that the insights gained from it could aid streamers, Twitch, and the scholarly communities invested in these topics. In has become increasingly apparent to me that a feminist examination of this issue has the potential to expose crucial nuances regarding the nature of this behavior and methods of combatting it. Thus, this project was born.

The theories, ideologies, and scholarly works that form the methodological perspective for this project are diverse, underscoring the inherent interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics. The works and scholars cited here may not often be seen in conversation with one another but, when positioned together, produce a unique

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[13] This has slowly begun to change. More research is being published, including Taylor (2018).

perspective on the data and issues at hand. This chapter unites scholarship from three areas – sociolinguistics, digital media studies, and intersectional feminism – to create a project that is centered on the experiences and performances of three women Twitch streamers and their viewers throughout the course of two of their livestreams each (for a total of six livestreams). Utilizing a social constructionist, intersectional feminist perspective, this project defines what toxic behavior looks like for these streamers, how they have responded to this behavior, and the steps they have taken to prevent or reduce toxicity in their communities. The remaining sections in this chapter explore the theoretical and practical underpinnings of this project, emphasizing not only the rationale for each element but also the personal motivation for shaping this project in this form, combining theories from diverse disciplines to construct a multi-faceted project embedded in social constructionist, intersectional feminist perspectives.

Theories Informing the Methodology

Social Constructionism

Social constructionists position themselves at odds with essentialist theories, arguing that "people are self-defining and socially constructed participants in their shared lives. There are no pre-defined entities within them that objective methods can seek to delineate but, rather, our ways of making sense to each other are constructed to yield quite different ways of being selves" (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 7). To contextualize the positioning of individuals and their interactions in this study, this section explores how two theories often called upon by social constructionists – indexical mutability and communities of practice – inform this project's approach to data analysis.

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In her discussion of three waves in the study of sociolinguistic variation, Eckert (2012) explains that social constructionists see text producers[14] as using linguistic variation to position themselves within the social landscapes of the communities in which they participate. Neither text producers nor linguistic variables themselves are stable or fixed. Rather, they respond to the needs and concerns of the community. Eckert (2012) remarks that

> [v]ariation constitutes a social semiotic system capable of expressing the full range of a community's social concerns. And as these concerns continually change, variables cannot be consensual markers of fixed meanings; on the contrary, their central property must be indexical mutability. This mutability is achieved in stylistic practice, as speakers make social-semiotic moves, reinterpreting variables and combining and recombining them in a continual process of bricolage. (p. 94)

Indexical mutability – the adaption of variables and their meanings according to the needs of the text producers – is what allows text producers to simultaneously construct themselves as individuals and as members of groups. Through their stylistic choices, they communicate their social status within their community; their stance on diverse issues; their relationship to other individuals, ideas, and trends; and their personal sense of identity. As the meanings and, in some cases, the variables themselves change, text producers communicate their understanding and response to those changes through their use of these variables and, in doing so, construct and reconstruct their own identities.

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[14] I use *text producer* here instead of speaker, writer, communicator, etc. as an umbrella term to describe an individual participating in any form of communication.

While Eckert's (2012) discussion is largely focused on phonological, morphological, and syntactic variables, this project applies her theories to discursive variations[15] present in the data by examining the linguistic choices Twitch users make when discussing, addressing, or participating in toxic behavior and the linguistic choices streamers make when constructing their identities and stances on diverse issues. A primary example of a discursive variable in the data for this project is emotes. There are emotes available through Twitch, those that can be accessed using third-party tools, and community emotes, which are made available when a user subscribes to a streamer. While these emotes often carry the creator's intended meaning, their use and interpretation is largely governed by Twitch's social norms, along with the social norms of an individual streamer's community. Users may choose to utilize some emotes and not others to communicate a specific stance. For example, using a streamer's emotes in their livestreams signals in-group status, while using another streamer's emotes in a livestream they are not a part of or affiliated with may signal outsider status. Furthermore, some emotes depict characters connected to broader social movements, such as Pepe the Frog's use as a symbol of the alt-right movement (Roy, 2016). Although emotes depicting Pepe the Frog are still regularly used on Twitch, the choice to utilize these emotes could potentially affiliate a user with this movement. Another example is the PogChamp emote (seen in Table 2.1), which was one of the most frequently used emotes on Twitch prior to its removal in February 2021 after the individual whose likeness was used in the emote tweeted support for the January 2021 riot at the United States' Capitol (Peters, 2021). Twitch's choice to remove this emote signals the company's alliance with other social

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[15] How these variables are defined in this project is discussed in the analysis section.

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media platforms in the decision to remove content that supports mass violence and ban users who post said content.

More broadly, when considering the discursive choices streamers and viewers make, it is essential to evaluate how users position themselves in other ways on the platform and communicate this positioning. Some questions to consider for streamers include:

1. Does the streamer use a camera, and, if so, how is that camera positioned?

2. How much does the streamer interact with their viewers (both on Twitch and other platforms)?

3. How much does the streamer include their viewers when it comes to making decisions about the stream (game choice, length of stream, stream start time, in-game decisions, etc.)?

4. How does the streamer talk about their viewers, streaming, and Twitch (i.e., what is their stance)?

5. How much does the streamer talk about (and include their viewers in) their personal lives?

For users, some questions might include:

1. How much time does the user spend on Twitch?

2. How much does the user engage with other users?

3. Does the user's interaction with Twitch extend beyond the platform?

4. How much does the user participate in a streamer's chat?

5. Does the user support a streamer in any manner (subscription, donations, etc.)?

6. How familiar is the user with the norms and expectations for the streams in which they engage?

7. How does the user express their acceptance/rejection of these norms/expectations?

These last two questions are relevant to streamers as well and provide crucial insight into the indexical system created by users on Twitch. Within this indexical system, variation "embeds ideology in language and that is in turn part and parcel of the construction of ideology" (Eckert, 2008, p. 453). Exploring the language and stylistic choices of the users in this study reveals the ideologies of these users and uncovers evidence for the ways in which toxic behavior is tied to specific beliefs regarding the presence and participation of certain users within a space that is overtly dominated by young, cishet, white men. Although not all of these questions are addressed with this project, they signal the many different ways in which an analysis of user behavior on Twitch can be approached and, more specifically, how users' choices can be connected to ideologies regarding a wide variety of issues, including toxicity.

In addition to understanding the indexical mutability of the variables encountered in the data, it is also important to emphasize the ways in which the interactions between users on Twitch can be viewed through community of practice theory. Drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) foundational theories, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) define a *community of practice* as

an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an

endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power

relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a

social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional

community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and

by the practice in which that membership engages. (p. 464)

In contrast to the traditional perspective on a community, which is often focused on

density and physical proximity, a community of practice is grounded in mutual

engagement in an activity. In other words, a community in this sense is built on *doing*; as

people come together to engage in a practice, they form a community that is a product of

their commitment to and consistent engagement in a practice. Examples of communities

of practice include book clubs, quilting groups, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, school

clubs, etc. Through the shared commitment to the practice, norms, expectations, and

beliefs are formed that become part of the structure of the community, further binding its

members. Within the context of this study, community of practice theory positions

viewers of a streamer as members of a community of practice. This is an important

distinction, as it emphasizes the ways in which a streamer's community is the product of

shared actions (e.g., attending livestreams and supporting the streamer) rather than

proximity between users. A streamer's viewers – particularly those who watch the

streamer regularly and participate actively in the chat – are the pillars of this community.

Through their attendance at the livestreams, they create a community that is grounded in

the values, interests, and beliefs not only of the streamer but also of the viewers engaged

as well. Thus, in the analysis portion, when discussing a streamer's community, one should keep in mind its dynamic nature and the way in which it is formed through practice rather than proximity. Users of Twitch are not bound by physical proximity to one another (e.g., as an audience that congregates in a physical space to watch a performance) but rather form interpersonal bonds through their active engagement with the platform, streamers, and other users. Users are not automatically members of a streamer's community simply because they watch one livestream; community membership is instead established through consistently watching the streamer and engaging with their community. Furthermore, a user must be familiar with the norms and expectations of the community (even if they do not agree with them) to become a member, as such aspects frame and inform user behavior, separating members from outsiders. This perspective emphasizes the agency of users and underscores the constructed nature of these communities – communities that can easily weaken or dissolve if the actions of its participants undermine the values of the community. This is discussed in further detail in the first analysis chapter, which shows the ways in which user behavior, when positioned at odds with the community's values and interests, can harm the community.

Indexical mutability and community of practice theory inform my understanding of and perspective on the data collected. Variables – particularly emotes, jargon, and slang within the context of this study – should not be assigned fixed definitions but rather should be analyzed within the context in which they occur. Furthermore, the users – both the streamers and the viewers – should be positioned as members of communities of

practice. However, it should not be assumed that every viewer is a member of the streamer's community; rather, a user's actions and other users' responses to said actions should be examined to determine whether the user in question has in-group status. Overall, when analyzing user behavior, the community, including its core beliefs, expectations, and norms, should be taken into consideration. Does the behavior (particularly potentially toxic behavior) align with or reject the community's norms? How do other users respond to this behavior? By keeping this theory in mind, this project offers a dynamic interpretation of toxic behavior through the lenses of the communities in which it occurs.

Intersectional Feminism

In addition to social constructionism, this project is strongly influenced by intersectional feminist scholarship. My advocacy for feminism (hooks, 1984) stems from interactions with scholarship spanning multiple disciplines, including the works of Mary Bucholtz, Judith Butler, Sarah Ahmed, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and bell hooks. In this section, I examine my positionality through a discussion of these influences, emphasizing how they inform my approach to this project.

As Bucholtz (2014) points out, feminist work is diverse and therefore sometimes conflicting. Although there is a shared commitment to challenging social inequalities, what those inequalities are, how they are understood, and the best methods of addressing them are not universally agreed upon. This conflict presents numerous challenges for feminist researchers, who span diverse disciplines and operationalize the term *feminism* in equally diverse ways. However, as Ahmed (2008) reminds us, critique is an important

and natural part of feminist work; we can acknowledge the value of feminist work while simultaneously presenting alternative viewpoints. This has been a valuable reminder for me throughout this project, as I interact with, challenge, and respond to feminist (and not so feminist) texts surrounding the issue of toxicity broadly understood and literature on video game culture, specifically discussions pertaining to the gamer stereotype and the presence of individuals who do not align with this stereotype.

Furthermore, this thought has greatly informed my approach to the three streamers examined in this project. As prominent women on Twitch, Pokimane, PaladinAmber, and Dexbonus represent three distinct sides and ways of interacting with Twitch, fostering communities with differing values, interests, and motivations. Crucial to this project, each of their approaches to and management of toxicity is discrete. In analyzing their responses to toxic behavior, my goal is not only to bear witness to the toxicity that surrounds these streamers and bring visibility to this harm but also to consider the effectiveness of the strategies employed. This is an attempt to acknowledge the value of their work while also providing critique when necessary. As the issue of toxicity on Twitch continues to attract attention, it is crucial to consider the effectiveness of the strategies that have been and currently are being practiced by streamers to prevent or reduce toxic behavior. This is by no means a criticism of the streamers themselves, who are on the front lines battling this issue, but rather a recognition of the need to step back (hence my position as a researcher) and analyze this issue from an alternative perspective.

At the same time, I must be careful to ground my work within the communities I am examining and to offer my findings to them as a stepping-stone for change both on Twitch and in broader contexts. This view is in line with hooks's (1984) assertion that feminist ideas must be made accessible, both physically and in terms of the writing style, inviting those who are "outside the feminist struggle inside" (p. vii). This text, while not as accessible as I would like it to be due to genre constraints, attempts to engage in a liberatory feminist praxis through my direct engagement with these streamers' communities and my involvement with AnyKey, an organization that pledges to "amplify, connect, and empower marginalized players and their allies through research and strategic initiatives" (AnyKey, n.d.). I participate on AnyKey's Discord server,[16] interacting with other individuals interested in this topic and sharing the insight I have gained through my experiences on Twitch. I intend to share the results of this project with any interested parties, including Twitch, the streamers, and AnyKey, so that my conclusions can benefit the users of Twitch more broadly. Such practices are in line with hooks's desire for feminist praxis to be embedded in and directly beneficial to the communities being investigated.

Narrowing the focus back to the data itself, I have been significantly impacted by Judith Butler's (1999) notion of gender as performative. She argues that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. […] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions that are said to be its results'"

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[16] Discord is a platform that allows users to create servers for online groups. Chatrooms inside of a server are called channels.

(Butler, 1999, p. 33). Butler asserts that gender is socially constructed and that our identities as members of a group, community, and/or society are the product of our interactions with the ideologies of that social structure. Although we have choices in how we perform our identities, these choices are highly constrained, and we are bound by the intelligibility of our performances. Our performances are limited by the social rules that dictate what it means to be a certain identity. This concept is crucial to my analysis because it balances performativity and intelligibility. The streamers in this study are bound by social rules regarding what is means to be a woman. These rules are then compounded by their position as an unwanted and highly sexualized minority within gaming culture. In analyzing these streamers' reactions and responses to toxicity, it is essential to keep the performance element in mind. Not only are Dexbonus, Pokimane, and PaladinAmber performing in the most traditional sense as streamers with audiences, but they are also performing facets of their identity, choosing how they want to be perceived through their interaction with social rules surrounding gender. For example, Dexbonus often uses the phrase "boys, girls, and beautiful in-betweens" as a way of acknowledging the fluidity of gender and underscoring her acceptance of diverse gender identities. This stands in stark contrast to many streamers who assume their audience is male or ignores or harasses those who are not. Thus, in analyzing these streamers' behavior, it is important to look closely at the choices they make throughout their performances, even though the choices are highly constrained by what may or may not be intelligible for their audiences, as these choices influence and shape their communities and the broader viewing experience.

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Gender, however, is not the only identity category taken into consideration in this project. Analyzing the streamers along a single categorical axis such as gender, according to Crenshaw (1991), takes other types of privileges as a given. Discrimination can occur in any number of ways, and it is therefore important to consider subordination as potentially stemming from multiple directions. In the case of the three streamers selected for this project, their race, age, sexuality, relationship status, experiences/perspectives, nationalities, and length of tenure on the platform have shaped the type and level of discrimination and toxicity they endure. A short overview of each streamer is provided in the respective analysis chapter, and these factors are woven into the analysis. Although not all of these elements are given thorough examination, this limitation is the product of time and space constraints rather than a lack of evidence in the data or a lack of impact on the experiences of these streamers. An intersectional feminist perspective is crucial to any analysis of toxicity because toxic behavior stems from intolerance of diverse factors. In the case of toxicity on Twitch, the gamer stereotype encourages discrimination along multiple axes, and this discrimination is compounded by Twitch's embeddedness in video game culture. Video games, video game companies, gaming media, etc. are largely constrained by this stereotype. Hence, when analyzing toxicity, it must be examined from all angles to fully ascertain its impact.

Mary Bucholtz, Judith Butler, Sarah Ahmed, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and bell hooks are by no means the only feminist influences on this project; however, they represent important pillars and themes. Given the critical nature of this project, it is vital to address the theories and concepts that inform my perspective. Additional scholarship is addressed

in relation to specific themes or data points within the analysis when relevant to add much needed depth to this discussion.

Methodology

This next section shifts from discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this project to an overview of the methodology. The methodology for this project combines Brock's (2018) theory of critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) with Fairclough's (2015) framework for critical discourse analysis (CDA). I have united these two theories to maintain the interdisciplinary focus of this project. CTDA is grounded in media studies and stands on its own as a well-developed yet malleable approach to analysis; I have supplemented it with Fairclough's discussion of CDA, however, to bring the linguistic layer of analysis to the forefront. This combination allows for the data to be positioned within the broader context and affordances (real and imagined) of Twitch without losing the focus on the utterances themselves. The streamers' language and the linguistic construction of toxicity is explored through this dual focus while keeping the data grounded with the contextual factors that create the unique social fabric of these interactions. In the following subsections, both theories are explored in turn, followed by a discussion of how these two theories work together to form the investigative framework for this project.

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA)

Brock (2018) established critical technocultural discourse analysis in response to social science's instrumentalist approach to technology, which was more concerned with *what* people do with technology rather than *why* people do these things and in which

"technology is seen as extrinsic to a person's being and society's character" (p. 1015). By divorcing digital practices from the spaces in which they occur, this style of research ignored the ways in which digital practices are embedded in and inherently shaped by the ideologies of the designers and users and the affordances, both imagined and real, of the technology being used. In contrast, Brock (2018) emphasizes that any digital practice is the product of both the user *and* the context of the practice, which not only affords the user specific rules for interaction with the technology and other users but also carries the ideologies of its designers embedded within the practice itself, including who should have access to the technology and how the technology should be used. In this way, CTDA emphasizes the need to explore the "material and semiotic complexities" (p. 1013) of technology to situate online interactions within the parameters, limitations, and ideologies of the technology used in the production of said utterances. Thus, technology is part of the data rather than external to it. Scholars such as Costanza-Chock (2020), who wrote a book exploring technological design as social justice, Murthy and Sharma (2019), who examined the YouTube comment space to show how online racialized expression operates as a networked phenomenon, and Cho (2018), who argued that the "design bias toward default publicness" on social media platforms can harm users, speak to the potential for CTDA to transform how academia approaches the study of technology and the diverse ways in which CTDA can be applied to enhance analyses of human-technology interaction.

At the practical level, CTDA is three-fold, examining the technology, the cultural ideologies that inform the production of meaning using said technology, and the use of

the technology by users (utterances, interactions, etc.). This is where the *critical* aspect of this methodology becomes most apparent. Technology within the context of CTDA is positioned as "a construct of technical artifacts (e.g. knowledge, skills, tools, and resources), technology practices, organizations, actors (e.g. users, consumers, and professional organizations), and technology beliefs" (Brock, 2018, p. 1016), which CTDA reduces to *artifact*, *practice*, and *belief*. Of these three, Brock (2018) places significant importance on the *technological artifact*, defined by Orlikowski and Iacono (2001) as "social structures [...] built into the technology by designers during its development which are then appropriated by users as they interact with the technology" (p. 127). By defining technology as a social construct, Brock (2018) emphasizes the need for a close examination of the ideologies and social norms embedded within technology and its use. In other words, how do a technology's users "perceive, articulate, and ultimately define the technocultural space in which they operate and exist" (Brock, 2018, p. 1016)?

In the context of this project, CTDA encourages the exploration of Twitch as a platform and the ways in which the ideologies embedded within the platform by the developers and the parent company, Amazon, along with the platform's affordances, impact its users and their actions on the platform. For example, the Amazon Prime subscription service includes Prime Gaming, a program embedded in Twitch that comes with benefits including a free monthly subscription to a streamer and free games and in-game assets. This has impacted streamers' interactions with users, including frequent reminders to use the 'free' Prime Gaming subscription on a streamer's channel, as well as

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the content and design of the platform itself, which now hosts occasional Amazon

Shopping content and has a button to redeem free content through Prime Gaming.

Ideologically, Prime Gaming frames Twitch as an inherently commercial operation

guided by monetary concerns and consistently reminds users of the ways in which

crowdsourced media, at least in the context of this platform, is often shaped by the profit

model of its parent company. Furthermore, of crucial interest to this project is the way in

which Twitch's positioning as a service provider displaces much of the responsibility for

regulating user behavior onto streamers. Twitch itself has acknowledged this point and, in

turn, has created support structures to assist streamers in user behavior regulation,

including updated and detailed Community Guidelines and machine learning programs

that proactively identify potentially risky user behavior. These structures are examined

throughout the analysis along with methods developed by streamers to determine how

both components impact levels of toxicity in the three streamers' communities.

Ideologically though, this displacement of labor is a signal of Twitch's self-perception –

it is not a content company and therefore not responsible for its users' behavior. Although

media attention regarding toxicity issues has forced Twitch to adapt its strategies for

addressing user behavior in order to improve its public image and reduce user (largely

streamer) discontent, Twitch ultimately relegates much of this regulation to streamers by

positioning itself as a service.

Understanding how user activity is impacted by their expectations, interests,

desires, assumptions, and biases regarding the platform allows the data collected to be

positioned as interactions between humans and technology rather than simply as

interactions between humans in the context of some technology. Nagy and Neff (2015) underscore the importance of this distinction in their reinterpretation of the term *affordance*, which they claim should be relabeled as *imagined affordance* to incorporate the ways in which the experiences of users are mediated by the material qualities of their technological environments. Thus, according to Nagy and Neff (2015, p. 4),

> [a]ffordances can and should be defined to include properties of technologies that are "imagined" by users, by their fears, their expectations, and their uses, as well as by those of the designers. What people expect out of their data, the "data valences" (Fiore-Gartland & Neff, 2015), are important aspects of the affordance of socio-technical systems.

Within the context of this project, it is therefore imperative to examine Twitch from the perspective of the users, considering what actions are deemed (im)possible, how users expect the platform and other users to act, how the platform and its designers are perceived by users, and, crucially how the platform is presented to users by designers and other users. Through such an examination, the data for this project, discussed in detail below, can be positioned as the product of the "material, mediated, and emotional aspects" (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 7) of Twitch.

Nagy and Neff's (2015) perspective on affordances aligns nicely with Brock's (2018) first requirement for the theoretical application of CTDA, which states that "[t]he theory should draw directly from the perspective of the group under examination" (p. 1017). In the context of this project, users' interactions with Twitch and with each other are analyzed, considering how users construct their expectations for, acceptance/rejection

of, and reactions to toxic behavior. The users participating in toxic behavior as well as those most directly impacted by said behavior (the streamers and their communities) are at the center of this analysis, and through the use of Nagy and Neff's (2015) concept of *imagined affordance*, the perceptions of these users, the ways in which they interact with each other and Twitch as a platform, and what they deem possible in terms of the use of this platform, are articulated and positioned as central to the understanding of this issue. Thus, the application of Nagy and Neff's (2015) definition allows for an analysis that is focused on the experiences and perspectives of the users that are central to it.

Furthermore, the analytic codes developed to describe the data emerged from the social fabric of Twitch. The term *toxic* is more broadly attributed to gaming culture and has been applied by users of Twitch to describe people who "bitch about everything, spread unnecessary hate or just talk shit about others" (Urban Dictionary, 2016). Scholars and the American news media then adapted this term to describe the larger social issue around which this project is centered. In addition, many of the subordinate codes (see the data analysis section below for more information) were developed based on Twitch users' own labels for behavior, including *backseating*, *white knight*, *sellout*, and *pepega* (described in chapters six and four respectively). While the term *toxic* is often used as an umbrella term for these phrases, they each describe a specific behavior, which allows for crucial nuance when addressing the types of toxicity that occur in the data.

In addition to the belief that the perspectives of the community being analyzed should directly inform the theory, Brock (2018) emphasizes the need to integrate Christians' (2007) theory of cultural continuity into the analysis. Brock (2018) uses the

cultural continuity principle to "decenter theories of technological determinism premised upon the beliefs of a dominant culture or modernist technological enterprises" by investigating "historically and geographically constituted people as the value-laden creators of technological enterprise" (p. 1017). Both Christians (2007) and Brock (2018) argue for a style of research that "refuses to separate moral agents from everything that makes them unique" (Christians, 2007, p. 440). In other words, rather than embedding analysis within larger social norms or trends (such as those that normalize whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, etc.), cultural continuity requires analysis to be the product of interactions with diverse theories, ideologies, and perspectives, elevating those that may otherwise be erased when one focuses solely on 'normative and analytic traditions' (Brock, 2018). In the context of this project, this means focusing on the experiences of individual streamers and viewers, combining quantitative and qualitative perspectives, and emphasizing pluriformity over uniformity when it comes to conclusions, theories, and results. Doing so, according to Christians (2007), speaks to the interests of the individuals and groups being studied and elevates the "innovations that most appropriately serve their local cultures" (p. 441), in which 'innovations' refer to the style of analysis.

Brock (2018) puts forth three expectations for analysis utilizing the CTDA framework:

1. Multimodal data operationalization;

2. Multimodal interpretive research methods;

3. Critical cultural framework applied equally to all data modes. (p. 1023)

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Brock (2018) positions both technology and the utterances collected as texts and asserts the needs to balance interface analysis with analysis of the utterances themselves. Both the interface, in this case Twitch, and the data collected from streamers and their viewers are subsumed under the heading of 'data' and, ideally, should receive equal attention from the researcher. At the same time, the interface analysis must be delimited according to the research objectives, as each angle a researcher chooses to explore casts the interface in a different light. This delimination "asks that the analyst unpack specific (rather than general, 'human') cultural, ideological, and historical contexts shaping design and use while relieving her from formal exegesis of the entire technical complexity of an [information and communication technology]" (p. 1024). Thus, only elements of Twitch that are directly connected to the issue of toxicity are analyzed in this project. Brock's final point is a reference to critical discourse analysis. While Brock (2018) reminds the reader that the mediation of the discourse must always be taken into account when analyzing utterances, he leaves the door open for researchers to approach CDA according to their needs and interests, as long as the role of the technology remains present and visible within the analysis.

This final point is an appropriate transition to a discussion of CDA, which is operationalized in this project through the work of Fairclough (2015). In the next subsection, I define Fairclough's (2015) framework for CDA and consider how this perspective on CDA fits within and supports CTDA.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Because critical discourse analysis as a methodological framework varies across disciplines, it is necessary to explain how CDA is positioned within sociolinguistics and the strategies employed when conducting CDA through this lens. In his introduction to *Language and Power*, Fairclough (2015) poignantly describes why CDA is so powerful as a methodology and the part it plays in reform and social change. He writes:

> In order to change the world, to understand what needs changing, to know what sort of change is possible, to know what goals we should aim for, to understand what sort of actions are most likely to produce radical change (there are no certainties), to understand what risks they entail and how we might avert them, we need to be constantly seeking to improve our understanding of the existing reality.
>
> (p. 5)

Unsurprisingly, Fairclough positions CDA as a necessary step towards social change. He argues that we must understand the nature of a problem before we can attempt to solve it. Social change, or at least effective social change, cannot occur unless we have a clear picture of the existing reality, and this picture is formed through meticulous analysis. Because CDA exposes connections between language and "other social elements such as power relations, ideologies, economic and political strategies and policies" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 5), it is uniquely positioned to challenge these elements. Its balance between analysis and explanation, pulling apart utterances while simultaneously drawing connections between said utterances and the social world beyond the utterances, allows for it, as a methodology, to extend beyond a mere discussion of data or isolated instances.

CDA, therefore, aligns with the objectives of CTDA, as both are broadly motivated by social injustices and a desire to expose them and prompt social change.

Fairclough divides discourse itself into three elements: text, interaction, and social context. Accordingly, his framework for CDA involves three steps: "*description* of text, *interpretation* of the relationship between text and interaction, and *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 128). All three stages emphasize the agency of the text producers involved through a focus on choice. By analyzing what is present in a text, one must by necessity consider available variants of the variable at play that could have been used. For example, in one of the livestreams analyzed in this project, PaladinAmber remarks, "Stop being a C U N Tuesday." She chooses to spell out *cunt* rather than saying the word and replaces the *t* with 'Tuesday.' This is a significant stylistic choice that must be considered in relation to the other choices PaladinAmber could have made in that moment. Agency and choice are similarly important to CTDA, which necessitates an understanding of the real and imagined affordances of the interaction being studied.

Analysis within Fairclough's CDA framework begins with description. Fairclough (2015) devised 10 main questions (with additional sub-questions) that, when properly answered, flesh out and capture necessary details within the description. For the sake of space, I will not repeat the questions here and focus instead on highlighting the intention behind these questions. Fairclough (2015) explores three levels of text: vocabulary (e.g., word choice, lexicon), grammar (e.g., grammatical/syntactical structures and features), and textual structures (interactional and generic conventions). In analyzing

these levels, Fairclough (2015) attempts to uncover the experiential, relational, expressive, and connective values of these formal features, although he is largely focused on the first three at this stage of analysis. Experiential value shows evidence of a text producer's experiences, knowledge, and beliefs; relational value considers the social relationships enacted within the text; and expressive value signals social values and identities. The fourth, connective value, draws on connections between parts of the text, which can be significant for some analyses, but, for Fairclough, is less indicative of social practice and thus carries less weight in a critical analysis. In analyzing formal features of a text, Fairclough seeks to pull apart the fabric of the text so that individual aspects can be given due consideration. However, he cautions the reader that "[t]he relationship between text and social structures is an indirect, mediated one" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 154). While these values may be identified in the formal features of a text, it is only through interpretation and explanation that the social significance of the text is revealed.

Fairclough (2015) argues that this mediation takes two forms. First, a text is mediated by the discourse in which it is embedded. Textual features only become social operative through their use in social interaction, and Fairclough places heavy significance on the role of interpretation and assumptions within social interaction. Thus, interpretation is taking place both within the text by those involved in the interaction and throughout the analysis by the researcher (step two of his CDA framework). The researcher must interpret how participants themselves are interpreting the interaction, making this style of analysis inherently an insider's task – one that can only be effectively completed by someone who has an awareness and understanding of the

intricacies of the social group or issue being studied. This requirement aligns neatly with Brock's (2018) assertion that CTDA should focus on the community's perspectives and emphasize cultural continuity. Both Brock (2018) and Fairclough (2015) place great importance on the insider perspective and consider it the duty of the researcher to make visible the beliefs and values of the group being studied.

The second form of mediation occurs through the social context of the discourse. Interactions are embedded within social and institutional frameworks that carry specific power dynamics and ideologies. Fairclough (2015) explores this form of mediation in the third step of analysis, explanation, which he describes as "seeing a discourse as part of processes of social struggle, within a matrix of relations of power" (p. 172). Of particular interest is Fairclough's focus on the 'reproductive effects' of discourses, and it is the explanation stage that allows the researcher to explore how texts can function to sustain and/or transform existing power relations. Social struggle can be overt or covert within a text, meaning that even a text that appears lacking in conflict can be contributing to social struggle in one way or another.

While Fairclough's (2015) use of the term *mediation* is at odds with Brock's (2018), both are reminders of the ways in which a text is never isolated or free of social influence. CTDA expands Fairclough's (2015) discussion of mediation to allow for a broader examination of the context of the interaction, one that extends to the technology itself. Thus, a holistic and dynamic methodological framework for analyzing toxicity on Twitch emerges when one combines Fairclough's framework for critical linguistic analysis with Brock's framework for critical interface and discursive analysis. In the next

section, I turn to the minutiae of the project itself, considering the objectives and methods before turning to a discussion of the project's limitations.

Methods

Research Objectives

This project seeks to further current understandings of toxic behavior and how it manifests on the livestreaming platform Twitch by examining how three women streamers – Pokimane, PaladinAmber, and Dexbonus – and their viewers respond to such behavior and the ways in which these responses encourage or discourage further toxic behavior in their respective livestreams. My research questions are twofold:

(1) What do toxic discourses surrounding these three women Twitch streamers look like? Are there common patterns or themes?

(2) How does a streamer's community-building efforts and norms (in terms of channel moderation, explicit rules, etc.) impact the level of toxic behavior in her streams?

Although discussed in scholarship previously, toxicity retains a nebulous definition, as an action or utterance must be viewed as disruptive or damaging to the individuals involved for it to be deemed toxic. Toxicity is therefore highly dependent on the context of the behavior. It must go against the social norms and behavioral expectations of the space in which it occurs and impact multiple users in that space. This does not mean, however, that toxicity is undefinable, but rather that a researcher must let the data itself define what is or is not toxic. Therefore, through RQ1, I develop a definition for toxicity that is applicable to the three streamers being studied and considers relevant patterns or themes

in toxic behavior that may then be extrapolated to the larger context of Twitch and tested for their validity. This definition is a product of each streamer's rules, Twitch's Terms of Service and Community Guidelines, and users' reactions to the behavior. Similarly, given the uniqueness of each Twitch streamer's community, it is important to consider the ways in which the streamer and her community impact the presence and level of toxic discourses. Therefore, in response to RQ2, I analyze methods of channel moderation and community building, including the use of channel moderators and the construction of community norms through explicit and implicit rules and methods of regulation.

Data Collection

To answer these questions, three types of data were selected for analysis:

- approximately 10 hours of livestreaming data for each streamer, divided across two livestreams for each streamer, resulting in 30 total hours of video data and six video files (10 hours per streamer x 3 streamers = 30 hours of video data)

- six chat logs, which go along with each of the livestreams selected for each streamer (2 livestreams each x 3 streamers = six chat logs)

- eight months of active fieldwork and participant observation on Twitch (February – September 2019).

Throughout the fieldwork period, women streamers were identified and observed. Those who do not predominantly play video games on their livestreams were excluded, as were streamers who do not stream regularly (defined in this context as at least three times per week). Furthermore, eligible streamers were limited to Twitch partners who regularly

attract an audience of at least 100 viewers to ensure that the streamers selected would

produce the amount of data and level of interaction needed for this analysis.

This data is part of a larger dataset collected over two week-long periods in June

and August 2019 following IRB approval. During this period, recordings of every stream

for the three streamers and the accompanying chat log for each stream were collected,

yielding 124 hours of data and 38 chat logs, each ranging from 4,500-75,000 utterances.

Two 5-hour streams from each of the three streamers were then selected, resulting in

approximately 10 hours of data for each streamer (30 hours of data total). An overview of

the video data can be seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Video Data Logistics for the Three Streamers

Name	Stream Id[17]	Stream Title	Stream Length	Total Time
Dexbonus	433937942	[!MERCH !CHALLENGE] GATO GANG	5.0 hrs.	9.2 hrs.
	434839418	HAPPY WEDNESDAY!	4.2 hrs.	
PaladinAmber	462667725	Minecraft Monday with Maz!	5.5 hrs.	10.9 hrs.
	463111113	yOu'rE oNe Of ThE bois?!?	5.4 hrs.	
Pokimane	433615433	IM REALLY MAD THOUGH CAUSE SHE DIDNT EVEN PUT "POKI AFTER DARK" IN THE TITLE LIKE NINJA USUALLY DOES. 😡 I WAS WATCHING THIS STREAM WITH MY	4.2 hrs.	10 hrs.
	434458525	HOW ARE YOU?	5.8 hrs.	

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[17] Each livestream is given a unique identifier by Twitch.

The timing of the data collection was intentional to ensure that there was an equal time opportunity for toxicity to arise. This is due to nature of livestreaming, which is in constant flux. As Twitch remarked in a recent report:

> Twitch is a live-streaming service. The vast majority of the content that appears on Twitch is gone the moment it's created and seen. That fact requires us to think about safety and community health in ways that are different from other services that are primarily based on pre-recorded and uploaded content. Content moderation solutions that work for uploaded, video-based services do not work, or work differently, on Twitch. (Twitch, 2021, Safety Philosophy section)

Because the focus of this project is on livestreaming, data collection for each streamer had to occur simultaneously, and the researcher needed to be present in the moment to capture the context and necessary details, such as viewer statistics, streamer ranking, etc., to ensure that the date at which the livestreams took place does not factor into the levels of toxicity present in the data. It would be ineffective to compare livestreaming data collected at disparate time points unless the goal is a diachronic analysis, as levels of toxicity will inevitably fluctuate over time. This is due to the ever-changing nature of Twitch and its affordances, streamers, communities, and users.[18] Thus, when analyzing the data and assessing this project's conclusions, it is crucial to keep in mind when the data was collected. By collecting the data within the same time period, it potentially diminishes the impact of time on the frequency of toxicity in the streamer's livestreams,

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[18] For example, the coronavirus pandemic significantly impacted Twitch, both in terms of the types of content being streamed and the number of users regularly interacting with the platform. Isolating the data within a time period mitigates the impact of the time variable on the frequency of toxicity for the streamers.

thus allowing other variables, such as behavioral regulation strategies, to be taken into consideration.

Data Analysis

The first step of analysis involved transcribing the video files utilizing transcription conventions adapted from Jefferson (1978) and Hepburn and Bolden (2013), as seen in Table 3.2. The video data were then analyzed in conjunction with the chat log for each stream. This method puts the streamer and the livestream itself in conversation with the viewers participating in chat, providing important context on both sides, as the streamer interacted with viewers in their chat and viewers responded to the streamer, to what was happening on stream, and to each other. Utterances of interest were then identified and separated for coding. Coding and theme identification were conducted in both an a priori and emergent fashion, first for each transcribed stream and chat log independently and then across the streams and chat logs for each streamer. The a priori theme identification focused on identifying sections of the videos, chat logs, and field notes containing potentially toxic utterances, responses to/discussions of toxicity, and methods of moderation/regulation to create a concrete picture of the ways in which toxicity impacts participants in these livestreams. The process of coding required multiple pass-throughs to refine the codes and develop a dynamic codebook that is simultaneously descriptive and flexible. The codes were developed to be applicable to all of the data rather than simply to one streamer and her community; however, some codes are only utilized in relation to one streamer, as the streamers' performances and communities are diverse and therefore present important nuances not seen in the others being studied.

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Table 3.2

Transcription Conventions

Convention	Description
((cough))	The transcriptionist's description of the events
.	Final falling intonation
,	Clause-final intonation
?	Rising intonation
…	A pause of 0.5 second or more
=	Latched utterances
:	Elongated sound
[speech] **[speech]**	Overlapping utterances
-	An abrupt cutoff
speech**:**	An extension of the sound it follows

The analytic codes are divided into primary and subordinate codes to allow for comparisons between the data for each streamer as well as to group behaviors together. Three primary codes were established: *toxicity*, *discussion*, and *moderation*. These codes mirror the research objectives for this project – to identify types of toxicity, understand how users respond to such behavior, and examine moderation strategies developed to resist or prevent this behavior. *Toxicity*, as discussed throughout this project, encompasses a wide variety of behaviors that go against the social norms of the space and negatively impact the individuals involved. *Discussion* describes noteworthy interactions between viewers in chat, including instances where users talk about a behavior occurring in the livestream (given the subordinate code *commentary*) as well as instances of

community-building (given the subordinate code *community*). Finally, *moderation* refers to the diverse regulating behaviors seen throughout the data, as the analysis chapters and the section on user behavior regulation in chapter two show.

Grouped under the primary codes are subordinate codes, which reflect the nuances in each streamer's data. These subordinate codes reflect the users' understanding of, reaction to, and vocabulary for the behavior occurring. For example, the subordinate code *feet* is utilized in relation to all three primary codes in PaladinAmber's data. This is due to the fact that some users have fetishized PaladinAmber's feet and will occasionally ask to see them on stream. She has responded by having a third-party tool, known as Nightbot, post the following message in her chat when a user mentions feet: "Yes she HATES feet. DO NOT ASK TO SHOW FEET! You risk being timed out and banned from the channel. Youve been warned." Thus, the term *feet* is significant to PaladinAmber's community and thus has been coded as such. The emergent nature of the subordinate codes reflects CTDA's tenet that the theory should reflect the perspective of the group being studied. By using the language of Twitch users within the coding process itself, the analysis reflects the experiences and lexicons of the communities being studied. A complete list of all primary and subordinate codes is available in Appendix A.

Coding for Toxicity

Because toxicity is highly contextualized, coding for toxic behavior required an analysis of each of the streamer's community norms and behavioral expectations in addition to Twitch's Community Guidelines. These aspects were examined during the field work period of data collection. For an utterance to be analytically coded as *toxic*, it

must go against the streamer's community norms and rules. For example, backseating – providing unwanted advice or direction in relation to a streamer's gameplay – only violates Dexbonus's rules, while Pokimane and PaladinAmber do not list backseating as a banned behavior. Thus, backseating in Dexbonus's livestreams was coded as *toxic* because it violates her rules and negatively impacts the viewing experience; in contrast, backseating was not coded as *toxic* in Pokimane or PaladinAmber's livestreams. In addition to examining the streamers' rules and Twitch's Community Guidelines, there were also instances where streamers, channel moderators, and/or viewers addressed a behavior occurring in chat as inappropriate, harmful, and/or toxic. Due to their in-group status, such perceptions were analytically coded as *commentary* and the utterances to which they referred were examined within the context of these perceptions. In most cases, the utterances to which these users referred were in fact toxic and were labeled as such.

There are also behaviors that violate Twitch's social norms or Community Guidelines, such as hate speech and sexual harassment. Any instances of such behaviors were coded as *toxic* in all three streamers' data, both because they violate the platform's rules and because they are harmful to the streamers and their viewers. Some utterances were more challenging than others to code. For example, one user in Pokimane's chat posted numerous times about their desire to commit suicide. These posts were ignored by other users, making it difficult to determine the impact they had on the viewers. Furthermore, such utterances do not violate Pokimane's rules and are not specifically prohibited by Twitch's Community Guidelines, which ban threats of suicide but not

specifically mentions of suicide. In instances such as these, where a norm or rule was not broken and the impact of the utterance was unclear, the analytic code *toxic* was not applied. Largely though, instances of toxicity were easily identifiable based on the fieldwork conducted as well as scholarly and media discussions of toxicity (including but not limited to Alexander, 2018; Blackburn & Kwak, 2014; Groen, 2020; Kwak & Blackburn, 2015; Poyane, 2018).

It is also important to note here that utterances coded as *toxic* were not necessarily given that label by users themselves. As the data shows, *toxic* is an umbrella term used to describe a wide variety of behaviors. Thus, while members of Dexbonus's community may not call backseating *toxic*, it is labeled as such due to the impact it has on her viewers and the fact that it goes against the social norms of her community. Throughout the analysis chapters, numerous behaviors are identified and explored as examples of toxicity; however, they should not be assumed to be the only types of toxicity that can occur or even the only types present in the data. Rather, these examples stand out as prominent or pervasive behaviors that speak to the nature of toxicity in this dataset and echo larger trends in toxicity on Twitch.

Analyzing Affordances

In addition to coding, analysis also consisted of an examination of the affordances utilized by users of Twitch, specifically in relation to these three streamers. To understand how Twitch's affordances are perceived (imagined) by the streamers and their viewers, I assessed my experiences as a participant observer in these communities, examined Twitch's discussion of said affordances (their website and blog), reviewed

news articles regarding Twitch or the three streamers published during this time period, and explored each streamer's homepage on Twitch, where crucial information regarding rules, community expectations, brand deals, the streamer's schedule, etc. is housed. These resources provided further context for the video data and chat logs and revealed how each streamer approaches Twitch and her viewers. Discussion of these aspects is inherently folded into each analysis chapter to emphasize that such components are not disparate data points but rather elements that build on and further understanding of the data or topic at hand.

Theme Identification

The final step of analysis involved the identification of overarching themes across the data. During coding, analysis was limited to each streamer to form a clear picture of each community, the level of toxicity present, and the community's approach to managing and preventing toxic behavior. Once these discrete analyses concluded, however, the similarities and differences between these streamers and their communities were examined to determine how toxicity can be addressed at the level of the platform. In the final chapter, I assess these points and offer recommendations for addressing toxicity. This final step extends the application of this research and underscores its critical nature both as an act of witnessing and as a call to action for Twitch, its users, and other researchers interested in examining and/or reducing toxicity on Twitch or other platforms.

Limitations

There are three key limitations that must be considered in relation to this project. The first is the inability to generalize the results of this project due to its limited scope. This is a common limitation of qualitative studies but does not negate the significance of the work. In contrast, the results of this study and qualitative work more broadly provide a level of nuance and detail that is often not possible in quantitative studies. Thus, while any conclusions made based on the following analysis cannot be blindly extrapolated to the larger community of women Twitch streamers, the possibility of extrapolation should be considered the next step in this project and is discussed in the concluding chapter.

The second limitation is connected to the first – due to the small scope of this project and the parameters set forth for data collection and analysis, the data itself is lacking in diversity on some important levels. Intersectional feminist analysis makes this observation obvious. In particular, white, cishet identities feature prominently in the following chapters. That such aspects are key features of the dominant culture on Twitch and its associated communities and groups contributes to this problematic. However, the gamer stereotype has prevented BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) and non-cishet (non-cisgender/heterosexual) streamers from reaching the same levels of success as their white, cishet peers. Due to the research objectives and the accompanying parameters for data collection (including the gender, audience size, and popularity of the streamer), Dexbonus, Pokimane, and PaladinAmber were selected. A larger sample size or different methods of data collection would have undoubtably revealed a sample that is more diverse in these ways; at the same time, though, the diversity of these selected streamers

should not be ignored or discounted. The following analysis chapters underscores the differences between these streamers and the ways in which these differences contribute to unique communities and varied strategies for managing toxic behavior. Each of the three streamers was selected because she represents something interesting about Twitch, streaming, or toxicity. These points are explored in great depth throughout this project. Thus, although this sample is imperfect in some ways, which is to be expected of any sample, it is quite fitting in others.

Furthermore, CTDA is highly context-dependent and relies on the researcher's interpretations of the data, which are inherently grounded in their observations and experiences. As such, one individual's interpretation may differ from another's, which limits the certainty of these results. As Christians (2007) reminds researchers, "All human effort—including theorizing—is done by beings whose knowledge is incomplete, whose insights are imperfect, and whose understanding is often blinded by tentativeness" (p. 441). At the same time, my extensive experience as a user of Twitch, my previous research on this topic, and my familiarity with the streamers being analyzed should lend these interpretations some credibility. Furthermore, this project is focused on the presence of toxicity in these livestreams, which, by definition, requires a focus on the *context* of potentially toxic utterances. The process of defining an utterance as toxic necessitates a connection be made between the utterance and the social norms and behavioral expectations of the space in which the utterance occurs. These norms and expectations are a fundamental component of the data and are used to support interpretations of the toxic utterances. While this does not negate the level of subjectivity

required during analysis, the focus on context allows for toxic behavior to be observed as an action in addition to the discursive analysis of the utterance.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has outlined the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this project. I touched briefly on elements of social constructionism and intersectional feminism to paint my positionality as a researcher and my ideological approach to the research. I then turned to a more detailed discussion of the methodology, which unites Brock's (2018) description of critical technocultural discourse analysis with Fairclough's (2015) framework for critical discourse analysis, bringing together linguistic and interface analysis to allow for a deeper examination of the role of Twitch as a company and a social context in the production and moderation of toxic behavior surrounding three women Twitch streamers. Finally, I described my research objectives, methods of data collection and analysis, and limitations, underscoring the scope of this project and my reasoning for the framework I have presented. In the following chapters, I shift into analysis of each of the streamers before turning to similarities, differences, and overarching conclusions in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE PRICE OF POPULARITY: OVERPOPULATED CHATS AND THE EFFECTS

OF LIMITED MODERATION

Although the goal of many Twitch streamers is to amass and sustain large viewer

bases, doing so can result in livestreams and chats that are more difficult to control.

While larger audiences equate to more money earned, better brand deals, and increased

popularity across numerous online platforms, the price is the strength of the community

members' bonds with one another. Larger communities have higher turnover rates, and

the high volume of communication due to the sheer size of the community can make

large communities feel impersonal, as members find it difficult, if not impossible, to

interact with each other on a personal level due to the number of people simultaneously

interacting (Ren et al., 2007). Furthermore, larger audiences increase feelings of

anonymity and online disinhibition (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012), making it easier for

misbehavior, including trolling and toxicity, to go unsanctioned. Part of the reason that

Twitch's toxicity problem has earned media attention is because of the level of toxicity in

its most popular livestreams. Kevin Lin, the head of Culture, Strategy, and Innovation at

Twitch, remarked in an interview that "If you go to smaller channels [on Twitch], with

hundreds of concurrents rather than tens of thousands, you'll see a lot less [toxic

behaviour]" (Batchelor, 2017). This claim speaks to the potential correlation between

audience size and level of toxicity. However, given Twitch's desire to host popular

streamers with sizeable audiences, it is essential to consider strategies for managing toxic

behavior in large communities, specifically given the ways in which Twitch and the some

of its most popular streamers have historically allowed, and in some cases encouraged, toxicity to thrive on the platform (McGuire, 2020).

It is difficult to discuss popular Twitch streamers without including Pokimane, the 'undisputed queen of Twitch' (Hore, 2020). With over six million followers on Twitch and an average viewer count of over 20,000 (as of October 2020), Pokimane, whose real name is Imane Anys, is among the fifty most popular streamers, the sixth most followed streamer, and the most popular woman streamer on Twitch at the time of writing. However, her popularity has made her vulnerable to toxic behavior both on Twitch and other platforms.[19] This chapter explores two of Pokimane's livestreams to determine how the size of her audience impacts the viewing experience and level of toxicity. For this reason, the chapter is organized as follows: First, this chapter considers how feelings of online unidentifiability and disinhibition due to the size of the audience impact viewer behavior and users' perceptions of Pokimane's livestreams. Then, the most common types of toxicity in Pokimane's chat are considered, including spam, sexualizing and objectifying messages, and general harassment. Embedded within the discussion of each of these types of toxicity is analysis of Twitch affordances. The examination of spam considers how bots – software applications often used for simple, repetitive tasks – can be employed to harass a streamer. When considering sexualizing/objectifying messages, the chapter explores how monetary donation messages (messages sent by viewers to a streamer when they donate money) can be exploited to send crude and inappropriate

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[19] Given the objectives of this project, this chapter focuses on toxic behavior on Pokimane's livestreams; however, it is worth noting that in mid-2020, Pokimane was the focus of media attention due to a series of YouTube videos posted by Leafyishere that harassed and mocked her. Leafy was banned from YouTube in 2020 for this behavior.

messages to streamers. This section also reflects on the role that AutoMod, a program that helps to moderate a streamer's chat using machine learning, plays in shaping the style of discourse present in Pokimane's chat. Finally, the chapter examines the presence of white knights, defined below, in Pokimane's chat when discussing general harassment, emphasizing how some types of responses to toxicity can be toxic in themselves. This chapter speaks to the challenges of sustaining and entertaining a large community and emphasizes how Pokimane's popularity and moderation strategies have impacted the types and level of toxicity present in her livestreams.

Who is Pokimane?

Imane Anys, better known as Pokimane or Poki, is a Canadian Moroccan Twitch streamer who has been on the platform since 2013. At 24 years of age, she is also a prominent YouTuber, with over 6.5 million subscribers across her three YouTube channels, and a member of OfflineTV, a group of content creators who produce YouTube videos. While most of the members of OfflineTV live together, Pokimane left the house in June 2020,[20] although she continues to actively participate in the group. Pokimane speaks English and French fluently and is based in Los Angeles, California.

At the time of writing, Pokimane streams an average of five days a week. She is known for streaming *League of Legends*, *Fortnite*, and Just Chatting, although she often plays whatever game is popular at the time at least once on her channel. As stated above, at the time of writing, her streams average over 20,000 viewers; however, when the data for this project was collected in June 2019, Pokimane averaged 8,000 viewers per stream,

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[20] This was partially a response to misconduct by another member of OfflineTV, who was eventually removed from the group following sexual misconduct allegations from other group members (Liao, 2020).

ranking her in the top 100 streamers on Twitch. Given her upwards trajectory since

starting her career seven years ago, it is unsurprising that Pokimane has continued to

grow her audience. Despite taking a month-long break from streaming in August 2020,

Pokimane remains one of the most popular and successful streamers on the platform.

Overview of the Data

This chapter predominantly focuses on Pokimane's chat, although her

performance and identity as a streamer are inherently embedded in any discussion of such

data. This focus was selected because of the large size of Pokimane's viewer base and her

relationship (or lack thereof) with her audience. Her style mirrors that of many popular

streamers; thus, the analysis here should be considered relevant to broader discussions of

Twitch streamers and the toxicity they face when the size of their viewership makes

interactions between a streamer and their viewers or between viewers in chat difficult or,

in some cases, impossible.

In Table 4.1, an overview of the 18 subordinate analytic codes applied to the data

and the number of occurrences for each is provided. Most of the utterances coded

received only one code; however, some received a second code when appropriate. For

Stream 1, 2,849 of 69,769 total utterances were selected for further analysis, with 27

utterances receiving two codes. For Stream 2,786 of 39,529 total utterances were coded,

with 94 utterances receiving two codes. The most used code was *spam*, describing

messages that are repetitively posted. This was followed by *sexual*, which marked

objectifying or sexual utterances. The defining criteria for each code and a corresponding

example are available in Appendix A. As table 4.1 indicates, a more substantial portion

of the chat utterances for the first stream were deemed relevant than for the second stream. This is due to the amount of spam in the first stream, which was quite significant due to the presence of bots, an issue discussed in greater detail in the section on spam. Towards the bottom of table 4.1 are mostly thematic codes that were only relevant for one stream, showing how the topics and types of utterances can change depending on the livestream. For example, there was an inappropriate discussion of Pokimane's legs that only occurred in the second stream, while pepega, a euphemism for the pejorative 'retarded,' was only seen in the first stream. Although the style of discourse in a streamer's livestreams is likely to remain similar across livestreams, there will inevitably be some differences based on the topics discussed, the viewers present, and the streamer's content, as some of the analytic codes in table 4.1 show.

In the next section, additional details and context are provided regarding each of the streams. The size of Pokimane's viewer base for each stream is considered and users' perceptions of Pokimane and her community are examined in relation to online disinhibition.

Table 4.1

Overview of the Codes Applied to Pokimane's Chat Data

Primary Code	Subordinate Code	*N* (Stream 1)	*N* (Stream 2)	*N* (Total)
toxicity	spam	2064	93	2157
toxicity	sexual	263	251	514
toxicity	harass	173	99	272
discussion	commentary	82	151	233
moderation	moderate	83	83	166
toxicity	white knight	64	15	79
toxicity	sellout	46	23	69
toxicity	gender	34	32	66
toxicity	troll	10	29	39
toxicity	dating	0	35	35
discussion	toxic	15	8	23
toxicity	scam	16	6	22
toxicity	tech	0	19	19
toxicity	private	3	15	18
toxicity	legs	0	12	12
toxicity	race	6	6	12
toxicity	virgin	9	3	12
toxicity	pepega	8	0	8
Total	18	2876	880	3756

Online Unidentifiability and Disinhibition

Comparing large chats to small chats on Twitch is like comparing attending a National Football League (NFL) game to attending a college class. In the first scenario, one must scream to be heard, and, even then, it is unlikely that anyone apart from

attendees nearby would notice. In contrast, while one may not know everyone's names in a class of 20-30 students, they are likely to recognize every face, and most types of interaction in such a space will likely be noticed. Pokimane's viewers often lament how they go unnoticed in her chat, how she does not appear to take the time to read messages and respond, and how even moderators are not closely monitoring the activity in her chat. This is likely due to the speed at which messages are posted in her chat. In the first livestream selected as part of the dataset for this project, Pokimane streamed for 4.2 hours to 117,467 unique viewers, averaging 10,144 concurrent viewers. During this period, 69,769 messages were posted in her chat, with an average of 277 messages being posted per minute. In the second livestream, Pokimane streamed for 5.8 hours to 112,671 unique viewers, with an average of 5,624 concurrent viewers. During this period, 39,529 messages were posted in her chat for an average of 117 messages per minute. In both livestreams, more than one message was being posted every second, with the first stream averaging 4.6 messages per second. This would be almost impossible to read even if one were focused solely on Pokimane's chat. It is therefore unsurprising that Pokimane does not spend a significant amount of time interacting with her viewers in chat. However, given that the streamer is seen as the foremost authority in a livestream, Pokimane's lack of attention has also resulted in a feeling of being unmonitored, which comes with its own consequences. In example 4.1, users[21] participating in the chat for the second livestream expressed this sentiment.

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[21] All usernames are pseudonyms.

Example 4.1

Stream 2 Chat

1   (00:13:33) Linusan: writes 10 rows messages still gets ignored :D :D

2   […]

3   (00:29:45) youABC: IM TRYING TO GET YOU TO SAY HI BACK FROM 1

4   WEEK AGO

5   […]

6   (00:46:34) Stevenee: Poki i actually love you owo but you will never see this so

7   […]

8   (01:41:21) guysgogo: she doesn't look at chat now

9   […]

10 (02:13:41) Aspires: you dont look at chat tho

11 […]

12 (02:14:19) SwipeRight: shes not gonna look at our replies

Linusan, in line 1, remarks on a common tactic used by those in chat when they want a

streamer to notice their message, which is to spam the message multiple times in the

hopes of catching the streamer's eye when they happen to be looking at chat. In general,

spamming is not viewed favorably by chat users on Twitch. As one user remarked in

Pokimane's first livestream: "1 owrd [sic] can be used to express feelings. spamming sam

[sic] word? just keeps a lot of space, chat garbage." This user, like many others, sees

spamming as taking up space, with the actual utterances being made meaningless by the

act of spamming. This point will be returned to in the section on spam. As Linusan points

out though, even spamming in this case has gone unnoticed, perhaps due to the volume of messages or the habit of some streamers to simply ignore unwanted behavior, discussed in further detail in the section on Pokimane's responses to sexualizing/objectifying messages. Another tactic employed by users and seen in lines 3-4 is the use of all-caps, which is equated with shouting. youABC expresses their frustration about going unnoticed for a week in lines 3-4. These types of messages, in which users want Pokimane to say "hi," are quite common and, given the volume of them, could disrupt the flow of the livestream if Pokimane said "hi" every time someone asked for her to do so. However, users persist in trying to get her attention, as seen in lines 6-12, with the later messages expressing a resignation of the reality that Pokimane will not see their messages. This commonly felt sentiment and the accompanying sense of distance felt by users between Pokimane and themselves due to this lack of interaction leads to an illusion of anonymity. Returning to the analogy at the beginning of this section, it is easy to feel like one's voice is inconsequential or unheard if one is part of a large crowd. While an individual on their own might not feel comfortable booing a celebrity, when they are surrounded by hundreds or thousands of others, booing or any other action feels less significant and less capable of leading to consequences, which may bolster one's resolve. This effect, as described in chapter two, is known as *online disinhibition* and is enhanced by feelings of invisibility or diminished social presence (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). In this case, being one of the hundreds of individuals sending messages every minute makes it easy for users to feel like they are not being seen and thus can act in whatever manner they prefer. Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) remark, "anonymity may cause

Internet users to feel unaccountable for their negative actions, as they cannot be identified as the perpetrators of certain actions or behaviors. This loss of accountability may result in an increased level of toxic disinhibition, consequently promoting impulsive, aggressive, and abusive behaviors" (p. 435). Pokimane herself commented on the role anonymity plays in user behavior, stating,

> Honestly, the type of stuff that people will say to you over the internet, they would never in a million years say to your face. […] I feel like behind the wall of anonymity it's really easy for people to say whatever they want and be as negative as they want because there are no consequences or repercussions, and they can't be judged because no one can see them, no one can say anything about how they look or how they're acting. (Clayon, 2019)

Twitch users are further shielded by the platform's username system, which does not require one to input any identifying information, apart from an email address, when creating an account. Thus, there is little Twitch can do to hold users accountable. When users enter livestream chats in which they feel unnoticed by the streamer, the lack of accountability is only amplified.

To make matters worse, regardless of the moderation strategies that Pokimane may have in place behind the scenes, users perceive the chat as unmoderated, further increasing their disinhibition. This could be due, in part, to the fact that Pokimane only has two rules for her chat: "1. Be meme, not mean. 2. No racism." While other streamers have extensive rules in place regarding user behavior (see discussion of Dexbonus's rules in chapter six), Pokimane is quite brief in her expectations and does not explain potential

consequences for misbehavior. London et al. (2020) connect a lack of discussion of consequences with a reduction in corrective behavior on Twitch, meaning that users' perception of the chat as unmoderated may be accurate, as Pokimane's channel moderators may not be actively regulating user behavior because Pokimane has not clearly defined the consequences for misconduct. Because Twitch users expect a streamer to use moderators, some viewers in Pokimane's expressed confusion and concern at the apparent lack of moderation in both streams, as seen in example 4.2.

Example 4.2

Stream 1 Chat

1   (00:41:47) lets_Focus: dose poki have any mods

2   […]

3   (03:32:19) sapphires: This chat doesnt have mods , look at the fckign spammers

Stream 2 Chat

4   (00:16:17) poptherock: Where are the mods

5   […]

6   (00:59:43) spikey: WHERE THE F ARE TH MODS 🙁

7   […]

8   (02:39:26) justkidding: MODS do something

9   […]

10 (03:51:08) Wrecker: the hell mods?

11 […]

12 (03:51:20) beauty: uh, mods?

13   […]

14   (03:51:21) riftraft: yeah mods, the hell? 🐸

In the first stream, lets_Focus asks whether Pokimane has moderators in line 1, and,

much later in the stream, sapphires remarks that Pokimane's chat must not have

moderators because of the amount of spam. Users appear to equate the presence of

behavior that is commonly unwelcome or against Twitch's or an individual streamer's

code of conduct with a lack of moderators, as it is assumed that moderators would

prevent such behavior from occurring. In Pokimane's case, spamming violates Twitch's

code of conduct (Twitch, 2020a) rather than her community's rules. Of course, Twitch, as

a platform, largely does not enforce punishment for small infractions like spamming; it is

therefore on the streamer to uphold the community guidelines. In the second stream,

users are again questioning where the moderators are and asking them to respond to

various infractions. In lines 10-14, users noticed a particularly vulgar post in Pokimane's

chat that went unnoticed/unregulated by moderators, leaving them to question what the

moderators are doing. While this is not to say that Pokimane does not have moderators or

that Pokimane's moderators are not actively doing their jobs, from the users' perspective,

Pokimane's chat feels unrestrained, allowing users to behave toxically without fear of

retribution.[22]

The feeling of not being watched by both Pokimane and her moderators has

significantly impacted her users' inhibition. Not only does the size of her viewer base

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[22] Pokimane does have moderators, but they do not appear to play an active role in her chat. There are no
instances of moderators reprimanding users or posting reminders about rules. While moderators may be
flagging posts and imposing punishments behind the scenes, such information in not available in this
dataset. For more information on the impact of visible/transparent moderation, see chapter six.

make users feel like they are unheard voices amongst thousands, but the lack of attention given to what is happening in chat has increased toxic online disinhibition to the point that users are questioning whether moderators are even present. In the next section, the consequences of this online disinhibition and feelings of unidentifiability are explored in greater detail.

Spam, Sexualization/Objectification, and Other Types of Toxic Behavior

Of the three streamers discussed in this project, Pokimane received the highest number of toxic comments. This is most likely due to the size of her viewer base and the lack of strict moderation. The three most common types of toxic behavior include spam ($N = 2157$), sexual or objectifying comments ($N = 506$), and general harassment ($N = 272$). Each of these types of toxic behavior are explored in the following subsections.

Spam

Spam is pervasive, particularly in the first stream. While some users simply copy and paste messages numerous times, which is one form of spam, when it has reached the levels seen in Pokimane's first stream, it is likely partially due to the presence of chat activity bots, which "attempt to imitate streamer/viewer interaction" (Twitch, 2020b). In other words, chat activity bots appear to be viewers but are, in fact, part of a group of Twitch accounts controlled by a single user. Bots, more broadly, can be divided into two categories: those that are built to assist the streamer using custom chat commands[23] and

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[23] Chat commands provide answers to frequently asked questions and other information that a streamer wants to remind their viewers about without the need for the streamer's interaction. These commands appear as an exclamation point in front of a word, such as !uptime, which tells the user how long a streamer has been live. The use of the command prompts a bot in chat to provide the information attached to the command. For more information on the value of chat commands, see chapter six.

those that artificially inflate viewer/follower counts and/or chat activity. While this first

category of bots can be beneficial for streamers and their communities, Twitch strongly

condemns the latter group of bots, arguing that botting does "not contribute to a healthy,

highly engaged community" (Twitch, 2020b). In this case, Pokimane is a victim of

botting rather than a perpetrator. While some streamers may use botting to artificially

boost their presence on the platform, bots are also used to harass streamers, as the

streamer's chat can be overrun by artificial posts that detract from authentic

conversations between viewers and hamper interaction between a streamer and their

viewers.[24] Popular streamers like Pokimane are common targets of this type of toxic

behavior because the amount of interaction already happening in their chat can help the

bots to blend in, making it more difficult for these streamers and their moderators to

single out the bot accounts and take appropriate action. Furthermore, botting can be

considered a form of trolling behavior, meaning that the users operating the bots are

doing so simply to cause trouble for a streamer.[25] In this instance, bots are being used in

Pokimane's stream to relentlessly spam messages, such as those seen in example 4.3.

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[24] It is unclear who is responsible for the bots used to harass streamers, as very little research has been conducted on the topic. However, it is most likely users who have enough technical knowledge to control the programs that operate bots.

[25] See chapter five for further discussion of trolling.

Example 4.3

Stream 1 Chat

1   (00:24:22) Revel: ALL OF YESTERDAY WASTED 🍩 ALL OF

2   YESTERDAY WASTED 🍩 ALL OF YESTERDAY

3   WASTED 🍩 ALL OF YESTERDAY WASTED 🍩 ALL

4   OF YESTERDAY WASTED 🍩 ALL OF YESTERDAY

5   WASTED 🍩 ALL OF YESTERDAY WASTED 🍩

6   […]

7   (00:24:33) Ricki: BACK AT ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT

8   ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT ROCKS 🍩

9   BACK AT ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT

10   ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT ROCKS 🍩 BACK AT ROCKS 🍩

11   […]

12   (00:26:11) Ricki: NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN

13   GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸

14   NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN

15   GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸 NOT EVEN GRILL 🐸

16   […]

17   (00:27:57) Ricki: You're supposed to go up not down 🐸 You're supposed to

18   go up not down 🐸 You're supposed to go up not down 🐸

19		You're supposed to go up not down 🐸
20	[…]	
21	(00:29:59) Ricki:	CANT EVEN USE A HAMMER 😀 CANT EVEN USE A
22		HAMMER 😀 CANT EVEN USE A HAMMER 😀 CANT
23		EVEN USE A HAMMER 😀 CANT EVEN USE A
24		HAMMER 😀 CANT EVEN USE A HAMMER 😀

These messages do not contribute to the conversation in any meaningful way. Instead, they simply take up space through their length, repetition, and use of all-caps, creating the impression of a cacophony of voices shouting nonsense at Pokimane. These messages also function as criticism of Pokimane's gameplay, commenting on the lack of progress Pokimane has made in the game (lines 1-17) and her inability to play the game at a satisfactory level for these viewers (lines 17-24). Such messages are particularly aggravating in the context of the game Pokimane is playing – *Getting Over It with Bennet Foddy*, in which one plays as a man stuck in a cauldron who uses a Yosemite hammer to climb up a mountain. This game is challenging and was popular on Twitch due to its ability to frustrate the streamers playing it. Viewers enjoyed watching streamers falling down the mountain repeatedly and the accompanying rage that went with the failure (known as *malding*). Comments such as those in example 4.3 add to Pokimane's frustration and heighten the tension in her chat. Although such comments could also potentially be viewed in the spirit of friendly taunting (see the section on harassment), the spamming of such messages is undoubtedly toxic, regardless of their content, because they impede user interaction between other viewers and with Pokimane.

Sexualization and Objectification

In addition to spam, 506 utterances were coded as *sexual*. The analytic code *sexual* subsumes both sexual and objectifying comments, including remarks about Pokimane's body, questions/comments regarding what users would like to do with Pokimane or a part of her body, references to sex acts, and questions/comments regarding what Pokimane is willing to do on camera. Because such utterances represent one of the most pervasive issues facing women streamers on Twitch, it is important to consider methods implemented by Twitch to prevent such behavior prior to analyzing the data itself, as the data discussed in this chapter considers utterances that have survived Twitch's and Pokimane's prevention methods. Therefore, AutoMod, Twitch's automoderator program, will be addressed first before analyzing the sexualizing and objectifying utterances present in the data from Pokimane's livestreams.

AutoMod

Twitch's AutoMod (short for Automoderator) is a bot that "uses machine learning and natural language processing algorithms to hold risky messages from chat so they can be reviewed by a channel moderator before appearing to other viewers in the chat" (Twitch, 2020c). According to Twitch's (2020c) website, this bot has four categories of moderation – discrimination, sexual content, hostility, and profanity – and offers five levels of filtering:

- Level 0: No filtering.

- Level 1: Some filtering on discrimination only.

- Level 2: Some filtering on discrimination and sexual content, more filtering on hostility.

- Level 3: More filtering on discrimination, sexual content and hostility.

- Level 4: More filtering on discrimination, sexual content and profanity, and most filtering on hostility. (Twitch, 2020c)

In addition to these settings, streamers and their channel moderators can manually block or permit terms and phrases. AutoMod is currently available in 17 languages and learns by monitoring the actions of moderators in chat, automatically adjusting settings based on how moderators respond to (approve or deny) messages flagged by AutoMod, as well as what messages are removed by moderators that have not been flagged by AutoMod. Unfortunately, there is limited data available on AutoMod, as its behavior in streamers' chats "cannot be scraped using public methods" (Harpstead et al., 2019, p. 115). This means that, although it is assumed that streamers like Pokimane, PaladinAmber, and Dexbonus use AutoMod to assist in the regulation of their chats, as it is highly encouraged by Twitch and simplifies moderators' jobs, it is unclear what level of filtering these streamers are using or how much labor each streamer and/or their moderators have invested in training AutoMod. Furthermore, while other automoderators have been studied,[26] little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of Twitch's AutoMod or streamers' perceptions of it.

Turning to the data from Pokimane's livestreams, Example 4.4 provides several examples of utterances coded as *sexual* from both streams. Although the level of filtering

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[26] See Young (2018) and Jhaver et al. (2019) for a discussion of Reddit's Automoderator.

Pokimane uses and the terms/phrases she chooses to block/permit are private, it appears that she is not exceedingly strict, as example 4.4 shows users posting messages with the terms/phrases "breasts" and "jacking off" without consequences. Note also how users have adjusted spellings and phrasing in these utterances to avoid being flagged by AutoMod.

Example 4.4

Stream 1 Chat

1   (00:04:08) conchshell: Why is your but like two balls of basketball

2   […]

3   (00:04:24) Tiberius: my god u need ur pooper eaten

4   […]

5   (00:07:32) fckdicks: IM JAKING OFFFFFFGG

6   […]

7   (00:17:32) cybermon: If I could I would like to touch your big breasts 🪶 👽

8   👽 👽 🍯 🍯 🍯 🍯 🍯 🍯 🍯 🍯

9   […]

10 (00:48:49) DarKnight: Can we see you swallow a baseball bat???/

11 […]

12 (01:04:53) Minus_Blue: SHE LOOKS LIKE A BLOW UP DOLL WHEN HER

13   MOUTH OPENS LIKE THIS 👄

Stream 2 Chat

14 (00:04:52) involuntary: show me your pusy pls

15   […]

16   (00:08:08) bradybunch: I'll clap your cheeks for you

17   […]

18   (00:14:38) monkeysee: Legit jacking off to this in the back of my science class

19   right now

20   […]

21   (00:25:21) iamhere: thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic

22   thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic thic

23   […]

24   (00:28:13) riskymorty: Shut up bust down and suck my big wee wee

Although AutoMod claims to automatically detect evasive language and misspellings,

lines 1 and 14 utilize misspellings to effectively evade AutoMod, with conchshell

replacing "butt" with "but" and involuntary spelling "pussy" with one 's.' Like most

automoderators, AutoMod is limited by its focus on terms and phrases, which require

context to be properly assessed (MacAvaney et al., 2019). It is unlikely that AutoMod

would recognize the sexual nature of the utterance in line 1, although a human moderator

should easily be able to flag such an utterance as inappropriate. In contrast, while the

term 'pussy' has been used to describe cats in addition to vaginas, it is most likely safe

for AutoMod to flag all instances of 'pussy' and any evasive misspellings, such as the

one in line 14. Why such an utterance was not deleted is unclear; however, it signals that

Pokimane is most likely operating AutoMod at level 0, 1, or perhaps 2, as sexual content

starts being filtered at level 2 and is increasingly filtered when AutoMod is used at higher levels.

Example 4.4 also shows examples of evasive misspellings that may be used out of habit rather than to avoid AutoMod in Pokimane's chat. In line 5, fckdicks misspells "jacking off;" however, this term does not appear to be blocked, as monkeysee, in line 18, uses the same phrase without having their message removed. In addition to misspellings, there are also two examples of evasive language, with Tiberius, in line 3, using "pooper" instead of "butt," and riskymorty, in line 23, replacing "penis" or "dick" with "wee wee." Furthermore, although example 4.4 only provides one instance of Pokimane being called "thic," which is a purposeful misspelling of "thick" or "thicc," this term and its variations are pervasive throughout both livestreams. It is evident from example 4.4 that users' perceptions of Pokimane's chat as unmoderated (as discussed in example 4.2) may be close to the truth; although Pokimane undoubtedly utilizes some moderation strategies, as she does employ moderators and has an albeit brief set of rules, she appears to allow a wide variety of offensive or inappropriate messages to be posted in her chat without consequences. The use of AutoMod as a strategy for moderating toxicity will be returned to in chapter seven.

Pokimane's Responses to Sexualizing and Objectifying Messages

Example 4.4 also provides a sample of the sexualizing and objectifying language directed at Pokimane through her chat. The level of vulgarity is somewhat jarring, given that 'sexually explicit content' violates Twitch's community guidelines (Twitch, 2020a); at the same time, it is not surprising given the positioning of Twitch within broader video

game culture, where women are marginalized participants who "have to struggle and maneuver within a structured system of social positions that has predefined their existence" (Gray et al., 2017). Sexualization and objectification are easy methods of degrading, intimidating, and ultimately controlling individuals who dare to trespass into male-dominated spaces like Twitch. Such acts contribute to a cycle of devaluation and exclusion that encourages acts of "violence enacted upon that group [to] not be taken as serious (i.e., Rape culture)" (Gray et al., 2017). In this case, it appears that the wide range of comments regarding Pokimane's body and what users would like to do to it have become par for the course, not seen as a 'serious' issue or potential threat of violence, inconsequential enough, in fact, to not even be moderated. However, this lack of action appears to be intentional. Pokimane, in her episode of the docuseries *Streaming IRL* stated that the best way to handle creepy or nasty messages is by ignoring them, as the users who post such messages are "irrelevant" because "what they say doesn't matter" (Clayon, 2019). Given the difficulty of reading chat, due to the speed at which it is moving, along with her more general approach to interacting with viewers, which does not involve significant engagement with her chat, it is unsurprising that Pokimane does not challenge such behavior, although her choice not to moderate it is unfortunate, given its toxic impact on other users participating in her chat. In other words, although Pokimane may claim that such messages do not matter, these messages are still read by other users in chat and therefore play a role in the shaping of her community, in this case causing them to question whether her chat is even moderated, as seen in example 4.2.

However, Pokimane's choice to ignore such users in her chat stands in contrast to her behavior surrounding other issues. As one of the most well-known women streamers, Pokimane is under constant scrutiny, and she has shown a willingness to fight battles, such as when she livestreamed without makeup on, which subsequently resulted in significant discourse surrounding gender roles, makeup as a form of deception, and beauty standards (Hale, 2018); when she livestreamed with US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to encourage people to vote (Anys, 2020b); and, most recently when she capped all donations made to her channel at $5, calling anything more than that 'unnecessary' (Anys, 2020a). Yet, she has been passive when it comes to comments in her own chat. This choice could be indicative of a belief that such behavior is simply 'par for the course;' Pokimane may question the importance of stringent chat moderation or the severity of the toxicity in her chat. Conversely, she may have simply accepted that the style of toxicity seen in the examples in this chapter are part of the experience of being a woman streamer on Twitch.

However, although Pokimane does not address toxicity in her chat, she does occasionally respond to toxic donation messages. While she has managed to ignore chat messages like those in example 4.4, it is more difficult to avoid monetary donation messages,[27] which are read aloud by a text-to-speech program her community calls Jarvis. In example 4.5, she succinctly responds to a lewd monetary donation message by yet another user discussing masturbating to Pokimane's livestream.

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[27] Donation messages accompany monetary donations to a streamer. In Pokimane's case, she has chosen to have messages accompanying donations exceeding $2 appear briefly as a visual alert on screen accompanied by a text-to-speech program that reads the message aloud to Pokimane and her viewers. See chapter two for additional information on donation messages.

Example 4.5

Stream 1 Monetary Donation Message and Response

1	(0:44:30) thebather:	I can promise you that 50% of your viewers are just
2		wanking off to you lmao, me too
3	(0:44:35) Pokimane:	I could- I mean actually, you're not? You're donating, but
4		you know like whatever. The fucking weird shit.
5		((laughs)) Dude if somebody is wanking off to a girl being
6		really pissed off at a video game then like you're the weird
7		one ((points at the camera)) not me for streaming myself
8		playing video games.

Unlike messages in chat, which can easily be disregarded, monetary donation messages briefly monopolize her viewers' attention because they are read aloud and are therefore difficult to completely ignore. thebather donated $2 to tell Pokimane that much of her audience masturbates to her livestreams, and they include themselves in that statement. References to masturbation, as well as discussion of what users would like to do sexually to Pokimane, are most likely the product of feelings of entitlement. Hayes and Dragiewicz (2018), in their discussion of dick pics – unsolicited pictures men send of their genitalia to others online, theorize that two forms of entitlement might contribute to a variety of abusive and harassing behaviors. Sexual entitlement – the belief that one is entitled to sex – and aggrieved entitlement – the resentment and antagonism felt when one is "deprived of patriarchal privileges they feel they deserve" (Hayes & Dragiewicz, 2018, p. 115) – are the product of power imbalances and can result in behaviors intended

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to 'right' said imbalances, including aggression and violence towards the supposed 'offender' in an attempt to regain control. In this case, users in examples 4.4 and 4.5 may be participating in such discussions as a response to Pokimane's elevated position in a male-dominated industry. By describing sexual acts they would like to engage in with Pokimane, users may be attempting to assert control over a situation in which they are relatively anonymous viewers in an audience of thousands. Through these utterances, users are divesting Pokimane of her power as a streamer through their positioning of her within nonconsensual, graphic sexual acts in which they maintain control.

Pokimane responds to this entitlement first, in line 1, by asserting that the user is not, in fact, masturbating at the time they sent the donation. Pokimane appears to recognize that claims like thebather's may not be truthful, and, while there is no evidence that she recognizes such statements as power grabs, Pokimane effectively regulates the behavior by labeling it 'fucking weird shit' in line 4. She simultaneously shows that she is unconcerned by such claims in lines 3-4 with the phrase 'but you know like whatever,' signaling that, while she believes thebather is lying, her choice to call them out on this fact should not be perceived as an emotional response, which would only further provoke this and other likeminded viewers. In fact, it is crucial that Pokimane does not appear bothered by such comments, as Lyons (2019) argues that trolling behavior, like thebather's donation message, "does not seem to serve any other purpose but to cause fear and disgust, and provoke a reaction from the victim, which the troll can then enjoy" (p. 168). Thus, although Pokimane may feel obligated to respond in some manner to this

monetary donation message, she must carefully craft her response to avoid further trolling behavior.

In lines 5-8, Pokimane further admonishes thebather by calling them 'weird' (line 6) while pointing at the camera. Through this utterance, Pokimane succinctly criticizes anyone using women streamers as masturbatory fodder. She places the onus on users who sexualize 'a girl being really pissed off at a video game' (lines 5-6) to change their behavior, freeing herself and by association other women streamers playing video games from responsibility for such behavior. This statement can be read as a response to the labeling of women streamers as 'Twitch thots' or 'titty streamers,' which positions women streamers as sexualized objects and their concerns and reports of violence as invalid or inevitable products of their 'sinful' performances. In rejecting responsibility for users sexualizing her livestreams, Pokimane is speaking to the much broader issue of the treatment of women streamers on the platform, signaling that her behavior and that of other women gamers is not the problem here; rather, it is the behavior of users such as thebather that should be subjected to scrutiny.

Thus, although Pokimane chooses to largely ignore and not overtly moderate sexualizing and objectifying utterances in her chat, she clearly does not approve of such behavior and is willing to address it when necessary. She claims in her docuseries episode that dealing with "creepy and nasty messages" is "part of the job" (Clayon, 2019) but does not appear to consider whether it *should* be or what could be done to make her livestreams less toxic, if not for herself than for her viewers participating in her chat, signaling a level of acceptance not uncommon in this industry.

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Harassment

The third most popular analytic code encompasses generally harassing utterances. Harassment is quite common on Twitch and is often used as an umbrella term to describe toxic behavior. However, within this project, the analytic code *harass* was applied to utterances that berate, rebuke, or inappropriately criticize Pokimane, her viewers, and/or her community as a whole. While harassment would typically extend to sexualizing comments as well, in this instance, such utterances have been coded separately. Largely, harassment in Pokimane's livestreams is centered on her gameplay, although, in the second livestream, Pokimane was also harassed for the quality of her camera and microphone (coded *tech*, $N = 19$). Example 4.6 provides samples of utterances coded *harass* in both streams.

Example 4.6

Stream 1 Chat

1 (01:03:04) blu4u: @pokimane u are the only who hasnt beat this poki, me

2   and all my friends did and all the streamers i watched beat

3   this, i think its about time you give up 🫠

4 […]

5 (01:40:38) BroBro: THAT KID ON HE SLIDE HAS A BRIGHTER FUTURE

6   THAN U DO

7 […]

8 (01:44:45) NinjaHype: I hate you white people suck

9 […]

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10 (01:57:41) aiota: this strat is for gamers only 🐸 this strat is for gamers only

11   🐸this strat is for gamers only 🐸

12 […]

13 (02:52:08) destiny95:   11.6k people watching you suck lol

14 […]

15 (04:10:46) Troyboy: bye stupid poopy head

Stream 2 Chat

16 (02:48:29) RonaldW: SHES SO BAD OMG

17 […]

18 (02:57:38) pANDA: @pokimane are you literally autismo?

19 […]

20 (03:18:04) Viscosity: it's because you have no skill 🐸

21 […]

22 (03:25:05) Navigate8:   I don't want to see your face, show game

23 […]

24 (03:42:31) canaries: guys i think poki is actually 🐸

25 […]

26 (05:06:42) MINTS: are u retarded 🧑

The utterances in example 4.6 offer a glimpse of the types of harassment occurring in

Pokimane's chat. There are numerous comments regarding her skill (or lack thereof) as a

gamer. As a woman streamer on Twitch, Pokimane inevitably faces skepticism regarding

her positioning as a gamer, as she does not fit the gamer stereotype and therefore must

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consistently prove herself in order to maintain the title of *gamer.* Although she has shown

her aptitude in numerous gaming competitions, Pokimane regularly faces criticism for her

gameplay. In lines 10-11, aiota comments that the 'strat' (strategy) Pokimane is using is

'for gamers only,' which implies that Pokimane is not a gamer, despite the amount of

time she spends playing video games. For aiota and other likeminded individuals, being a

gamer may have less to do with the amount of time spent gaming and more to do with

Pokimane's inability to perform the 'hardcore gamer stereotype' to their level of

satisfaction. Whether she is not playing the 'right' type of games (Paaßen et al., 2017) or

she simply does not symbolize the superiority, masculinity, and authenticity that her

viewers associate with hardcore gamers (Kubik, 2012), Pokimane does not meet these

viewers' expectations for what a gamer should be and therefore faces ridicule for

'sucking' (line 13), being 'bad' (line 16), and having 'no skill' (line 20).

In addition to the gameplay-related comments, there are several comments

expressing general dislike for Pokimane, including, in line 8, a comment about hating

Pokimane, and, in line 15, a user resorting to juvenile name-calling. NinjaHype's

comment in line 8 also includes "white people suck," which in itself is an intriguing

comment, as Pokimane does not identify as white (she is Moroccan) and is, in fact, often

mislabeled as "Asian." Because Pokimane may pass for white and is socially privileged,

however, she receives these comments and broader race-related comments semi-regularly

in her chat. The extent of race-related discourse in her chat, however, cannot be fully

known, as AutoMod, even at level 1, should be filtering discriminatory messages.[28] There

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[28] AutoMod's discrimination category is broadly construed as being based on "[r]ace, religion, gender, etc. Hate speech falls under this category" (Twitch, 2020c).

are also three examples of ableist language in lines 18, 24, and 26. While the comments

in lines 18 and 26 are straightforward to interpret – both comments reflecting an ableist

mindset, with pANDA's use of 'autismo' appearing to be a play on 'autistic' and MINTS

directly asking Pokimane if she is retarded, canaries' comment requires the reader to be

familiar with the use and meaning of common Twitch emotes in order to understand what

is being communicated. In line 24, canaries uses the pepega emote (), stating "guys i

think poki is actually [pepega]." The word *pepega* and its accompanying emote are

commonly used on Twitch. The emote is a warped version of Pepe the Frog, a meme that

is quite popular on Twitch and has resulted in the creation of numerous emotes, despite

the meme's appropriation by the alt-right movement in the United States and its

association with white supremacy (C. W. Anderson & Revers, 2018).[29] Switzer (2019)

argues that *pepega* is derogatory and is used as a replacement for *retarded*. "Pepega is

often spammed in chat when a streamer does something foolish or embarrassing, like

missing an easy kill or dying. It's a favorite of trolls and streamers with historically toxic

chats" (Switzer, 2019). The word *pepega* or its accompanying emote are used eight times

in the first stream, which is not frequent but is worth considering given that such

language is not regulated in Pokimane's chat. Furthermore, Pokimane herself uses

pepega, stating "I feel like so pepega right now" approximately 2.5 hours into the first

stream. Pokimane's personal use of *pepega* signals its acceptability in her community. At

the same time, Pokimane's acceptance of the term should not necessarily be equated with

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[29] Although news media covered the connection between Pepe the Frog and the alt-right movement, it does
not appear that Twitch users have been impacted by this association, as many users continue to use emotes
depicting the character. It is not clear though whether this is due to ignorance or indifference.

its potential toxicity. Although Pokimane may use the term and allow it to be used by participants in her chat, it may still have toxic effects on viewers who recognize it as a pejorative.

White Knights

Equally diverse as the types of harassment present in Pokimane's chat are the responses to said harassment. Although many users ignore the comments or simply acknowledge them as toxic, some choose to respond to this type of behavior aggressively. While some of these responses may take the form of calls for moderation (see the following chapters), there is a select group of users, known as *white knights*, who have taken it upon themselves to defend women streamers from toxic behavior. In the context of face-to-face interactions, Leone et al. (2020) position white knight behavior as a product of benevolent sexism – "subjectively positive attitudes and chivalry toward women who are seen as sexually pure" (p. 705). White knights idealize women who conform to traditional gender roles, yet simultaneously see such women as "weak and incompetent" (p. 708) and therefore in need of protection. In the context of Twitch, white knights position themselves as defenders of select women streamers, challenging anyone who criticizes or disrespects the streamer they are protecting. Unfortunately, this behavior is often tied to an expectation that such chivalry will result in a closer personal and/or sexual relationship with the streamer (much as a 'damsel in distress' is expected to reward the knight who saved her from the dragon in fairytales). Furthermore, such behavior denies women streamers' ability to defend themselves, reinforcing the stereotype that women are weak and therefore need to be defended. In the first stream,

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white knights ($N = 64$) are active both in monetary donation messages and in chat. One such white knight donated \$2 to share the following message with Pokimane and her chat.

Example 4.7

Stream 1 Donation and Response

1	(01:46:09) LinkChibi:	poki smile your face is prettier when you smill ignore all
2		the mean donos
3	(01:46:15) Pokimane:	Listen, everybody's prettier when they're smiling but
4		sometimes you want to be a freakin gamer and in those
5		moments you can't always be smiling. Sometimes things
6		are difficult. Sometimes you don't always get what you
7		want. Sometimes you're playing a game and chat's
8		cyberbullying you and it's hard

LinkChibi's donation message is a clear example of the white knight phenomenon, as it is simultaneously protective and sexist. While telling Pokimane to 'ignore all the mean donos' (donations) may seem like a kind and supportive message, LinkChibi's statement regarding Pokimane looking prettier if she smiles is inherently sexist. The two statements together speak to LinkChibi's desire to see Pokimane smile through a barrage of toxic behavior, passively accepting that such behavior is normal and not a direct consequence of sexism on Twitch. Thus, while LinkChibi's donation message may appear at first glance to be honorable, it is, in fact, yet another symptom of a dysfunctional system – one that expects streamers to endure behavior that in another job would be considered

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workplace violence. Pokimane rejects LinkChibi's call to smile for these reasons, stating

that 'it's hard' to smile when chat is 'cyberbullying' her. Furthermore, Pokimane

positions smiling at odds with being a 'freakin gamer,' again speaking to the male gamer

stereotype. Since comments about needing to smile are almost exclusively reserved for

women, it is unlikely than LinkChibi would ask a male gamer to smile (or would use the

term 'prettier' given its connection to femininity).

Mingled with toxic messages (via monetary donation messages and in chat) are

other white knights walking a fine line between poor attempts at protecting Pokimane and

outright sexism. In example 4.8, three users sent donation messages in a short span of

time, two acting as white knights and a third responding negatively to this behavior.

Included in example 4.8 as well are chat messages responding to the white knights.

Example 4.8

Stream 1 Donation Messages

1	(02:18:30) OneGuy:	Imane, let me put these trolls back in their place. There
2		will be a jump scare at the bell tower. When you see a
3		thumbs-up sticking out of a window, get ready to take you
4		headphones off. I want you to win, sweetie.
5	(02:20:45) Stools:	The last donator juust ruined one of the best parts of the
6		game for you. Unbelievable.
7	(02:21:54) CptnCck:	Imane, it's me, the captain of your queensguard. Don't
8		listen to these losers, you are perfect. I will donate $100
9		but you don't have to reset. :) You're welcome, sweetie, let

| 10 | | me know when we can go on that date. I can donate more |
| 11 | | if I need to. |

Stream 1 Chat

12	(02:18:51) BARD:	wtf kinda white knight shit was that
13	[…]	
14	(02:18:56) nateymatey:	what the actual fuck are these white knights
15	[…]	
16	(02:19:08) Diglett:	OBSESSIVE KNIGHT
17	[…]	
18	(02:19:24) MooMoo:	White knight tard

OneGuy starts off this exchange by warning Pokimane about an upcoming jump scare in the game, attempting to 'save' her from the trolls mocking her gameplay. Although successful gaming streamers make their livings off these types of reactions when playing games,[30] OneGuy appears to be concerned that the jump scare would genuinely frighten Pokimane and therefore wants to prevent her from experiencing that, even though such a reaction is a regular part of the streaming experience. This unnecessary 'help' constructs Pokimane as weak and denies her credibility as a streamer and a gamer. OneGuy's comment can therefore be read as condescending rather than compassionate, functioning more to advertise OneGuy's self-assumed role as Pokimane's protector than to aid Pokimane in any meaningful way.

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[30] The bigger the reaction, the better, within the limits of what passes as authentic. It is crucial the streamers' reactions appear to be authentic, or they risk being labeled as fake, which damages their relationship with viewers.

Stools, in lines 5-6, recognizes the negative effects of OneGuy's comment, stating that OneGuy 'ruined one of the best parts of the game' for Pokimane. Stools, unlike OneGuy, wants Pokimane to fully experience the game and appears to trust that she would be able to handle the jump scare (again, because she is an experienced gamer who has chosen to stream this game). This donation message casts OneGuy's comment in stark relief, underscoring its unwanted and unnecessary nature and the potential harm it is causing to Pokimane's stream (because she will not be able to react authentically when she reaches that part of the game) and to her viewers' experience watching her (because they too have had the game spoiled for them and/or have been denied the experience of watching Pokimane play through that part of the game). In lines 12-18, several members in Pokimane's chat are similarly disgruntled by OneGuy's donation message. The emote used in lines 12 and 16 () is called 'weirdchamp' and is used to express disappointment. Like Stools in lines 5-6, these users in lines 12 and 16 appear to be frustrated by white knights like OneGuy who provide unnecessary help and subsequently ruin the viewing experience for others. Their reactions underscore the potentially toxic nature of white knight behavior, as well as Pokimane's community's low tolerance for such behavior, even when she chooses to ignore it. Thus, although Pokimane may not enforce strict policies in her chat, her viewers are clearly influenced by larger trends and ideologies that inhabit the platform and are willing to participate in moderating behaviors when their viewing experience is negatively impacted. It is unclear though, given the size of her chat and the rate and which messages appear, whether such moderation has any impact. If anything, it is likely that a monetary donation message such as Stool's will

carry greater significance than regular chat messages, as donations messages are read

aloud and therefore are heard by all viewers, including those who are not participating in

Pokimane's chat.

In lines 7-11 of example 4.8, another donator appears to follow up on the white

knight behavior, although it is unclear whether CptnCck is parodying white knight

behavior or is genuinely participating in it. In line 7, CptnCck calls themselves 'captain

of your queensguard,' signaling their desire and willingness to defend Pokimane, their

queen. Like other white knights, this user positions those who speak negatively of

Pokimane as 'losers' and Pokimane as 'perfect.' Such behavior appears to be

commonplace for white knights. CptnCck then offers to donate $100 to Pokimane (they

only donated $2 to send this message). The remark about not having to reset is a

reference to Pokimane's earlier statement that she would reset her game if someone

donated $100. Offering to donate that money without the conditions set forth by

Pokimane, particularly when the statement is followed by 'You're welcome' does not

read as chivalrous though; rather, it again positions Pokimane as is need of a rescuer,

denying her agency to set the terms for donations and assuming that she should be

grateful for this behavior. The final part of the donation message solidifies CptnCck's

positioning as a white knight, as they imply that Pokimane has agreed to go on a date

with them, phrasing it as 'let me know *when*' rather than 'let me know *if*,' either of which

would be inappropriate given the context (a streamer and a viewer during a livestream),

and closing by stating that they are willing to donate additional money if necessary. The

final lines of CptnCck's donation message read vaguely like a solicitation for sexual

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services and shows their expectations regarding the donation, its purpose, and the

supposed relationship between a streamer and a white knight/'captain of your

queensguard.' The message, which could be read as having a friendly tone, is in fact

somewhat predatory, arguing that Pokimane should be grateful for CptnCck's unsolicited

help and should reward them with a date; furthermore, it positions Pokimane as bartering

her body for 'protection'/donations. Such discourse underscores the parasocial

relationship CptnCck and other white knights have formed with Pokimane. Parasocial

relationships, which develop between a media user and a mediated performer (Dibble et

al., 2016) and therefore are largely one-sided, allow white knights to position their

behavior as "intimate reciprocal social interaction, despite knowing that it is only an

illusion" (Dibble et al., 2016, p. 23). CptnCck's reference to a date, along with OneGuy's

user of 'sweetie,' underscore the illusion of an intimate personal relationship with

Pokimane, even though she is most likely unaware of these users.

      CptnCck's message is the epitome of white knight behavior, exhibiting an

elevation of the streamer (a queen, perfect, etc.), rescuer/protector behavior, and an

expectation for a reward (typically personal/sexual in nature).[31] While white knights have

not been given much scholarly attention yet, they appear to be attracted to women

streamers, and popular streamers like Pokimane are easy targets due to their visibility and

the ability for white knights to act without fear of retribution. Pokimane's lack of

moderation and her general acceptance of a wide range of problematic behavior – she

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[31] Although some white knights offer to make large monetary donations to streamers, it is unlikely that Pokimane would see that as a reason to tolerate their behavior, as she has recently capped viewers' donations (Anys, 2020a). Other streamers, though, particularly smaller streamers, may be motivated to tolerate white knight behavior in exchange for donations.

even has a white knight emote (), which could be perceived as her encouraging such

behavior – allow white knights to flourish in her community.

Concluding Thoughts

As one of the most popular streamers on Twitch, Pokimane has a thriving

community, numerous sponsors, a well-established personal brand, and diverse sources

of income. Unfortunately, she also faces consistent toxic behavior from her viewers, as

the size of her audience along with her lack of strict moderation allows users to act and

speak freely without fear of consequences (such as time-outs or temporary/permanent

bans). Toxicity in the context of two of Pokimane's livestreams predominantly takes the

form of spam, sexualizing/objectifying comments, and general harassment, all common

forms of toxic behavior experienced by women streamers. While Pokimane is most likely

using AutoMod, which filters some of the more inappropriate and undesirable messages,

it does not appear to be set at one of the higher levels and has allowed a significant

number of toxic utterances to be posted.[32] Furthermore, there is little evidence of overt

moderation (discussed in greater detail in the following chapters) and Pokimane does not

regularly interact with users in her chat. Members in her chat posted about feeling

ignored by Pokimane and questioned whether there were any moderators present. This

led to increasing online disinhibition and the likelihood of toxic behavior as a result. Due

to her popularity and visibility as a streamer, bots were present in her chat, endlessly

spamming messages. However, more sinister than spam were the sexualizing and

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[32] It is also possible that Pokimane's moderators are allowing such messages to be posted or that AutoMod has been turned off. Given users' behavior though, it seems more likely that AutoMod is being used at a lower setting.

generally perverse comments regarding Pokimane's body and what users would like to do with it. General harassment was also prevalent and took many forms, largely functioning to criticize or call into question Pokimane's competence as a gamer and streamer. Pokimane was further plagued by white knights who operationalized their benevolent sexism through attempts to 'protect' Pokimane in exchange for increased intimacy with her. White knights are a complex form of toxicity who may at first glance appear to be helpful but who ultimately damage the streamer's credibility and relationship with their audience. Thus, although there are many benefits to being a popular streamer, they are countered by an increase in toxic behavior that has the potential to damage a streamer's relationship with her community, negatively impact the viewing experience, and potentially adjust viewers' expectations regarding acceptable behavior in Pokimane's livestreams. Such expectations will inevitably impact user behavior in other livestreams, meaning that Pokimane's lax approach could have a far-reaching impact on the platform, particularly for other women streamers, a point that will be considered in greater detail in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

'BREAKING NEWS: STREAMERS DON'T WANNA DO THE HORIZONTAL

TANGO WITH YOU': CREATIVE RESPONSES TO TOXICITY

This dissertation seeks not only to expose the types and levels of toxicity present in the livestreams being examined but also to explore streamers' methods of responding to toxicity. The previous chapter showed how popularity can lead to an unmanageable viewer base. Because she averages over 20,000 viewers per stream, Pokimane struggles to moderate her chat, leading to frequent spamming of messages, not to mention the more deliberate types of toxicity that target Pokimane specifically, such as the inappropriate donation messages and lewd utterances posted in her chat. Pokimane's livestreams therefore underscore the potential benefits of a smaller viewer base. Yet, as this chapter will show, the size of the viewer base is not the only factor impacting toxicity. An examination of PaladinAmber's livestreams and chat reveals that toxicity is still an issue for her. Her methods of responding to this toxicity, however, are what underscore the need for further analysis.

In July 2019, popular online media outlet *Polygon* published an article titled "Twitch Streamer Shuts down Trolls and Sets Boundaries in the Best Way." This piece explores a Twitch streamer's creative response to toxic comments in her chat. Known as PaladinAmber, Amber Wadham uses multiple cameras and ingenious overlays to parody breaking news segments, in which she calls out viewers who post toxic comments in her chat. Through these segments, Wadham offers an alternative method for dealing with toxicity and redirects the spotlight to herself (instead of the user being toxic), boosting

her popularity and inspiring viral responses to clips of her streams posted on other platforms.

This chapter considers how PaladinAmber's creative responses to toxicity shape viewers' experiences of her livestreams, the level of toxicity in her chat, and the larger conversation regarding toxicity on Twitch. In particular, this chapter contemplates the benefits and consequences of Wadham's unique methods for dealing with toxicity. While these methods have benefited her popularity and success as a streamer, these segments also thwart a cardinal internet rule – 'don't feed the trolls.' By calling out individuals who engage in toxic behavior, Wadham may in some ways encourage them to keep engaging in that behavior, as many internet trolls do what they do because they relish the responses (Buckels et al., 2014). This chapter explores this hypothesis, considering whether PaladinAmber's methods of moderation, while effective in calling attention to the issue of toxicity on Twitch as the chapter will show, may at the same time encourage some users to act in toxic ways in an effort to be noticed or called out by Wadham.

Who is PaladinAmber?

Amber Wadham is a white Australian streamer who created her Twitch channel in August 2017. At the time of data collection, she was 23 years old and based in Adelaide, Australia. She typically streams four days a week and averages around 450 viewers. Due to the media coverage surrounding her channel during the data collection period, she was highly ranked on TwitchTracker[33] at 870, putting her in the top 0.05% of Twitch
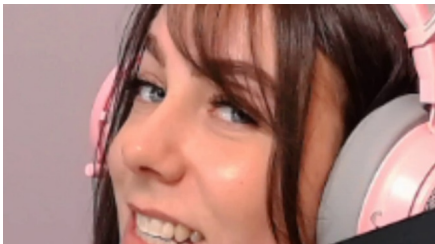
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[33] "Algorithmic rank assigned to the most popular streamers. Based on avg. viewers, followers, views and stream time for the last 30 days" (TwitchTracker, 2020).

streamers who had streamed in the last 30 days at the time. She typically streams Just

Chatting and the games *Rainbow Six Siege* and *Apex Legends*.

Wadham cycles through cameras and diverse overlays to create unique effects on

her streams, as seen in Figure 5.1. For example, PaladinAmber's Just Chatting overlay,

which is modeled after an early version of the Windows operating system, has been

adapted by Wadham to creatively show her video feed (left), her chat (right), and the

amount of donations she has received (bottom). As the title of the overlay implies,

Wadham uses this overlay when she is "Just Chatting" with her viewers, often at the

beginning of her streams and when she takes breaks from gaming. PaladinAmber's

overlays provide an additional layer of entertainment, and her diverse camera angles

punctuate her points, sometimes quite literally (see example 5.1), keeping her audience

engaged in her content, regardless of whether she is playing games or, as the next section

discusses, crucifying viewers for disobeying her rules.

Figure 5.1

Six Examples of PaladinAmber's Camera Angles and Overlays

Side-Facing Distance Camera (SFDC)	Breaking News Overlay (BNO)
Just Chatting Overlay (JCO)	Gaming Overlay (GO)
Front-Facing Up Close Camera (FFUCC)	Side-Facing Up Close Camera (SFUCC)

Breaking News: Combining Moderation and Entertainment

PaladinAmber's commitment to challenging toxicity in her chat is underscored

through the many prevention and resistance strategies she utilizes while streaming,

including the use of active moderators, explicit rules, and chat commands (see chapter six for more on these strategies). Wadham takes these methods a step further, though, by engaging in public moderation, where she confronts users who have posted something toxic in her chat. These public acts of moderation often take the form of breaking news segments, which are modeled after the breaking news segments seen on mainstream television news channels, and feature a custom overlay, seen in Figure 5.1. This overlay has an introductory screen with an animated logo and includes scrolling text along the bottom of the screen, which reads "Breaking news, garbage goblin has something very important to say; says 'listen, come here listen' before eating a handful of garbage and running off." The 'garbage goblin' reference is part of the persona Wadham has developed, in which she is responsible for 'taking out the trash,' with 'trash' in this case referring to the viewers in her chat who are acting toxically. For example, when a user indicated they wanted to see a breaking news segment, PaladinAmber responded "Oh you missed it. We took out the trash like an hour ago. Two- two trash people." By constructing users who act toxically as 'trash people,' Wadham underscores her position on users who behave toxically – they are equivalent to garbage that must be taken to the dumpster before they start stinking. PaladinAmber and her channel moderators do not hesitate to 'take out the trash' – temporarily or permanently banning users who do not abide by her rules, showing Wadham's willingness not only to sanction inappropriate behavior but also to sacrifice the size of her viewer base if it means protecting her community and herself from toxicity.

Positioning herself as a 'garbage goblin' contrasts with the seriousness of the segments themselves, in which Wadham often speaks directly to a viewer who has misbehaved, chastising them for their behavior in her chat. Example 5.1 models Wadham's breaking news segments. Through this example, one can see not only the sequencing of events in these segments (welcome, discussion of 'news,' and sign-off) but also how PaladinAmber incorporates the overlays and camera angles to create an entertaining yet effective display of public moderation. In example 5.1, Wadham responds to a user who made a rude comment about her use of multiple cameras, which she reads aloud in lines 1-2. In this example, PaladinAmber (PA) is playing a game with fellow streamer Maz (M), who expresses his appreciation for these segments as Wadham prepares to launch into her well-structured section.

Example 5.1

Stream 1

1	(02:55:44) PA:	((in gaming overlay)) ((reads utterance in chat)) "You must feel
2		like you're special and unique with those extra cameras." Okay.
3	(02:55:48) M:	Aww.
4	(02:55:49) PA:	Alright, it's okay, are you ready? This is what we all come here
5		for. Are you ready? ((switches to BNO))
6	(02:55:53) M:	My favorite bit.
7	(02:55:54) PA:	((whispered)) It's the bit. It's the bit.
8	(02:55:57) PA:	Good afternoon and welcome in, Calm, that's right, listen that-
9		((switches to FFUCC)) This just in. ((switches to SFUCC)) Stop

10	being a ((switches back to FFUCC)) C U N Tuesday. ((switches
11	back to BNO)) Umm, listen, I'm quirky as fuck ((switches to
12	FFUCC)) without the camera angles, ((switches to SFUCC)) it's
13	pretty dang clear, ((switches back to FFUCC)) there just a little bit
14	mwah quality chef's-kiss production. ((switches to BNO)) So if
15	you don't like it, and you want to watch standard gameplay,
16	((switches to FFUCC)) do your- do- ((switches to SFUCC)) do
17	yourself a favor. ((switches to SFDC)) Stop making it unpleasant
18	((switches to SFUCC)) for everyone else. ((switches to FFUCC))
19	Go. Be free, my friend. Go see- ((switches to BNO)) go and see all
20	of the other content creators out there. There's plenty to choose
21	from. ((switches to FFUCC)) Just don't come back ((switches to
22	SFUCC)) here anymore. ((switches to BNO)) Alright, guys, back
23	to you. ((switches back to GO))

PaladinAmber habitually reads posts in her chat aloud as a way of showing her engagement with her viewers. This enables her to dialogue with viewers seamlessly while also allowing viewers who are not participating in her chat to understand the context of what she is saying. In lines 1-2, PaladinAmber reads AnythingButCalm's (whom she calls "Calm" in the example) message aloud. In lines 2-7, upon recognizing that the message is ill-mannered, Wadham appears to prepare herself mentally for the segment, and Maz remarks "My favorite bit" in line 6, leading Wadham to whisper-chant "It's the bit." By calling the segment a 'bit,' a reference to a section of a stand-up comedian's

routine, both Maz and Wadham acknowledge the ways in which these moments function as subversive humor, directing attention to the hegemonic assumptions at play when users act toxically and transforming such assumptions into a source of laughter (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017, p. 344). The subversive humor also allows PaladinAmber to construct public acts of moderation like her breaking news segments as entertainment on her channel, embedding such moments into her character as a streamer and therefore into her audience's expectations for her performances on stream. This is an important point that will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

The breaking news segment itself (seen in lines 8-23) follows a strict sequence mirroring mainstream television breaking news segments: welcome (lines 8-9), discussion of 'news' (lines 9-22) and sign-off (lines 22-23). In lines 8-9, Wadham greets AnythingButCalm, the user who posted the toxic comment, and welcomes them to her news segment. She then uses the standard breaking news phrase "this just in" (seen also in the scrolling text bar in at the bottom of the breaking news overlay) before she tells the user to stop acting like a "C U N Tuesday" in line 10. This phrase has comedic value, as Wadham begins to spell out the word *cunt* but turns the last letter into a perfectly acceptable word, subverting the viewer's expectations while simultaneously critiquing AnythingButCalm's behavior. Her refusal to say *cunt* is offset by her use of *fuck* in line 11, when she describes herself as "quirky as fuck." She embraces the "special" and "unique" components of the user's claim while arguing that it is not the cameras that make her unique but her very character itself. The gentle balance she strikes, both in her use and non-use of vulgarity and in her rejection of AnythingButCalm's statement, works

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to construct PaladinAmber as someone who is confident in her role as a streamer, invested in her own well-being and that of her viewers, and capable of responding to viewers who misbehave in ways that allow her to entertain her viewers while reinforcing the norms and expectations of her community.

What is particularly noteworthy about these breaking news segments is Wadham's use of the camera angles to emphasize her discourse. By returning to the breaking news overlay in line 14, Wadham shows that she is finished addressing her first point – don't say things like that; I'm unique without the camera angles – and is shifting into her next point – what the user can do now since they don't like Wadham's content. She emphasizes with overlay and camera changes that if the user wants more traditional gameplay, instead of making rude comments, they can leave. Each camera change follows a phrase, punctuating her claims and underscoring the seriousness of them. The camera changes themselves also allow the viewer to get an up-close view of Wadham's face, as two of the cameras are positioned in such a way that Wadham's head takes up most of the frame. These camera angles give the viewer the impression that Wadham is making eye contact with them. This illusion is important because, as Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) argue, a lack of eye contact contributes to toxic online disinhibition. By zooming in on her eyes while admonishing AnythingButCalm's behavior, Wadham not only encourages the viewer to pay attention to what is being said but also reduces any sense of invisibility and anonymity felt by them. Although PaladinAmber can do little more than ban AnythingButCalm, the addition of the diverse camera angles to her public act of moderation reduces the viewer's online sense of unidentifiability (Lapidot-Lefler &

Barak, 2012), which is turn would hopefully reduce the likelihood of the user re-offending.

In lines 20-23, PaladinAmber closes the segment by telling AnythingButCalm not to return to her channel. By stating "Just don't come back here anymore," Wadham implies that the user is permanently banned from her channel, although her statement could also potentially equate to "you're not welcome here." Wadham then ends the segment by returning to the breaking news overlay one last time to sign off. "Alright, guys, back to you" indicates that the segment is over and Wadham is returning to what she was doing before the 'interruption,' much as news anchors do when switching between anchors or segments. This is solidified by her return to the gaming overlay, at which point Maz and Wadham continue playing their game.

Through multiple camera angles, overlays, and subversive humor, PaladinAmber's breaking news segments function simultaneously as entertainment and resistance. She creates a sequence in which she addresses what has been said, responds to the utterance and the user who posted it, and reprimands the user by delivering a punishment. These segments can therefore be understood as critical witnessing (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017), in that they capture the offence (the toxic utterance) and allow the audience to bear witness to Wadham's interpretation and response to the offence. The breaking news segments gain "validity by providing testimony and evidence that allows the audience to bear witness to both OSH [online sexual harassments] defined and interpreted from a woman's perspective and the pervasiveness of this harassment" (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017, p. 342). That PaladinAmber has been able to dedicate an entire

segment of her livestreams to responding to toxicity speaks not only to the pervasiveness of this behavior but also to how eager viewers are to witness her responses to such behavior.

Some of PaladinAmber's viewers, however, are more than just witnesses to her breaking news segments, as a streamer's community must be receptive to a streamer's methods of moderation for the moderation to be effective. Example 5.2 is an excerpt from PaladinAmber's chat around the time that AnythingButCalm posted their message (which was deleted by a moderator). This example demonstrates the impact of toxicity on PaladinAmber's viewers and how they engage in and with moderation, showing their excitement for and participation in PaladinAmber's breaking news segment and the ways in which they partake in their own discussions and resistance strategies within the context of the chat.

Example 5.2

Stream 1

1   (02:54:05) mintjulep: @AnythingButCalm I can't tell if you're awful or her

2   friend

3   […]

4   (02:55:16) mintjulep: @AnythingButCalm why don't u just leave lol u got the

5   attention you wanted

6   […]

7   (02:55:49) OVER: HELL YEAAA

8   […]

9	(02:55:54) kimbicia:	Now I want Julien to get the extra cameras I LOVE IT
10	(02:55:58) monotone:	O.o
11	[…]	
12	(02:56:06) princey:	ITs HAPPENing
13	(02:56:06) garbage:	o.O
14	(02:56:07) Schleps:	awww yeah, breaking news
15	(02:56:10) misfortune:	new 🐱 break
16	[…]	
17	(02:56:24) ToSociety:	I feel like she needs more camera angles
18	[…]	
19	(02:56:37) Bluebell:	🤦
20	(02:56:39) Xerox:	She definitely needs double the camera angles
21	(02:56:43) kimbicia:	Can someone clip this and send it to julen? I need this type of content dink style
22	(02:56:44) barfbarf:	@AnythingButCalm lmao you follow ninja
23	(02:56:45) jumpup:	@AnythingButCalm get out
24	(02:56:46) monotone:	🤦
25	(02:56:46) icecube:	🤦
26	(02:56:47) birdy:	Jerk
27	(02:56:50) OVER:	HEEELLLLL YEEESSS
28	(02:56:51) castonfire:	@PaladinAmber you are so savage I hope you never burn
29		out and continue to own gross boys forever

30   (02:56:56) monotone: get outta me chat!

31   (02:56:56) candle: 🐰🐰🐰🐰

32   […]

33   (02:56:59) wizard: @AnythingButCalm showing some serious envy

34   (02:56:59) crybaby: omg i love you so much

35   (02:57:00) princey: Actualy savage

36   […]

37   (02:57:11) grapejuice: AnythingButCalm is 🧊

There are several interesting things happening in this example. First, several users are

engaging in community moderation – enforcing the rules and norms of the community

despite the fact that they are not official moderators. In lines 1-2, 4-5, 22, 23, 26, 30, 33,

and 37, users are engaging with AnythingButCalm, voicing their disapproval of the user's

behavior and echoing PaladinAmber's command for the user to leave their community.

Community moderation, while not imbued with the same power as the official

moderation that comes from Wadham and her channel moderators, plays an important

role in resisting toxicity, as it communicates members' support for PaladinAmber and

their commitment to the community parameters she has established. It also functions as a

method of community building, as it unites members in the fight against inappropriate or

unwelcome behavior in their community. Crucially, some users in example 5.2 extend the

impact of their community moderation by tagging[34] AnythingButCalm in their utterances.

By calling out the user, these community members not only draw attention to the user

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[34] Tagging: Including @ followed by a username so that the user tagged gets notified of the utterance.

who is misbehaving, exposing the user to public scrutiny, but also confront the user directly, opening the possibility that the mentioned user might respond. One user even draws a connection between AnythingButCalm and communities known for being toxic. In line 22, user barfbarf comments that AnythingButCalm follows[35] Ninja, referring to one of the most popular Twitch streamers, well-known for having a toxic community. By connecting AnythingButCalm to Ninja, barfbarf equates AnythingButCalm's behavior with that of members of Ninja's community, which, in the context of PaladinAmber's community, is an insult because Wadham's community has constructed itself in opposition to mainstream toxic communities.

In addition to community moderation, example 5.2 also exemplifies users' excitement for the breaking news segments. In lines 7-15 and 24-27, users express their appreciation for the segment, using all-caps and the LUL emote (white man laughing) to show their level of enjoyment. User kimbicia indicates in lines 9 and 21-22 that they are enjoying the segment so much that they would like to see a similar style of content on another streamer's channel.[36] Users also praise PaladinAmber for her behavior in lines 28-29, 34, and 35. Calling her 'savage,' these users show their support for Wadham's behavior, with one user in lines 28-29 even evoking the role of gender in the breaking news segment, positioning Wadham as a powerful person capable of "owning" or dominating the "gross" men who act toxically. However, mixed into the enjoyment and

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[35] Follow: To be a regular viewer of a streamer (potentially a community member as well)

[36] PaladinAmber was 'raided' earlier in this stream by streamer jennajulien, and viewers from jennajulien (who call themselves dinks) are still participating in her livestream. A raid happens when a streamer sends their viewers to another streamer's channel (usually at the end of the first streamer's stream so that their viewers can enjoy another stream together).

praise is also some confusion, expressed as "o.O or "O.o" (meant to depict a person's eyes when they are confused) in lines 10 and 13. For users unfamiliar with PaladinAmber's streams, the breaking news segments may feel startling or strange, as Wadham abruptly shifts from game play to telling a user off for their behavior in her chat. This contrasts with many other streamers, who may ignore toxic behavior or have moderators quietly remove utterances or users when toxicity occurs. This confusion may also be potentially attributed to the ways in which these segments can be equated with shaming and shaming with mob justice. This point will be explored in further detail in the next section.

Finally, example 5.2 shows how users align themselves with Wadham and participate in her segments. In lines 17 and 20, users parallel Wadham's rejection and appropriation of AnythingButCalm's utterance. They indicate that, unlike AnythingButCalm, who criticizes Wadham's use of multiple cameras, they think that she should use more camera angles. Through these utterances, they reject AnythingButCalm's criticism of PaladinAmber and instead construct her camera angles as one of her strengths as a streamer. User kimbicia's comments in lines 9 and 21-22 also serve a similar function, as kimbicia's appreciation of the camera angles and desire to see another streamer incorporate that element into their own streaming practices can be construed as a rejection of AnythingButCalm's criticism as well.

Through their participation in the breaking news segment and their engagement with a user acting toxically, users in example 5.2 show how Wadham's public acts of moderation extend into her chat. Her community is eager to support her actions and

engage in their own acts of community moderation to not only show their support for PaladinAmber but also to underscore their commitment to the community that has gathered around her. By challenging AnythingButCalm, praising Wadham's behavior, and participating in the breaking news segment, the users present themselves as a united front that refuses to be marred by the misbehavior of one individual.

Public Moderation as Shame Justice

Because she posts clips from her streams featuring these public displays of moderation, at the time of data collection, Wadham was becoming increasingly popular. In an article discussing her antics, she explains that her purpose in engaging in public acts of moderation like the breaking news segments is to enforce boundaries that may have become blurred due to parasocial bonds established between streamers and their viewers. Wadham remarks, "What I'm trying to achieve is bringing back some boundaries and letting people have a voice of 'you don't have to share this,' or 'you shouldn't share this with people, because it's none of their business'" (Hernandez, 2019, para. 8). Wadham explains that streamers should not have to share every detail of their personal lives with viewers, and, by creating firm boundaries with her viewers, she hopes to encourage other streamers to do likewise. Boundaries (and the lack thereof) have been a consistent issue for Twitch streamers, who often struggle to separate their personal lives from their public lives as streamers. Wadham speaks both to this struggle and to the ways in viewers have come to expect complete transparency and honesty from streamers about what is happening in their lives when they are not on camera. She advocates boundary-setting as a way of reminding streamers that they are not obligated to share information about

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themselves and viewers that they are not entitled to such information. PaladinAmber

models boundary-setting in example 5.3: when a user makes an inappropriate request,

Wadham responds by temporarily banning the user in another display of public

moderation. In doing so, she establishes a clear boundary between appropriate and

inappropriate behavior, ensuring that it is obvious to the user that such questions will not

be tolerated.

Example 5.3

Stream 1

1   (02:51:49) PA: ((in GO)) ((reads utterance in chat)) "Can you show feet?" No,

2   but I definitely can show you something else. Do you want to see

3   it? It's so cool. ((switches to FFUCC)) Are you ready? ((switches

4   to SFUCC)) Are you excited? ((switches back to FFUCC)) Oh

5   my god, guys, can we get some hell yeahs in chat right now?

6   ((switches to JCO)) O:kay. It's 10 minutes of silence. Enjoy your

7   time out, alright? ((switches back to GO)) ((laughs))

The toxic utterance "Can you show feet?" connects to discourses of gender in video game

culture, in which certain elements connected to women gamers (such as feet and

bathwater, in addition to the classics like underwear) are fetishized. PaladinAmber's chat

has been consistently troubled by users asking for pictures of her feet to the point that her

chat bot,[37] when prompted by the command *!feet*, will post "Yes she HATES feet. DO

NOT ASK TO SHOW FEET! You risk being timed out and banned from the channel.

Youve been warned" in the chat. To emphasize that such questions are inappropriate,

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[37] The chat bot, known as *Nightbot*, is discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

Wadham calls out users who post these utterances in her chat. In lines 1-5 of example 5.3, she builds the anticipation by asking the user if they want to see something else instead of her feet and follows that question up with additional questions intermingled with camera and overlay changes. Although most users who frequent PaladinAmber's streams most likely know what is coming, they are encouraged to participate by Wadham, who asks them to post 'hell yeah' in the chat as she announces that the user who posted the utterance has received a temporary ban. Posting 'hell yeah' creates hype as Wadham builds anticipation for her announcement of the ban and signals her community's support for that ban. This not only builds excitement for the viewers but also shows the way in which PaladinAmber and her community co-construct boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

At the same time, making a public example out of the user who disobeyed her rules and inviting other viewers to participate in her sanctioning of this behavior could potentially be construed as shame justice – justice that is meant to enforce the norms of the community through the act of shaming an offender (Karp, 1998). Shame reinforces social disapproval, diminishing one's status in the community. While at first glance, shame justice might seem to be an effective method of discouraging toxicity, Harris and Maruna (2006) argue that "[t]o promote shame and shaming […] in the name of peace-making and violence reduction appears on the surface to be an absurdity" (p. 456). Shame is a complex emotion and has been explored extensively as a method of reducing crime (e.g., Braithwaite, 1989; Harris & Maruna, 2006; Kim & Gerber, 2012). The act of shaming can be either reintegrative or stigmatic, with the former meant to be respectful of

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the person being shamed and ending in forgiveness and reintegration, while the latter

does not respect the person being shamed and constructs that person as deviant, with no

possibility of forgiveness or reintegration (Braithwaite, 1989). As discussed above,

PaladinAmber has constructed the users who post toxic utterances in her chat as 'trash' or

'trash people.' Although, in example, 5.3, she offers the user a temporary ban, leaving the

possibility that the user may rejoin the chat (reintegrate) once the ban is over, this is in

contrast with example 5.1, where she tells the user not to return to her channel. Both the

use of permanent bans and Wadham's construction of misbehaving users as 'trash' seem

to align with stigmatic shame. Perhaps the most definitive support for this assertion is

example 5.4, in which, after dealing with a repeat offender for twenty minutes, Wadham

appears to become fed up with a user who posted a particularly rude remark.

Example 5.4

Stream 1

1	(03:14:23) PA:	((in GO)) ((reads utterance in chat)) "Can't wait till your Twitch
2		channel dies. You are unemployable because all you do is play
3		video games badly." Regret, where are y- where are you all
4		coming from? It's so cute. Okay, come're, listen. I have some news
5		for you. Um, playing video games doesn't make me as- okay,
6		Come're. ((switches to BNO)) Holy shit. Ho-ly shit. This is the
7		one, boys. This is the one. Good afternoon, and welcome into
8		PaladinAmber Network. That's right, I'm your host, PaladinAmber.
9		This just in. Did you know that playing video games and being an

10		internet personality makes me ((switches to FFUCC)) WAY more
11		((switches to SFUCC)) employable than you. ((switches back to
12		BNO)) That's right, this just in. People are now looking for outside
13		creators because unfortunately, ((switches to FFUCC)) your job?
14		((switches to SFUCC)) Probably replaceable. ((switches back to
15		BNO)) That's right. Your job's probably easily replaceable. My
16		job, however, ((switches to FFUCC)) not so ((switches to
17		SFUCC)) much, fun? ((switches back to BNO)) Um so here's the
18		thing. If you don't like the content, you can log the fuck off int- the
19		internet. You can just log right off. You don't even have-
20		((switches to FFUCC)) you don't even have to ever ((switches to
21		SFUCC)) come back on the internet ever. ((switches back to
22		BNO)) Just log right off. So, uh, listen, when you don't have a job
23		because you're a sour piece of garbage, um ((switches to FFUCC))
24		and I do ((switches to SFUCC)) because I'm killing it, ((switches
25		back to BNO)) we can have a talk and maybe I'll hire you to clean
26		my toilet, alright? Back to you guys. ((switches back to GO))
27		Hehehehe yes! ((laughs))
28	(03:15:37) M:	bitch:!
29	(03:15:38) PA:	That's it! That's the fuckin news! ((laughs))
30	(03:15:41) M:	Feels good, bitch:! ((laughs))
31	(03:15:43) PA:	Oh, shit. Oh it's good to just get that off my chest.

This is clear evidence of stigmatic shaming. In this example, Wadham constructs Regret, the user who posted the comment to which she is responding, as a 'replaceable' employee (line 14). Like in example 5.1, Wadham invites Regret to leave, reminding the user and all viewers who 'don't like the content' that they are not obligated to watch her streams or even be on the internet (lines 17-21). However, Wadham extends her criticism by calling Regret 'a sour piece of garbage' (line 23), a callback to her construction of users who act toxically as 'trash.' She closes the segment by stating that, when Regret is inevitably unemployed (because, according to her, he is 'replaceable'), she might consider hiring them to clean her toilet (lines 22-26) – a job that she clearly does not value. Through this breaking news segment, PaladinAmber lambasts Regret, constructing them as worthless, not only to her but to society more broadly. Her invitation for Regret to potentially clean her toilet underscores her disdain for this user, as the job, in her mind, would function as further punishment for the user's behavior. Through this example, Wadham makes it clear that users who do not abide by her rules carry no value for her and she is therefore uninterested in rehabilitating them. She leaves no possibility for forgiveness, as a banned user will be unable to interact with her streams, which, combined with the construction of the user as 'trash,' is emblematic of stigmatic shaming.

Stigmatic shaming is problematic because it is linked to re-offending (Harris & Maruna, 2006). By constructing Regret as deviant and providing no opportunities for future redemption, PaladinAmber may be encouraging Regret and others like them to continue acting toxically in response to her face-threatening behavior. Shame in these

instances may be working to further incite the offenders, who may feel ridiculed by Wadham's public acts of moderation and seek to discharge the negative feelings through further toxic behavior as a form of revenge (Scheff et al., 2018). This theory is supported by PaladinAmber herself, who, when asked why she was having so many issues with toxic users, replied (Stream 1, 03:48:54):

> It's the one guy. He keeps creating accounts cause he- all of his accounts are like created um like an hour after the other, which is fine. This- this one person I have no doubt is probably just somebody who is really sour about not being at the stream.

Wadham appears to understand she is being harassed by a single user[38] who has created multiple accounts so that they can continue to access her chat. Wadham refers to the user as 'sour about not being at the stream,' which seems to indicate that she is aware that this behavior stems from the user being reprimanded and most likely banned for misbehavior earlier in the stream or during one of Wadham's previous streams. Whether the original reprimand was a public act of moderation is unclear, but it appears that PaladinAmber's continued public moderation of this user is not deterring this behavior and may in fact potentially be encouraging further misbehavior.

However, although PaladinAmber's public acts of moderation may have unintended consequences, her actions should not be construed as mob justice, where a dominant group takes pleasure in the discomfort of someone labeled deviant. Instead, as Vitis and Gilmour (2017) argue, PaladinAmber's behavior "exemplifies shame being

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[38] This does not mean that all of the examples in this chapter are connected to one user. PaladinAmber is simply indicating that one user has become a repeat offender.

used as an exo-judicial punishment for invisibilised transgressions which sit outside the ambit of criminal law, deployed by those outside the dominant sphere, whose voices have been historically subordinated by the mistrust of women's harassment claims" (pp. 348-349). Wadham is well-aware of her position as a woman on a male-dominated platform. She recognizes that toxic behavior often occurs in the form of 'invisibilized transgressions' (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017, p. 349) – harmful behavior that goes unnoticed and unpunished, as Twitch offers moderation tools but does not directly moderate user behavior – and understands that her methods of managing such behavior bring crucial visibility to the injustices experienced by streamers who do not fit the gamer stereotype. Thus, although public acts of moderation may antagonize offenders and encourage them to further harass Wadham, she is willing to engage in such behavior for the sake of others who cannot or choose not to speak up so loudly. She makes this point during one of her streams when she says (Stream 1, 03:13:27):

> I'm equipped to dealing with the fuckheads. Like if I wasn't equipped to, and it was like something that was really [.] stressful for me to do, I would 100% um turn on follower only mode. You know what I mean?

Wadham explains that engaging with toxic users is not 'really stressful.' While followers-only mode has been proven to reduce toxic behavior (Twitch, 2017), Wadham indicates that she would only use it if her current methods of moderation became stressful. Thus, it appears that PaladinAmber's current methods of moderation have allowed her to deal with toxic behavior in a way that calls attention to the issue of toxicity and underscores how such behavior is unacceptable in her community.

Trolling for Entertainment

Thus far, PaladinAmber's breaking news segments and broader public acts of moderation have been examined, showing the ways in which she responds to toxic behavior, how her community reacts to these moments during her streams, and the role that shame may play in users' responses to public moderation. In addition to the repercussions of shaming that come with public acts of moderation however, one must also consider how the construction of these acts as entertainment may perhaps encourage some users to act toxically in an effort to trigger acts like Wadham's breaking news segments. To explore this possibility, this section first shows how PaladinAmber and her community have constructed these segments as entertainment and then transitions into a discussion of users who have voiced their desire to be 'roasted' by Wadham.

PaladinAmber recognizes that her public acts of moderation simultaneously function as entertainment for her community. It is clear from the examples above that there is a part of her that enjoys these segments, as she often laughs at the end of these segments and labeled them comedic 'bits' in example 5.1. In an interview with Kotaku, Wadham explains how these segments became a regular part of her streams:

> I was trying to do the news one day as a joke, and somebody just happened to say something that was so far-fetched that I couldn't not make it a headline […] And then that was it. Everyone was like 'This is what the news is for. This is the news channel I stand by.' I was like 'That's it. I've become the news lady.' (Grayson, 2019, para. 12)

Wadham constructs herself as 'the news lady' because of the publicity surrounding her news segments and the ways in which this publicity has helped popularize her channel, thus expanding her viewer base and her community. In this interview, she speaks to the sequence of events that led to the creation of the breaking news segment on her streams. She remarks that 'everyone' said that her news segments should continue to follow the above-described pattern, in which she chastises users for misbehaving in her chat, signaling the role that her viewers play in the construction of her streams. Had her viewers not supported this style of 'news,' Wadham most likely would not have continued to include such segments, as her income and success as a streamer are dependent on her viewers.

However, because these moments simultaneously function as entertainment and have been publicized so heavily, there is some concern that this publicity could attract trolls – individuals who engage in "deceptive, destructive, or disruptive [behavior …] with no apparent instrumental purpose. […] Much like the Joker [in the *Batman* comic series], trolls operate as agents of chaos on the Internet, exploiting 'hot-button issues' to make users appear overly emotional or foolish in some manner" (Buckels et al., 2014). While similar in some ways to cyberbullying, trolling is unique in that there appears to be no end goal for the behavior beyond disruption. Because Wadham's segments are dynamic, face-threatening, and entertaining, they align with the types of behavior trolls seek to incite. Thus, it would make sense that the publicity surrounding her segments could potentially encourage trolls to attempt to engage with her. Evidence of this trolling desire can be seen in example 5.5.

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Example 5.5

Stream 1

1 (00:22:09) Misery: So I have seen a lot of your fun stuff on Twitter. First

2   time viewing. Is it weird I want someone to say

3   something stupid so you can hit em with that $19.95?

4 […]

5 (03:46:46) goodygood: um hey roast me

6 […]

7 (03:47:26) rollinrollin: my first time hear I was tempted to say something

8   horrific in hopes of being the target of a tweet. but i

9   decided id rather stay and not be doooosh

Stream 2

10 (00:37:24) guardian: I came to be a fuckhead

11 […]

12 (04:28:35) spicy123:   I aspire to be roasted by amber

13 […]

14 (04:33:00) noenvy: I'm here to get roasted

The users in this example express a desire to witness and, in some cases, be the subject of Wadham's public acts of moderation. Misery in lines 1-3 indicates that they came to PaladinAmber's channel because of the publicity surrounding her breaking news segments, which Misery calls 'fun stuff.' The user then questions whether it is 'weird' to want someone to misbehave just so that Misery can witness Wadham's response.

Specifically, the user phrases it as 'hit em with that $19.95,' which is a reference to another style of public moderation that Wadham uses, in which she parodies a commercial while chastising a user for their behavior in her chat. Similarly, rollinrollin expresses this same sense of being torn between misbehaving for the sake of entertainment and behaving appropriately out of respect for PaladinAmber. Both Misery and rollinrollin's comments show how users might be tempted to post inappropriate messages in Wadham's chat simply to incite her, but, as rollinrollin points out in the second half of their utterance, doing so would make them a 'doooosh' (douche) and they would rather 'stay.' In other words, rollinrollin recognizes that, while an inappropriate comment might provide short-term satisfaction, such behavior might also result in removal from the community, thus limiting the possibility for the long-term entertainment of watching Wadham reprimand others who misbehave. rollinrollin also emphasizes that such behavior would be characteristic of a douche – a jerk or idiot, something rollinrollin clearly does not want to be characterized as. Other users in example 5.5 are less insightful. While not actually misbehaving, at least in these examples, these users indicate that they want to be the subject of Wadham's public moderation, meaning that they would first have to behave egregiously enough for her to make them the subject of one of her segments.

PaladinAmber is not unaware of this desire and addresses one of the user's comments by saying "Also spicy123, um you aspired to be roasted by me? Don't aspire to be roasted by me. You wanna know why? Those who get roasted by me are literal pieces of garbage, and you don't want that." Returning to the analogy of herself as a trash goblin

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responsible for disposing of trash people, Wadham tells spicy123 that they should not

want to be roasted by her because that would mean that they are 'literal pieces of

garbage,' i.e., not a good person. Like rollinrollin, Wadham explains that, regardless of

any short-term benefits that may come from misbehaving in her chat, users should not

seek public moderation because, according to her logic, to be the subject of public

moderation requires foul behavior and that foul behavior would make them bad people.

However, despite her censure of such behavior and her construction of users who act

toxically as 'garbage,' these prevention methods do not appear to be fully effective, as

some users in example 5.6 point out that trolling behavior has become common in her

chat due to the publicity.

Example 5.6

Stream 1

1 (00:01:51) mistermiyaki: Oh boy, who's ready for comments trying to

2   provoke Amber into responding?

3 […]

4 (00:04:24) captncrunch: I feel like people now come in here just to say the

5   things they have seen on twitter

Stream 2

6 (01:21:51) finalcountdown: I can't tell if the comments are genuine thirst or bait

7   to get the news treatment

These three users seem to recognize that PaladinAmber's public acts of moderation may

have become an incentive for trolls, who seek public and emotional responses to their

behavior. While the publicity seems to have increased interest in Wadham's streams, which will benefit Wadham as a streamer, it has also attracted the attention of trolls, who will undoubtably see Wadham's public acts of moderation as further incentive for their behavior, as the reactions will extend beyond the chat and potentially onto social media, where Wadham and others have posted clips of these segments. As mistermiyaki points out, such comments are clearly attempting to 'provoke' Wadham. According to this logic then, Wadham would be 'feeding the trolls' or 'giving them what they want' by engaging in public acts of moderation surrounding the trolls' behavior. Similarly, captncrunch connects the posting of clips of Wadham's public moderation on Twitter to the increase in trolls and trolling behavior, recognizing that the publicity surrounding PaladinAmber will inevitably draw the attention of other trolls who will watch Wadham's streams for the specific purpose of engaging in trolling behavior, although from the data collected for this project, an increase in trolling behavior cannot be confirmed and is therefore based solely on the perceptions of viewers.

Thus, it appears that both Wadham and some of her viewers are aware that public moderation is risky because it may encourage the very behavior that Wadham seeks to eliminate. Despite this risk, however, Wadham stands by her public acts of moderation. In Example 5.7, she reads and responds to a user's comment regarding her public acts of moderation, emphasizing that there is value in drawing attention to toxic behavior and making it visible beyond the platform.

Example 5.7

Stream 2

1   (01:00:02) PA: ((in GO)) ((reads utterance in chat)) "Calling out shitty behavior is

2   not stooping to their level." No, it is not. And no- don't let anyone

3   ever say- tell you that is cause listen let me tell you […] People

4   need to learn, and here's the thing, right? So many people ask me

5   this. ((reads utterance in chat)) "Don't you think it's counter-

6   productive what you do?" Absolutely not. You want to know why?

7   Cause people are going to fucking do it anyway, and I would

8   rather speak up about it and be like hey, this is really shitty and if

9   you don't stop, I'm going to literally report you.

As Wadham emphasizes in this example, people will troll or act toxically regardless of

the measures that people put into place; she recognizes that such behavior is inevitable

given the platform, users, and social climate. However, she agrees with the user that

'calling out shitty behavior' – i.e., public acts of moderation – is not 'stooping to their

level.' Although Wadham's actions could be constructed as stigmatic shaming, she

argues that it does not equate to toxic behavior, perhaps because she sees her acts of

moderation as a response to such behavior and motivated by a desire to curb or eliminate

toxicity more broadly. Although another user questions whether Wadham's public acts of

moderation are 'counterproductive,' Wadham firmly disagrees, arguing that 'speaking up

about it' and 'reporting' this behavior is productive. She addresses this point in her

interview with Grayson (2019), where she asserts that public acts of moderation may

encourage people to question their behavior and eventually change it:

> If you've ever done something stupid, and somebody said to you, 'Hey, that was
>
> really stupid,' it truly makes you question […] And whether or not they
>
> questioned it right there and then, eventually if enough people start saying, 'Hey,
>
> this behavior is really stupid; you should probably consider changing that or just
>
> logging off,' it starts to sit there with that person, and then hopefully that change
>
> comes. […] if one out of 10 people really learn that lesson of 'It's the internet, but
>
> also your actions have repercussions,' then my job is done as a comedic
>
> entertainer.

PaladinAmber seems to see public acts of moderation as productive because they may

encourage users to reflect on their behavior. Calling out toxic behavior allows users to

see that their behavior is unacceptable and gives them the opportunity to change their

behavior or at least consider the repercussions of it. Wadham recognizes that not every

user will reform their behavior in response to her actions and that such change may take

time; however, even if only 'one out of 10 people' change, Wadham argues that that

would be reward enough. By continuously addressing toxic behavior publicly, Wadham

clearly hopes that her sentiments will begin to resonate with users who may otherwise be

oblivious to or simply not care about the consequences of their behavior and the impact

that such behavior has on the communities in which they are participating. By

incorporating public moderation into her streams, Wadham seeks to change the public

sentiment on toxicity more broadly, as users will come away from her stream with an

understanding that their 'actions have repercussions,' a perspective that may not have been obvious to them before if they had only engaged with streamers and communities that ignore or encourage toxic behavior. Thus, although PaladinAmber's public acts of moderation may encourage some users to act toxically, such consequences are counterbalanced in Wadham's mind by the visibility that she brings to toxic behavior and its consequences.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter explored a streamer's creative response to toxicity, showing how public acts of moderation can be used to enforce community norms, punish users who act toxically, entertain viewers, and bring visibility to the issue of toxicity. PaladinAmber has constructed a community that is invested in her community norms, in this case specifically the eradication of toxic users. Through her breaking news segments and other public acts of moderation, PaladinAmber asserts her authority as a streamer, pushing back against users whose online disinhibition encourages them to troll, harass, or otherwise antagonize streamers and their communities. For Wadham, public moderation is simultaneously punishment and entertainment. Users who misbehave in her chat may become the subject of one of her segments, calling attention to their inappropriate behavior and making them the focus of her comedic skits. Wadham argues that this form of moderation may urge users to reflect on their behavior, thus hopefully inspiring them to behave more appropriately or at least recognize that their behavior has repercussions. However, the public nature of her segments combined with her construction of these users as 'trash' makes such segments emblematic of stigmatic shaming, which may only

encourage users to re-offend because they feel shamed and want to seek revenge. Furthermore, the publicity surrounding these segments has also attracted the attention of trolls, who may see PaladinAmber's responses to toxic behavior as irresistible temptation, as public acts of moderation may feel like a reward for these trolls. Thus, although public moderation may draw attention to the issue of toxicity on Twitch and the experiences of streamers and communities affected by toxicity, streamers who engage in public moderation may face further trolling or toxic behavior consequently. While Wadham indicates that she is willing to accept this trade-off, other streamers may not.

Although this response to toxicity is not without its consequences, it is vital to underscore the importance and value of PaladinAmber's actions. Not only is she potentially altering the behavior of user who interact with her streams, she is also drawing attention to the issue of toxicity more broadly, even if this attention has repercussions. Numerous articles were written about Wadham's segments, and clips from her streams gained significant attention on Twitter. Her work is a reminder that toxicity is painfully common on Twitch but also that not all communities are responding passively to this issue. There are many streamers and users who are fighting for more inclusive and positive spaces on Twitch and for changes to the platform itself. By consistently engaging with users who act toxically, Wadham reminds users that toxic behavior is not a forgone conclusion in all Twitch communities. Streamers like PaladinAmber have positioned themselves as agents of change through their informed and creative responses to this behavior, thereby changing the narrative about toxicity on Twitch from a discussion of harm to a tale of resistance.

CHAPTER 6

RESISTING TOXICITY THROUGH STRONG COMMUNITY BONDS AND

TRANSPARENT MODERATION

The previous analysis chapters have explored types of toxicity, methods of

moderation, and resistance strategies utilized by streamers to prevent toxic behavior in

their communities. This chapter delves further into the final component – resistance

strategies – by exploring a community known for being wholesome, inclusive, and

relatively free of toxic behavior. Dexbonus, better known as Dodger, is a variety streamer

who has been on Twitch for almost a decade. Her community provides an excellent

backdrop for exploring resistance strategies for two reasons: (1) Since her community has

been developing for over a decade, its norms and rules are engrained within the fabric of

the community, embedding them within the community's identity and encouraging active

moderation, and (2) Dodger and her channel moderators are transparent in their

construction and enforcement of community policies, which not only encourages rule-

following but also prevents reoffending. While PaladinAmber's methods of enforcement

are likewise transparent, this chapter looks more closely at the community structures,

including explicit rules and information-sharing, that prevent toxic behavior, a topic not

discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

To fully explore these two elements, this chapter first considers Dodger's methods

of cultivating and sustaining community bonds, encouraging prosocial behavior through

behavioral imitation, and interacting with users regarding her rules and community

norms. Then, the rules themselves are considered, exploring how Dodger communicates

her expectations for users. Finally, the role of Dodger's channel moderators in the

prevention and policing of toxic behavior will be examined. Channel moderators are

Twitch users who are given specific privileges by a streamer that allow them to monitor

behavior in the streamer's chat, delete messages that violate the streamer's rules or

Twitch's Terms of Service, and punish the users who post said messages accordingly (see

chapter two for more information on moderators). Dodger's methods of resistance and

moderation are exemplified through examples, considering how such methods contribute

to the creation and maintenance of a space that is relatively free of toxicity, a rarity on the

Twitch platform.

Given the wide range of possible toxic behaviors, this chapter focuses on one of

the most common nuisances on Twitch and in Dodger's community – backseating.

Backseating – when a viewer attempts to tell a streamer what to do in a game by

discussing game mechanics, spoiling the story, commenting on the streamer's behavior,

or, more broadly, giving uninvited tips, tricks, or hints – is banned in Dodger's

community. Dodger and her moderators have put numerous parameters in place,

discussed throughout this chapter, to ensure that backseating is kept to a minimum. This

chapter considers how these restrictions have become embedded within the social fabric

of Dodger's community to actively prevent toxic behavior and encourage pro-social

behavior in its place.

Who is Dexbonus (aka Dodger)?

Brooke Thorne, also known as Dexbonus but more commonly referred to as

Dodger by her community, is a white, American, cis-female Twitch streamer who began

as a YouTuber in 2010 and started her Twitch channel in 2011 before transitioning

completely to streaming a few years later. At the time of writing, she was based in California with her husband and young daughter, although she has since moved to England. Dodger is a variety streamer, playing diverse narrative-focused and rogue-like games and interacting with viewers in Just Chatting. Table 6.1 includes some of the emotes available to Dodger's subscribers, many of which are seen throughout the examples in this chapter.

Table 6.1

Examples of Dodger's Twitch Emotes

Emote	Emote Name	Emote Meaning
	doogWhoa	Surprise
	doogHype	Excitement
	doogGang	Community solidarity
	doogPaw	Hello
	doogLaugh	Laughter

At 33, Dodger is a veteran in the industry in comparison to Pokimane and PaladinAmber and has the most well-established community of followers, many of whom have been fans since she began her career as a member of a well-known content creator network on YouTube. Furthermore, her role as a parent in an industry largely skewed towards young, childless gamers has impacted her position on Twitch, affecting the length and frequency of her streams and the topics she discusses, as she regularly talks about what is happening in her life with her viewers. Although this aspect of her identity

will not be considered within this chapter, it is worth mentioning, as it has inevitably impacted her relationship with her viewers.

Cultivating Community Bonds

Dodger's community is well-known for being open, welcoming, and friendly, with little trolling, inappropriate, or otherwise toxic behavior occurring in her chat. This is most likely due in part to how well-established the community is, with many members having followed Dodger since she started her career on YouTube. The duration of community membership contributes to bond-based attachment between long-term or consistently active members, formed through a member's interpersonal relationships with other group members (Ren et al., 2007). Evidence of this attachment can be found in the high level of phatic exchanges occurring in Dodger's chat. Miller (2008) argues that phatic "interactions essentially maintain and strengthen existing relationships in order to facilitate further communication" (p. 394). Phatic exchanges are less concerned with achieving goals or communicating information; rather, these interactions function simply to connect participants and strengthen the bonds between them. Within the data for this project, there are numerous examples of phatic exchanges. Users greet each other, ask one another how their day is going, and share information about their lives. Dodger herself promotes these interactions with community events to encourage user participation. During the data collection period, Dodger ran 'community book week,' and her bot, Purrbot, discussed in detail below, occasionally posted the following message during her streams: "It's community Book Week! Is there something you've been

meaning to read but you keep putting it off? Read a little of it every day this week!"

Users can be seen discussing this event in example 6.1.

Example 6.1

Stream 1

1   (00:07:16) bambinas: how's the challenge been going for everyone :)

2   (00:07:33) Draug: i read chat so ....

3   […]

4   (00:07:39) stacey: ok, been reading a little bit each day. have to keep

5   reminding myself to do it.

6   […]

7   (00:08:10) bambinas: @stacey what are you reading right now?

8   […]

9   (00:08:19) Rosa: Haven't got anything to read, all my books are home also

10   I'm supposed to be packing to go home :T

11 (00:08:37) Sleepy: I keep saying I'm gonna read something and then time

12   passes without reading anything 🙈

Dodger's community event has clearly given her viewers a shared reason to interact with one another and allows them to share their own experiences. In line 7, bambinas uses "@" to tag a user in chat. This highlights the message for the tagged user and makes it easier for them to keep up with the conversation, particularly when there are other topics being discussed. In fact, bambinas and stacey continue their discussion of books for approximately eight minutes following this excerpt, tagging each other as they post.

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Other viewers can be seen engaging in this discussion as well, with Draug, in line 2, joking that reading Dodger's chat could count as fulfilling the challenge, while Rosa, in line 9, explains why they have not been able to complete the challenge. Interactions like those seen in example 6.1 are commonplace in Dodger's chat and help a community develop a shared identity, which can increase community attachment (Ren et al., 2012).

Behavioral Imitation

Community attachment serves a vital function when it comes to resisting toxic behavior, as members with a strong attachment to the community "help enforce norms of appropriate behavior (Smith et al. 1997), police the community and sanction deviant behaviors (Chua et al. 2007), and perform behind the scenes work to help maintain the community" (Ren et al., 2012, p. 842). On Twitch, channel moderators are most likely to have the strongest bonds with the community given their role as protectors and enforcers. Subscribers and other long-term members may also express strong community bonds, with evidence for this being seen in their imitation of moderator behavior through peer moderation and their promotion of pro-social behavior, such as the phatic exchanges in example 6.1. Individuals with strong community bonds, such as moderators, subscribers, and long-term community members, can contribute to the enforcement of community norms through behavioral imitation and deterrence strategies (Seering et al., 2017). This section focuses on behavioral imitation, and deterrence strategies are discussed in the section on transparent moderation below.

Behavioral imitation – the observance of a behavior that then initiates the same behavior in others (Wheeler, 1966) – is often reliant on the perception of social norms, in

that "when choosing from a set of possible behaviors, individuals are more likely to choose the behavior that their peers prefer or which they perceive to be in accordance with social norms" (Seering et al., 2017, p. 112). Thus, those with strong community bonds, such as channel moderators and subscribers, participate in pro-social behavior, and other participants pick up on and imitate said behavior, therefore benefiting the whole community. In fact, in their study on the impact of moderation and example-setting on user behavior on Twitch, Seering et al. (2017) show that channel moderators have the most substantial impact on user behavior, while subscribers have some impact in some scenarios but significantly less than that of moderators. Simultaneously, behavioral imitation can work against a community when anti-social and toxic behavior is observed and imitated. This is why some communities are known for their toxic behavior; such behavior is observed to align with the social norms of the space and therefore is imitated as a signal of in-group status. The section on explicit rules below discusses this point in further detail.

Dodger's community is an example of beneficial behavioral imitation, where there is very little toxic behavior because it does not align with the social norms of the community and those with strong community bonds are not participating in such behavior; therefore, behavioral imitation of toxic behavior is not possible given the lack of a stimulus. This does not completely prevent toxic behavior but rather limits new viewers' exposure to and therefore likelihood of imitating said behavior. Instead, members of Dodger's community are seen participating in pro-social behavior, which encourages new viewers to participate in pro-social behavior as well. An example of this

can be seen in example 6.2, where a subscriber named zappy prompts the community with the message "happy pride month everyone!" zappy's role as a subscriber is evident through their use of doogHype (🐱), as only subscribers of a streamer can post the streamer's emotes in chat. Numerous users reply to zappy with pride-themed emotes, with some users adding Dodger's emotes into the mix, including doogHype in lines 1 and 15 (🐱), doogGang (🎩) in line 14, and doogPaw (🐾) in line 15.
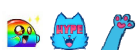
Example 6.2

Stream 2

1	(00:08:00) zappy:	🏳️‍🌈🐱🏳️‍🌈 happy pride month everyone!	
2	(00:08:14) BunBun:	@zavone Happy pride month!	
3	(00:08:18) darkmagic:	🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈	
4	[…]		
5	(00:08:26) RedSea:	🏳️‍🌈 🦋 🏳️‍🌈	
6	[…]		
7	(00:08:37) link:	🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈	
8	(00:08:40) Melania:	🪽 🏳️‍🌈 🪽	
9	(00:08:40) harry:	🌈	
10	(00:08:40) brother:	🏳️‍🌈 🦋 🏳️‍🌈	
11	(00:08:41) FunnyDemon:	🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈	
12		🏳️‍🌈 🏳️‍🌈	
13	(00:08:48) poison:	👄	

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14 (00:08:49) Armor:

15 (00:08:57) buzzybee:

16 (00:09:03) MintT:

Behavioral imitation is clearly benefiting Dodger's community in this example, as users flooded her chat with emotes symbolizing acceptance, love, and celebration. zappy's original post, which combined the doogHype emote with pride wings before wishing everyone a 'happy pride month' prompts users to respond with their own pride-themed emotes, with each user posting a unique combination of emotes to symbolize their own take on the celebration. zappy's use of doogHype connects the pride celebration with Dodger's community, which is unsurprising given Dodger's focus on acceptance and inclusivity. This combination could also be seen as communicating the social norms of the community – Dodger's community is hyped about pride month. This could encourage other users to respond in kind to show that they align with said norms. There are also no instances of toxic responses to zappy's post, and this could be attributed to the flood of pride emotes, signaling social consensus on the issue, and to the lack of stimuli to prompt anti-social behavioral imitation. The responses to zappy's post are unanimously positive, so a new user would most likely not consider behaving toxically without any indication that such behavior would be welcome. The flood of pro-social behavior may act on its own as a preventative measure for toxic behavior, as such behavior would undoubtably be poorly received in a community such as Dodger's.

Streamer Interactions

A final element that cannot be overlooked when discussing a streamer's community is the streamer themselves, without whom the community would not exist. Dodger has spent over a decade developing and maintaining a devoted fanbase, and it is through this labor that she has been able to refine the boundaries and expectations of her community, ultimately creating a space that reflects and champions her ideologies, particularly regarding acceptance and inclusivity. There is little room in her community for the toxicity that is so commonplace on Twitch because her followers recognize that such behavior does not align with the norms that she has established and therefore actively challenge any instances of such behavior should they occur. Furthermore, Dodger often engages with her viewers regarding her ideologies, rules, and expectations, offering explanations, answering questions, and, more generally, displaying a willingness to consider viewers' perspectives and take into account their desires and expectations, even when said desires and expectations do not align with Dodger's own.

This is especially true when it comes to Dodger's rules regarding backseating, a behavior that has existed since the birth of video games. Backseating, also known as backseat gaming, is a term derived from backseat driving. Dodger defines backseating as "[p]roviding unwanted help, tips, guidance or best practices, including spoiling content" (Dexbonus, 2020). Backseating encompasses diverse behaviors, including telling a streamer how to play a video game (tips, tricks, etc.), explaining what they are doing wrong, and/or spoiling the game. Spoilers themselves can include information about a video game's plot or story, how to solve a puzzle or in-game mechanic, or hints regarding

upcoming content in the game (such as "save this resource because you will need it in the next phase"). Backseating has thus far received very little scholarly attention but is grounded in an individual's disregard for their own lack of agency when providing feedback or suggestions. Linderoth (2013) describes this phenomenon as follows: "While one player might be in control of the mouse or control pad, or formally have a player position in a board game, these games allow other people to take part in the challenge even though they have no agency to execute actions in the game" (p. 12). Backseating is particularly pervasive on livestreaming platforms like Twitch due to the investment felt on the part of viewers when watching a streamer playing a video game and the online disinhibition that results from the platform's affordances (discussed in chapters two and four).

In example 6.3, Dodger (D) responds to a viewer's question regarding backseating. Rather than giving an abbreviated response or leaving the duty of responding to her moderators, Dodger offers insight on her own thought process and reasoning behind her backseating rule.

Example 6.3

Stream 1

1	(2:21:06) D:	"Is speculation generally frowned upon on Twitch?" No, I mean
2		everybody's chat is going to be different and what everyone wants is
3		going to be different. My- for example, my husband and I, the way
4		that, um, that we deal with like backseating and what we consider to
5		be backseating is completely different. Um, in my situation, it's not

6		fun for me if somebody tells me what to do or if I don't like come to
7		the idea on my own, um so that's like included in spoilers, right? It's-
8		it's like all one package for me. It's like don't tell me what's going to
9		happen and don't tell me how to do something, like it's all kind of let
10		me experience the game for myself? Um, some people don't enjoy
11		watching another person struggle at all, and so there have been plenty
12		of people who have been like 'this is not the channel for me' right
13		because that's like- that's kind of what I enjoy, I guess, in a game, is
14		figuring it out for myself so. ((long pause while playing game)) But
15		like for Sam,[39] when Sam is- is playing a game, uh, Sam- Sam loves
16		it. Uh, fuck ((responding to game play)). He loves being able to go to
17		chat and be like 'wait, how does this work? What am I supposed to
18		do here?' ((long pause while playing game)) So yeah, it depends, it
19		totally depends on the person.
20	(2:23:47) D:	Yeah, like I've- shit- I've learned that I actually don't enjoy watching
21		streams like mine ((laughs)) right? Like, this is how I conduct my
22		stream, but it's real- it's so difficult for me as a viewer when- like to
23		keep my mouth shut, to not backseat. Despite the fact that I have such
24		a strong backseating policy in my own chat, it's really hard for me to
25		not backseat? I- I fully admit that about myself.

---

[39] Sam is Dodger's husband.

The viewer's question that prompts Dodger's explanation is telling on its own. It is clear from the question that the viewer has been paying attention to interactions in chat and most likely has seen the numerous reminders posted by Dodger's moderators (see example 6.5), community members, and Purrbot (discussed in the next section) to not backseat, as speculation is subsumed under backseating in Dodger's rules. This question signals an understanding that backseating behavior is not allowed in Dodger's chat, prompting the user, who is most likely new to Twitch given the proliferation of backseating in most livestreams, to wonder whether this rule extends to Twitch more broadly. Even though Dodger has had this rule in place since the beginning of her Twitch career and such a question could easily have been answered by a channel moderator or any viewer experienced with using Twitch, Dodger provides a detailed answer. She begins by explaining that streamers' communities are unique, with different rules and expectations, and sets up a comparison between her own community and that of her husband and fellow streamer, Sam. Dodger then explains, crucially, *why* she does not allow backseating, stating "it's not fun for me if somebody tells me what to do or if I don't like come to the idea on my own" in lines 5-7. Because livestreaming is highly performative, it is important that streamers find the experience enjoyable. Otherwise, the performance might be perceived as inauthentic, which could have serious negative repercussions for a streamer (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). Dodger, therefore, has banned backseating in her chat to allow her and viewers who want to watch her figure a game out for herself to enjoy the game in their own way, without fear of being spoiled.

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Dodger's unwillingness to sacrifice her own enjoyment of the game for the sake of some viewers who want to backseat, however, does not stem from a belief that this is what *all* streamers should do, nor does Dodger seem to see backseating as a general practice as toxic. Rather, she presents perceptions of backseating as varied, using Sam as a counterpoint, stating in lines 15-18 that he "loves being able to go to chat" to get answers about the game. This counterpoint is important because it shows Dodger's viewers that she has a nuanced understanding of what happens on Twitch, has taken into account her own desires as well as those of her viewers, and has created rules based on said understanding and desires. In other words, not only is Dodger being transparent with her viewers regarding her reasoning, but she is also recognizing that her rules are neither generalizable nor necessarily beneficial to other communities. Such discussion can serve as important justification for viewers who may not understand why these rules are in place, which may later function as a preventative measure for backseating behavior, as users who understand why a rule is in place are more likely to abide by said rule (Jhaver, Bruckman, et al., 2019).

In her final point regarding backseating, in lines 20-25, Dodger attempts to connect with users who feel inclined to backseat by recognizing her own enjoyment of backseating when she is watching other livestreams. She states in lines 20-21 that she does not enjoy watching livestreams that do not allow backseating, and this point parallels an earlier statement in lines 10-13, where Dodger acknowledges that some people may not want to watch her livestreams because they do not "enjoy watching another person struggle at all." This final point helps forge a connection with viewers

who are tempted to backseat in her chat or who may slip up from time to time. Dodger expresses that her style of livestreaming is not for everyone and also aligns herself with those who may feel inclined to misbehave, although she makes it clear that she does not condone such behavior, instead implying that someone should just not watch a streamer if they cannot abide by the streamers' rules in lines 11-13 with the statement "there have been plenty of people who have been like 'this is not the channel for me.'" This final acknowledgement combined with her earlier justification humanizes Dodger's rules and expectations and helps to create and/or strengthen bonds not only with viewers who do not enjoy backseating but also those who do. This feeling of connection can be felt in example 6.4, where viewers respond to Dodger's statement. The viewers in this example align themselves with Dodger on different points, from the blanket statement "I hate backseaters lol" in line 10 to an assertion of allegiance to Dodger as a person in line 14.

Example 6.4

Stream 1

1	(02:23:02) Tornado:	I imagine with spoilers it comes to listening & respecting
2		wishes depending on the person
3	(02:23:05) Amir:	It makes sense we all play games differently enjoying
4		different things
5	[…]	

6	(02:23:19) Sparks:	I honestly enjoy watching @Dexbonus solve shit on her own
7		and her geniune satisfaction in doing so. It's refreshing seeing
8		someone actually PLAY and discover all the game
9		mechanics

10 […]

11 (02:24:14) withered:　 I hate backseaters lol

12 […]

13 (02:24:26) Armor:　 that's why we are here 🎩 EVIL 👿

14 […]

15 (02:24:45) dark:　 @Dexbonus we like you for you...but we get what you mean

16 […]

17 (02:24:50) Amir:　 I think I'm not bothered because Dodger plays games I don't

18 　 play so I usually have no idea anyway 👹

19 […]

20 (02:26:45) Armor:　 I tend to sense the atmosphere a streamer has. I enjoy taking

21 　 active part in a game, like some Starcraft 2 players are chill

22 　 about it, others not. So I adjust to that. But def. remember

23 　 getting a hefty timeout for blurting out "maybe do that thing

24 　 🐱" So I'm not flawless there, but understand the different

25 　 methodology.

26 […]

27 (02:26:57) Armor:　 but yeah, I digress. Not to dwell on that topic too hard.

28 […]

29 (02:27:19) MighD: Armor the backseating mod 🙀🧑🏻

30 […]

31 (02:27:52) Armor: @MighD 👹 tho tbf (and not to toot my own horn 🐸) I can

32   count those times on one hand.

The bonds felt between Dodger and her community members are exemplified in example 6.4. Tornado and Amir, in lines 1-4, echo Dodger's point about the uniqueness of each streaming community and the need to understand and abide by the individual rules and expectations set forth by each streamer when engaging in a livestream. Sparks, in lines 6-9, speaks to Dodger's point about wanting to enjoy the game without the interference of backseaters. It is likely that some viewers come to Dodger's stream because she does not allow backseating, which creates a different experience for viewers. In this way, Dodger sets herself apart from most other streamers, and for viewers like Sparks, that is a valuable trait. In line 15, dark claims that the community likes Dodger for who she is, perhaps indicating that she does not need to explain herself or her rules because her followers are willing to follow her regardless. This statement is evidence of strong bond-based attachment between dark and Dodger and, assuming dark's statement is true, this attachment is most likely felt by other members as well, which will inevitably encourage rule-following out of a felt sense of loyalty.

In lines 20-32, Armor, one of Dodger's channel moderators (see the section on moderator activity below), chimes in regarding two of Dodger's points. First, Armor recognizes that communities have different rules, and participants will need to adjust to

each community's expectations if they intend to become members. This echoes Dodger's

first point in example 6.3. Then, Armor responds to Dodger's final point about the desire

to backseat, stating that they have been timed out, a penalty for misbehavior, for failing to

follow a streamer's 'no backseating' rule. In this statement, Armor aligns themselves

with Dodger and admits, as Dodger did in her statement, that it can be difficult to not

backseat, even when they are watching a livestream with that rule. Crucially, like

Dodger, Armor does not excuse this behavior, stating that they are "not flawless" in lines

24-25, and, when a user jokes about Armor being a moderator who breaks the rules by

backseating, Armor fires back by saying that such lapses in judgment can be counted on

one hand. Through this exchange, Armor shows solidarity with Dodger and with users

who may feel a desire to backseat but, like Dodger, does not condone breaking the rules,

no matter how they may feel about the issue at hand.

Although Armor's role as a moderator will be discussed in more detail in the

section on moderator activity, it is worth mentioning here that Armor's support for

Dodger on numerous points is vital. This exchange will undoubtably impact behavior in

the community, as the discussion humanizes both Dodger and Armor, presents them as a

united front, and functions as a deterrent for backseating. There is an expectation that

moderators will support the streamer they moderate for through interactions in chat, and

Armor's utterances in example 6.4 not only show their commitment to the social norms

of the community, as outlined by Dodger in example 6.3, but also capitalize on Armor's

experiences as a viewer on Twitch, allowing Dodger's community to see another side of

Armor. Although Armor's posts show evidence of their power as a moderator, which

may not be regarded positively by some viewers,[40] as the section on channel moderator activity shows, the role of the moderator is to wield such power in chat so that the streamer can focus on their own performance (Wohn, 2019), and Dodger's viewers have come to expect her moderators to play an active role in chat, both in terms of regulating behavior and participating in general discussion.

Community bonds are immensely powerful when it comes to the prevention of toxic behavior. When community members feel connected to one another, they are more likely to actively participate and less likely to engage in behavior that threatens the health and longevity of the community (Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2014). Dodger's community is well-established, with numerous long-term members who are invested in the community. The high level of phatic exchanges in the data contribute to the sense of attachment felt by viewers, and these interactions are encouraged by Dodger's implementation of events like community book week. Furthermore, the prosocial behavior of moderators and community members contributes to a pattern of pro-social behavioral imitation, which significantly decreases the chances of toxic behavior. Finally, Dodger herself is willing to engage with viewers regarding her rules, including her motivations and logic behind them, which further strengthens community bonds not only with those who regularly follow her rules but also with those who may be tempted to misbehave, as understanding why certain rules are in place encourages rule-following and decreases the likelihood of rule breaking (Jhaver, Bruckman, et al., 2019).

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[40] A moderator in Wohn's (2019) study remarked that "The mods that actually do their job, people will call them Nazi mods. I've been called that plenty of times for actually enforcing rules in streams and timing people out or purging them, you know, just part of the part of the game, I guess" (p. 9).

In addition to community bonds, moderation serves an important role in resisting toxic behavior in Dodger's community. The next section considers Dodger's rules in further detail and the value of transparent moderation in supervising user behavior and preventing misbehavior.

Methods of Transparent Moderation

A critical element in preventing toxic behavior is the creation and promotion of explicit rules and norms (Seering et al., 2017). This creates clear expectations for viewer conduct, encourages peer moderation, and allows for transparent moderation of undesirable behavior. Transparency is crucial when it comes to moderation decisions, as it can increase user acceptance and trust and "improve how users learn to be productive members of online communities" (Jhaver et al., 2019, p. 2). Thus, communities that are transparent in their expectations for users and moderation of user behavior can "improve community outcomes" (Jhaver et al., 2019, p. 24), including strengthening community bonds and decreasing levels of misbehavior. Part of the reason that Dodger's community is branded as wholesome and her viewers are well-known for being kind and welcoming is because Dodger encourages such behavior and actively polices behavior that does not align with her rules. She has drafted an extensive set of rules, which she provides a link to on her livestreams, and employs active channel moderators who effectively monitor user behavior. This section explores Dodger's rules and moderator activity to theorize the potential correlation between such actions and the apparent lack of toxicity in her community.

Explicit Rules

Rules serve a vital function in communities; according to Sternberg (2012), "rules are among the social ties that bind online communities together" (p. 133). This claim is supported when looking at Twitch communities, where a streamer's rules shape their audience accordingly. Few and/or unenforced rules create wild, toxic communities often headed by wild, toxic streamers, while communities with extensive and/or consistently enforced rules are viewed as more positive and wholesome and, unsurprisingly, are captained by similarly positive and wholesome streamers. This is part of the feedback loop described by Alexander (2018), who argues that streamers and their viewers have created a harmful cycle in which both parties are spurring on each other, leading to increasingly harmful and toxic behavior. Although Alexander's feedback loop is focused on a cycle of negative behavior, this cycle can also be seen in more positive communities, like Dodger's. Part of this positive feedback loop is Dodger's creation and enforcement of rules that encourage such behavior. These rules are well-advertised on her livestreams, making it difficult for a viewer to claim ignorance as an excuse for misbehavior. In fact, one of her rules makes this exact claim, stating "[i]gnorance of, or disagreement with, the rules is not a valid reason to be pardoned" (Dexbonus, 2020), underscoring Dodger's commitment to sustaining a community bound by her policies.

Dodger advertises her rules to new viewers through a pop-up message that appears when a viewer first participates in her chat; it reads: "Welcome to my channel! No one ever reads these let's be real. There's a button below stream with all the rules but like, just don't be a butthead." In the past, this message included a brief overview of

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Dodger's community rules; however, she has since adjusted the message to reflect her acceptance that such pop-ups are often ignored; therefore, a cursory reminder to not 'be a butthead' in her chat will have to do. On its own, this rule may feel exceptionally vague, as what counts as being a 'butthead' on one livestream may be perfectly acceptable on another livestream. However, Dodger also alludes to a more descriptive set of rules and provides a link in her stream information. These rules, as it turns out, are quite extensive and cover user behavior across multiple platforms, including Twitch and Discord.[41] At the top of the page, Dodger's team writes, "It's sad that we have to put anything more than just 'don't be a dick' here, but people don't seem to understand what that means anymore..." (Dexbonus, 2020). It is evident from this statement that Dodger is aware of how common toxic behavior is on the platforms she frequents, and, to deter such behavior in her own community, she has fashioned rules to discourage such behavior and give her team the necessary authority to penalize those who misbehave. Dodger's rules largely center on "ensur[ing] the community is a fun and accepting place for all to talk and interact," which she accomplishes by banning trolling, discrimination, doxing, lying, excessive swearing, hate speech, backseat gaming, spamming, self-advertisement, and the discussion of 'disruptive topics,' including religion, politics, and self-harm (Dexbonus, 2020).

Dodger's rules are divided into three sections – General, Infractions, and Use of Services, each with numbered and bulleted rules, descriptions, and explanations regarding prohibited behavior in relation to each rule. The level of detail allows

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[41] Discord is a platform that allows users to create private servers for their online group or community. Discord supports instant messaging and voice and video calls.

participants in Dodger's community to have a clear understanding of what is and is not

acceptable. For example, when it comes to backseating, Dodger includes two rules

addressing this behavior:

6. Spoilers are not okay, and will be removed. What constitutes as a spoiler is at

   the discretion of the Dexbonus Community Staff. Receiving excessive

   warnings for spoilers may result in you being removed from some or all of the

   Dexbonus Services.

7. Respect Dodger's Rules. Only provide game tips when asked. Do not backseat

   game. Don't give tips, or explain what to do and how to do it. Do not gripe or

   moan if Dodger does something you don't believe is correct. (Dexbonus,

   2020)

Through these two rules, Dodger addresses two types of behavior related to backseating

that are banned in her community. Each rule begins with a clear statement regarding

behavior expectations. The statement is followed by further explanation, and, in the case

of rule #6, punishment for excessive misbehavior is included.

However, as Dodger herself points out in the pop-up on Twitch, it is unlikely that

most viewers will follow the link or read her rules. To ensure that her viewers are aware

of and abide by her policies, Dodger uses Moobot,[42] an immensely popular bot that can

be integrated into the Twitch dashboard and responds to a streamer's prompts, posting

customizable messages in response to user behavior in chat. Moobot can remove spam

and other types of unwanted posts in a streamer's chat, responds to Twitch commands,

and automatically posts Twitch alerts, such as subscriptions and donations, in chat for

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[42] Both Pokimane and PaladinAmber use a similar bot, as do many streamers on Twitch.

viewers to see (Moobot, 2021). With regards to encouraging rule-following, Dodger has

created numerous Twitch commands that prompt Moobot, who Dodger has renamed

Purrbot, to post information in her chat regarding her community, her brand, and her

rules and expectations for user behavior. In the data examined for this project, Purrbot

was prompted 294 times using the following triggers[43]: !car, !challenge, !Crendor,

!coffee, !death, !discord, !game, !manga, !merch, !mods, !music, !politics, !schedule,

!spoilers, !uptime, and !warning. While many of these triggers function to share relevant

information with viewers, such as how long Dodger has been live (!uptime), what game

she is playing (!game), and where viewers can buy her merchandise (!merch) or find her

streaming schedule (!schedule), relevant to this discussion are !discord, !politics, and

!spoilers, which prompt the following information to be posted in chat:

!discord: Come and chat about the stream with us! Join the Community Discord

              server (NO download needed!) - http//dexbon.us/discord

!politics: Please do NOT discuss politics in chat. Let's focus on games!

!spoilers: Please be aware that posting spoilers (even fake ones) and backseat gaming

              will get you timed out, possibly for a long time. This includes (but is not

              limited to) hints, tips, info on mechanics, and suggestions. We have a spoiler

              channel on discord at http//dexbon.us/discord

The politics command is relatively self-explanatory, given Dodger's ban on 'disruptive'

topics. Banning topics that could cause animosity in her chat allows Dodger's livestreams

to avoid most arguments and restrains conversations to light themes, with most viewers

chatting about their lives, shared interests, or the content of Dodger's livestreams with

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[43] Each trigger is proceeded by an exclamation point to avoid miscues.

little disharmony. This reminder is an easy way for moderators to put an end to such conversations without having to personally intervene; furthermore, it does not single any users out, allowing them to adjust their behavior before any punishments are handed down.

However, Dodger also recognizes that some viewers may feel constrained by the affordances of her chat, which may make in-depth conversations challenging. She has therefore created a Discord server that her viewers can join. Although her rules extend to this server, meaning 'disruptive' topics such as politics cannot be discussed there either, the Discord server is an important extension of her livestreams, as it allows her community to interact with one another outside of Twitch. Conversations on Discord are still synchronous but, in general, move more slowly than on Twitch, allowing users to engage more directly with one another, sustain conversations, and bring up topics that are unrelated to Dodger's livestreaming content. Purrbot's reminders about Dodger's Discord server function to redirect viewers who want to interact with one another outside of the livestreams and encourage community engagement outside of Twitch. These reminders, and the existence of this server more broadly, work to deter misbehavior by assuaging user discontent regarding Twitch's chat affordances and strengthening community bonds, which, of course, can encourage rule following. Perhaps, most crucially, there is a special channel on Dodger's Discord server where viewers can freely talk about the games she is playing, allowing them to post spoilers and discuss her gameplay without fear of being reprimanded for backseating. Because Dodger does not allow backseating or spoilers – a stark divergence from most streamers – the !spoilers trigger is a crucial command that is

frequently used when Dodger is playing games because many viewers are conditioned to participate in this behavior on other livestreams. Like the !politics command, the !spoilers command is an easy way to inform new viewers of Dodger's rules and remind returning viewers as well; furthermore, it can function as a gentle reprimand if users are not abiding by the rules, steering them back within the bounds of Dodger's expectations for viewer behavior before things get out of hand. Thus, in many ways, Purrbot functions as an additional moderator in Dodger's chat, reinforcing community rules and norms throughout her livestreams without the labor typically associated with moderation.

Channel Moderator Activity

In addition to Purrbot, Dodger's channel moderators are also quite active in her chat, regulating user behavior, answering questions, and posting reminders regarding Dodger's rules when necessary. Having active moderators not only allows viewers to see that their behavior is being monitored, potentially decreasing feelings of online disinhibition (in contrast to Pokimane's chat, see chapter four), but also helps viewers become familiar with or be reminded of a streamer's rules and expectations, which may also encourage user participation (Wise et al., 2006)[44] and compliance.

Channel moderators can be subsumed under the category of moderation strategies but differ significantly from the strategies discussed in chapters four and five.[45] Unlike AutoMod, a machine learning algorithm (chapter four), and other bots (Moobot/Purrbot),

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[44] Wise et al. (2006) argue that evidence of moderation helps a community be perceived as stable, in contrast to 'feral' online spaces overwhelmed by inappropriate behavior. It is this sense of stability, according to the authors, that encourages individuals to participate (p. 30).

[45] See also the section on moderation strategies in chapter two, which includes a discussion of the role of moderators on Twitch, including how users become moderators and what motivates them to take on such roles.

moderators in this context are always human, and, in contrast to the moderation strategies employed by PaladinAmber herself (chapter five), moderators operate exclusively in chat. Their control is limited to moderation tools built into Twitch that allow them to delete messages and punish users (time-outs, temporary bans, permanent bans, etc.). Their permissions can be customized by a streamer but rarely extend beyond policing behavior in a streamer's chat. Thus, although moderation can and does occur in many forms on Twitch, in the context of this section, the focus is exclusively on human users who regulate behavior in Dodger's chat. Furthermore, because streamers can customize moderators' permissions, and, as the previous chapters have shown, significantly vary in their approach to moderation, moderators' roles may differ depending on the streamer for whom they are moderating (Wohn, 2019). Seering, Kaufman, and Chancellor (2020) identified five categories of metaphors for community moderators: nurturing and supporting, overseeing and facilitating, governing and regulating, managing, and fighting for communities. These metaphors signal that, for moderators, "removal is only one piece of a deeper social process of nurturing, overseeing, intervening, fighting, managing, governing, enduring, and stewarding communities" (Seering et al., 2020, p. 15). As the following analysis of the behavior of one of Dodger's moderators reveals, moderation in her community is a blend of facilitating, representing, mediating, and refereeing. Dodger's moderators are active participants in her chat, facilitating general discussion, functioning as representatives for Dodger and her moderation team, mediating disputes between viewers, and refereeing user behavior.

Example 6.5 provides a selection of messages sent by Armor, one of Dodger's most active moderators. This selection is representative of the style of messages most often sent by Dodger's moderators in the data. Note Armor's style here in particular – they are gentle in their reminders and enforcement of the rules, expressing a level of kindness towards the community while also representing Dodger's wishes (line 1). The emote that frequently appears in Armor's message is known as doogGang and is used to express in-group status in Dodger's community. By including this emote in their acts of moderation, Armor is signaling that compliance with the rules is an expectation for members of Dodger's community.

Example 6.5

Stream 1

1	(02:17:45) Armor:	Let Dodger figure things out on her own 🎩 She prefers it that
2		way.
3	[…]	
4	(02:20:01) Armor:	Just gonna do a bit precautionary general reminder of the
5		spoilers/hints rules. We might have new folks in chat and this
6		is the sorta game it's hard to not feel the urge to help 🎩
7	[…]	
8	(02:39:20) Armor:	remember you can discuss the mechanics in our Discord, let
9		Dodger figure this out on her own 🎩

Stream 2

10 (01:36:47) Armor: reminder, chat, share plot speculations and hints and all that in

11   our discord, not here. So you don't accidentally spoil the plot

12   for Dodger or otheres here

13 […]

14 (01:49:04) Beenn: @Armor would you call translations spoilers?

15 […]

16 (01:49:25 Armor: @ Beenn hmm, maybe wait for Dodger to ask for a translation,

17   like she did with the door.

18 […]

19 (01:49:33) Beenn: right kk

20 […]

21 (01:50:59) Armor: Tho the character seems to understand Norwegian, so he

22   should understand certain words at least. But yeah, we'll wait

23   for Dodger to ask us for translating things 🐱 Could contain

24   spoilers (I know God of War did it, in Icelandic tho it was in

25   runes)

In Stream 1, backseating proved to be a significant issue for users in chat, requiring

Armor to frequently post reminders regarding Dodger's rules. Armor's posts, combined

with Purrbot's messages regarding spoilers, work to establish clear parameters for user

behavior in chat, allowing Dodger to remain focused on the game without fear that

people are misbehaving in her chat. At the same time, during Stream 1, in lines 4-6,

Armor recognizes that it may be difficult for viewers to abide by the 'no backseating'

rule, voicing that the style of game – a 2D Metroidvania – may be impacting viewers'

willingness to 'let Dodger figure things out on her own,' as this style is heavily focused

on game mechanics, and it is often difficult to watch someone struggle to progress in a

game without offering suggestions or hints. To combat such urges, in lines 8-9, Armor

reminds viewers about the spoiler channel on Dodger's Discord server, where viewers

can go to talk about the game, including its mechanics and story, without fear of being

reprimanded. This is a crucial allowance for Dodger's community and most likely

contributes to users' willingness to abide by her 'no backseating' rule.

This flexibility is further exemplified in the second stream in example 6.5, where

Armor discusses what does and does not count as spoilers in the game Dodger is playing.

This interaction highlights a willingness to engage in discussion about the rules. In

communities where moderators are less active or not obviously visible (discussed in

chapter four), it can be difficult at times to determine whether a behavior is permissible,

such as in the above example.[46] Moderators can be identified by the presence of this

badge – – next to their username; however, regularly active moderators like Armor

are likely well-known by community members, making it easier for them to engage with

moderators when necessary, like Beenn did in example 6.5. Furthermore, being able to

tag a moderator and get a prompt response allows for viewers to get clarification on rules,

ask questions, and, in general, interact with leadership (i.e., the moderators) in a

streaming community without interrupting the streamer. In this example, Dodger is

playing a game in which the characters, who speak English, are visiting a village in

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[46] Armor posted 741 times across the two livestreams examined. This contrasts with Pokimane's
moderators (chapter four), who appeared to be absent from her livestreams.

Norway; thus, the characters encounter text in Norwegian that they are unable to translate. From the general 'no backseating' rule, it is unclear whether posting translations of the Norwegian text would be considered backseating. Therefore, in line 14, Beenn prompts Armor with this question. Armor, in lines 16-17 and 21-25, then provides clarification, recognizing first in line 16 that this question requires some thought – 'hmm, maybe' – and then in lines 21-25 expanding on their decision by recalling the general rule seen multiple times in example 6.5 – when in doubt, wait for Dodger to ask viewers a direct question – before closing with further justification through an example of another game – *God of War*, where translating text from Icelandic revealed spoilers about the game's storyline. The exchange between Beenn and Armor is friendly, showing evidence of a bond felt between community members and moderators. Although moderators may at times be required to punish viewers for misbehavior, in Dodger's community, they also function as a vital part of the community, regularly engaging with viewers in friendly interactions that help to set clear boundaries on appropriate behavior.

The final example in this section shows how backseating behavior is treated once it occurs in Dodger's chat. In example 6.6, Scored engages in backseating behavior by reminding Dodger of a game mechanic. What follows is an interaction with another community member regarding whether Scored's behavior should be considered backseating before Armor steps in and reprimands Scored.

Example 6.6

Stream 1

1   (01:14:24) Scored: you didnt forget about normal shooting right?

2   […]

3   (01:15:16) lurking: @Scored thats backseating even if you use kappa

4   […]

5   (01:15:35) Scored: is it tho? :o

6   […]

7   (01:16:05) Scored: I would say it is an observation

8   […]

9   (01:16:30) Armor: @Scored observation + commenting on the gameplay =

10   backseating. 🎩

11 […]

12 (01:16:37) Armor: so please keep that to Discord

Scored's remark in line 1 utilizes the kappa emote, which communicates sarcasm. It

appears from Scored's interaction with lurking that the kappa emote is meant to offset the

question; thus, although asking Dodger whether she forgot about 'normal shooting' on its

own may seem like backseating, the use of the kappa emote is meant to alleviate some of

the backseating power. In other words, Scored seems to have been trying to say "Of

course you didn't forget about normal shooting, right?" However, user lurking responds,

in line 3, by tagging Scored and indirectly telling them that their behavior is not allowed,

i.e., the kappa emote does not prevent the question itself from being backseating. Scored

then replies to lurking twice, although they do not tag lurking in these responses,

disagreeing with lurking's conclusion. lurking's comment can be seen as an example of

peer moderation, where community members engage in moderation strategies. While

peer moderation will not be discussed in detail in this chapter, it is important to note that it serves a crucial role in encouraging pro-social behavior, as it contributes to users' understanding of social norms. In this case, lurking reminds Scored of Dodger's rules and indicates that Scored's post does not align with said rules. Perhaps due to lurking's lack of authority, Scored responds by questioning lurking's assessment. Thus, peer moderation, in this example at least, can be less effective that formal moderation, although it still promotes community norms and encourages users to follow the rules.

Following the exchange between Scored and lurking, in lines 9-12, Armor tags Scored and rules that their behavior was, in fact, backseating. The doogGang emote is used again here by Armor to contrast backseating with the expectations of the community. By using this emote, Armor is communicating that Scored's behavior was out of line and that they should stop. Armor then clarifies this statement with a second post in line 12, where they more directly ask Scored to not post similar messages and to "keep that to Discord," reminding Scored and viewers more generally about the spoiler channel on Discord. Armor's moderation here is both transparent and effective. Not only does Armor tag Scored to ensure that the user will see the message, but they also explain why Scored's behavior is considered backseating and offers an alternative space for Scored to go. This style of moderation does not include punishment; instead, it can be viewed as educational rather than punitive, providing an opportunity for Scored to adjust their behavior without consequences (although some may see the act of a moderator tagging a user and addressing their behavior as face-threatening, regardless of the lack of actual punishment). Jhaver et al. (2019) argue that this style of moderation is more

effective, as it can lead to a reduction in future misbehavior. In the case of Scored, this proves true, as, although Scored does not respond to Armor's message (some users in the data went as far as apologizing to Dodger after being reprimanded for backseating), they also do not engage in backseating again; at the same time, Scored remained active in Dodger's chat, signaling behavioral reform rather than a rejection of the community.

This style of moderation is common in Dodger's community and most likely contributes to the low levels of toxicity. Users are given clear and explicit rules, and those who do misbehave are treated respectfully and offered explanations regarding where they went wrong and chances to adjust their behavior before consequences are put in place. Furthermore, the use of Purrbot to remind users of rules, in addition to the high level of moderator activity, may help users feel seen, reducing online disinhibition and therefore encouraging cooperation and conformance to the community norms. It is clear from the lack of toxicity in Dodger's community that these are effective deterrence strategies, with general deterrence – strategies that involve the threat of punishment without actual punishments being incurred (Seering et al., 2017) – being the most common, at least amongst moderators. While more specific deterrence (involving punitive action) is undoubtedly in place for more severe cases of toxicity, from the public-facing perspective, general deterrence seems to be working well in Dodger's community to prevent toxic behavior.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter explored the role of community bonds and transparent moderation in resisting toxic behavior. Dodger's community is well-known for being wholesome and

accepting and has rarely been troubled by toxicity. This is most likely due to the strength of the community bonds felt by members. Not only is Dodger's community well-established, with some members boasting over 10 years of membership in the group, but Dodger has contributed a significant amount of labor to shaping her community. She has developed extensive, explicit rules that govern all spaces where her community is active and has a devoted team of moderators who engage in transparent moderation strategies that encourage conformance to social norms/rules (general deterrence) while not blindly punishing or expelling those who misbehave. Dodger offers numerous opportunities for her users to engage with one another, including events and challenges, and this has resulted in strong bond-based attachment between members and high levels of phatic exchanges. Users appear to truly enjoy interacting with one another and share a felt sense of belonging in the community. These strong community bonds lead members to adjust their behavior to fit Dodger's rules not only to ensure continued membership but also because they feel an allegiance to the community and do not want to risk harming it, its members, or their beloved leader. Furthermore, the pro-social behavior of moderators and members contributes to the lack of toxic behavior, as users imitate the behavior they witness, and moderators and members provide positive, rule-abiding behavior as stimuli for imitation.

Channel moderators, as explored in this chapter, serve an important function in shaping the interactions occurring in a streamer's chat. Although the analysis here focuses on a single streamer's community, it reveals some of the diverse strategies employed by moderators to curb toxic behavior, promote community interaction, and

communicate social norms and behavioral expectations. Moderators are positioned as leaders in a streamer's community, as their moderating privileges elevate them above other members and their role dictates that they govern other viewers in chat; however, they have relatively little power beyond such privileges and may not receive appropriate appreciation for their hard work from the streamer(s) they serve (Wohn, 2019). In Dodger's case, her moderators are highly valued by her and her community and are regularly praised. Yet, this should not be construed as a norm on Twitch, with further scholarly attention needed to determine how moderator labor on Twitch is perceived by streamers and users more broadly.

Through the community bonds she has cultivated and her use of transparent moderation strategies, including explicit rules and enthusiastic moderators, Dodger has formed a strong barrier to toxicity. Not only has she ensured that her community is dedicated to following her rules, but Dodger has also trained a team of moderators who handle any misbehavior professionally and courteously. Undoubtedly, some of these strategies may be off-putting to some Twitch users, who do not want to restrain their behavior, read rules, or consider a streamer's expectations. This may be why Dodger, despite her tenure on Twitch, has a smaller community than some of the top Twitch streamers, like Pokimane, although her community is still large relative to most streamers. Dodger, however, seems happy with this compromise, valuing the health of her community and her enjoyment as a streamer over growth opportunities that would require her to sacrifice her rules or morals.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: REAL-WORLD IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

The three preceding chapters presented case-study analyses of Pokimane's, PaladinAmber's, and Dexbonus's methods of managing, resisting, and preventing toxic behavior in their livestreams. This final chapter synthesizes and unites the conclusions drawn from these analyses to address the similarities and differences between these streamers and the impact that their diverse approaches have on the levels and types of toxic behavior in their communities. The organization of this chapter is as follows: First, the most common types of toxicity seen across the data are summarized. Then, the role of online disinhibition in the production of toxic behavior is reviewed, and aspects of the streamers' behavior that contribute to or discourage online disinhibition are addressed. Finally, prevention and resistance strategies, including Twitch affordances, third-party tools, and human moderation, are detailed. In typical fashion, the chapter closes by considering potential gaps and weaknesses in the project and suggesting avenues for future research.

Types of Toxicity

Although toxicity can take many forms, four types garnered critical scrutiny in this project: sexualization/objectification (coded as *sexual*), harassment (coded as *harass*), backseating, and spam. The levels of each type of toxicity are detailed in table 7.1.

Table 7.1

Number of Utterances According to Each Analytic Code and Streamer

Streamer	Sexual	Harass	Backseating	Spam	Total Toxicity*	Total Utterances
Pokimane	506	272	0	2157	3344	109298
PaladinAmber	44	16	0	0	227	12181
Dexbonus	0	0	100	0	100	11023

Note. This table does not include all types of toxicity present in the data for this project.

Rather, it features the four most prevalent types of toxicity in the data. This is why the

sum of the number of utterances for each of the four types of toxicity does not equal the

number listed under Total Toxicity for Pokimane[47] and PaladinAmber.[48] In Dodger's

case, backseating was the only type of toxicity present in the data for her livestreams.

* Total toxicity refers to the number of utterances analytically coded as *toxic* for each

streamer.

As the table shows, levels of toxicity were the highest in Pokimane's livestreams, while

PaladinAmber and Dexbonus (Dodger) had relatively low levels of toxicity. Apart from

backseating, Pokimane experienced the highest levels of each type of toxicity. The lack

of utterances analytically coded as backseating can be attributed to the way in which

coding was approached for Pokimane's chat data. Although there were distinct instances

of viewers trying to tell Pokimane what to do or spoil the game (such as in example 4.8;

see chapter six for a complete definition of backseating), they were not coded as such for

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[47] See Table 4.1 or Appendix A for a breakdown of the analytic codes applied to Pokimane's chat data.

[48] In addition to *sexual* and *harass*, the following subordinate codes related to toxicity were applied to PaladinAmber's chat data: *all-caps* (*N*=119), *repeat offender* (*N*=38), *personal* (*N*=16), *feet* (*N*=10), *gaming* (*N*=10), and *bath* (*N*=4). See Appendix A for a complete list of the primary and subordinate codes.

two reasons. First, backseating is not against Pokimane's rules and thus would not likely be viewed as toxic in most cases by either Pokimane or her chat. Second, backseating utterances were largely subsumed under other codes. For example, some viewers during the first stream wanted Pokimane to watch a playthrough of the game she was playing on YouTube to help her understand the game mechanics. However, such vocalizations were picked up by some users and turned into spam and thus were coded as such. Similarly, example 4.8 (which was also a monetary donation message, not a message in chat) is an exemplar of a white knight, a type of gender-based harassment. The user's attempt to spoil the game for Pokimane held less analytical value in contrast to the user's attempt to 'protect' Pokimane. Thus, the lack of backseating utterances in Pokimane's chat should be read less as a mark of user restraint and more as a lack of one type of behavior in favor of another, more toxic one.

Given that this project focuses on women streamers, the prevalence of sexualizing and objectifying comments was anticipated. Utterances grouped under this analytic code included messages regarding a streamer's body, solicitation of sexual acts with a streamer, and inappropriate suggestions about what a streamer should do on camera. Sexualization of a streamer in these instances can be equated with sexual harassment and is used to reject a streamer's authority and render them vulnerable. Similarly, objectification, which largely centered on Pokimane's buttocks and breasts and PaladinAmber's feet, dehumanizes streamers, reducing them to objects. Both behaviors are common on Twitch, particularly surrounding women streamers. Furthermore, Twitch has normalized such behavior by embedding the oppressive systems that thrive in broader

gamer culture into their platform, thereby legitimizing the power structures that

marginalize streamers who do not conform to the gamer stereotype (Gray et al., 2017).

Twitch not only pushes much of the labor of moderation onto streamers (except for

AutoMod), but it also has historically lacked transparency regarding its own approaches

to streamer and viewer moderation.[49] Thus, users may perceive Twitch as a space devoid

of regulation, which inevitably contributes to the high levels of toxicity.

Of the three streamers, Pokimane received the most sexualizing/objectifying and

harassing comments, while PaladinAmber received a few, and Dodger received none.

Given Pokimane's limited moderation strategies, it is unsurprising that viewers feel

comfortable posting these types of comments. As detailed in the next section, users

expressed feelings of being unwatched and ignored, which contributes to online

disinhibition and toxic behavior. In addition to her strategies for managing user behavior,

Pokimane also faces such comments because she is one of the most popular streamers on

Twitch. While Pokimane brings crucial visibility to women streamers on the platform,

she simultaneously is targeted with toxic behavior that seeks to destabilize her authority

and remind her and her viewers of the "pervading power relations" that govern Twitch

(Gray et al., 2017). Thus, for Pokimane and other popular women streamers, toxicity is

likely a common occurrence because they represent a threat to the current social order.

Although PaladinAmber and Dexbonus are considered popular against the broader

backdrop of all streamers, given that Twitch averaged 6.9 million active streamers per

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[49] On March 2, 2021, Twitch published a document titled "Transparency Report 2020," the first document of this nature they have released. According to Twitch (2021), it "takes a hard look at how we think about safety; the product choices we made to create a safe space for all our communities, and how our safety staff, community moderators, and technological solutions help enforce the rules we set."

month in 2020 (TwitchTracker, 2021b), they do not receive the same visibility as Pokimane, nor do their audience sizes compare to hers. Thus, although all streamers who do not fit the gamer stereotype – cishet, young, white, and male – are at risk for toxic behavior as a result of their deviance from said stereotype (Gray, 2012), as a streaming icon, Pokimane receives the brunt of the abuse.

While PaladinAmber also receives sexualizing/objectifying and harassing comments, they occurred less frequently in the data, with only 44 of the 227 toxic utterances coded as *sexual* and only 16 coded as *harass*. This is most likely partially due to her smaller audience size, which diminishes not only the number of utterances posted in chat but also feelings of anonymity and online disinhibition. In addition, PaladinAmber's public moderation strategies underscore her community's norms and remind the audience that their behavior is being monitored, which will likely encourage viewers to abide by her rules, unless, of course, they are trolls and are purposefully disobeying the rules in the hopes that they will be publicly reprimanded by PaladinAmber.

In contrast to Pokimane and PaladinAmber is Dodger, who received no sexualizing/objectifying or harassing comments. Dodger is an outlier, with her community representing one of the "pockets of respectful and positive users" discussed by Kevin Lin, the head of Culture, Strategy, and Innovation at Twitch (Batchelor, 2017). Lin asserted that these streamers "have very carefully managed their community […] and communicated what they will allow in their channel. You'll find they're quite conversational, they're pleasant but it does take a lot of work as a broadcaster"

(Batchelor, 2017). As concluded in chapter six, the relative lack of toxicity in Dodger's community can largely be attributed to her explicit rules and strict moderation strategies, as discussed in the section on prevention and resistance strategies. Throughout her long tenure on Twitch, Dodger has developed effective methods of responding to toxicity and has nurtured a community that is committed to supported her and her values.

The one area in which Dodger has not been able to fully prevent misbehavior is backseating. Of the three streamers' chat data, only Dodger's was coded for backseating, as both Pokimane and PaladinAmber do not prohibit backseating and, at times, appreciate feedback from their viewers on game mechanics (although spoilers are still largely discouraged in terms of Twitch's social norms). Dodger's rules against backseating stand in contrast both to many other streamers' rules and with broader norms within gaming culture. Newman (2002) argues that secondary players – those who are "interested, engaged with the action, but not actually exerting direct control through the interface" – often perform active roles in gameplay and can be highly valued by primary players (those who are controlling the video game). Similarly, Taylor (2018) asserts that livestreaming spectators are a "part of the circuit of production *through* their engagement" (pp. 45-46) and thus are fundamental to livestreaming as a genre. By rejecting what is, for some, a natural part of gaming culture, Dodger asks her viewers to replace broader social norms with those of her community. It is, therefore, unsurprising that her viewers find this challenging. Dodger, however, seems to recognize this (see example 6.3), and instructs Purrbot and her channel moderators to offer ample reminders about her rules to prevent and reduce misbehavior.

The final type of toxicity – spam – occurred only in Pokimane's chat but was prevalent, according to her, due to the present of nefarious bots. As discussed in chapter six, bots can be used on Twitch in both beneficial[50] and harmful ways. Bots labeled as 'harmful' (and which also go against Twitch's Terms of Service) are typically used either by a streamer to artificially inflate their viewer or follower counts or by a viewer to harass a streamer, as in Pokimane's case. These bots post messages repetitiously to disrupt a streamer's chat and aggravate the streamer and their viewers. Such utterances are inherently toxic because they damage the viewer experience. Although bots are not required to produce spam, they are often an efficient vehicle for said behavior, as a streamer can easily reprimand or ban one user but faces a more substantial challenge when numerous bots are flooding their chat. In Pokimane's case, there are already thousands of users in her chat, making tracking and removing a handful of bots difficult.

While these four types of toxicity do not cover all of the ways in which users misbehaved in the data, they do signal major themes in toxicity on Twitch. That women gamers are targets by sexualizing, objectifying, and harassing comments is well-documented (e.g., Kubik, 2012; Nakandala et al., 2017; Paaßen et al., 2017; Shaw, 2012; Vanderhoef, 2013). The level of depravity (see example 6.4) may be surprising to those unfamiliar with Twitch; however, the examples of these types of toxicity represent just a small sample of what users are willing to say when they are uninhibited by elements of face-to-face conversation, such as eye contact and turn-taking procedures. The next section summarizes the role of online disinhibition in the production of toxic behavior.

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[50] See the section on prevention and resistance strategies for discussion on beneficial bots.

Online Disinhibition

Twitch affords users an "online sense of unidentifiability" that is "characterized by a lack of personal information (i.e., anonymity), lack of visibility, and lack of eye-contact" (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012, p. 440). Not only are users not required to create an account to watch livestreams, but should a user choose to create an account, they also are not required to supply any personal information apart from a valid email address. Furthermore, since viewers only participate in chat, they are not physically seen by other viewers or by the streamer, and, when participating in the chats of popular streamers, such as Pokimane, they may feel completely invisible to everyone else participating, as such chats sometimes move as unreadable speeds. Both elements contribute to online disinhibition – a lack of inhibition or reserve that results in toxic behavior. However, it was observed that the behavior of the three streamers examined in this project impacted viewers' levels of online disinhibition as well. One behavior that seemed to play a role was actively reading and responding to chat. Both PaladinAmber (examples 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.7) and Dodger (example 6.3) regularly engage with viewers in chat. They are quiet at times while they watch viewers post comments (so viewers witness them reading chat) and often read some comments aloud before responding to them. This is important engagement when it comes to reducing online disinhibition because viewers feel seen by the streamer. Even if a user's comment is not read aloud, it can be assumed that the streamer saw it because the streamer is engaging with others in the same space. Users are therefore less likely to post face-threatening messages or utterances that violate the streamer's rules because doing so will be witnessed by the streamer and likely punished.

In contrast, Pokimane does not appear to read her chat or respond to messages posted there. This appears to be both intentional and a product of the speed at which her chat moves, given the number of utterances posted per minute. Viewers in example 4.1 reported feeling 'ignored' and seemed resigned to the fact that Pokimane does not 'look at chat.' This may result in users feeling more disinhibited because, regardless of what they say, Pokimane will not see it. Furthermore, as example 4.2 shows, viewers do not see moderators playing an active role in Pokimane's chat; thus, her chat may be perceived as a 'free for all,' as neither the streamer nor moderators appear to be regulating user behavior. Regardless of whether this is true, this perception undoubtedly contributes to increased online disinhibition, hence the reason why Pokimane's chat experiences high levels of toxicity. While some viewers abide by Pokimane's rules and behavioral expectations as a result of their bonds with her community, the perceived lack of regulation may encourage many to ignore these parameters as well as any criticism of user behavior made by Pokimane (as seen in example 4.5) because there are no obvious repercussions for misbehavior.

This is not to say that Pokimane does not engage with her viewers. Rather, her engagement in the data for this project was mostly limited to interactions with users donating money to her, such as in example 4.5. However, even the donation messages she received were toxic at times, signaling a broader ideological approach to toxicity that is ineffective. Pokimane's decision to largely (but not always) ignore toxic users, which she discusses in her episode of the docuseries *Streaming IRL*, has resulted in unregulated user behavior marked by high levels of toxicity. As the data for Pokimane exemplifies,

streamer interaction with viewers is not only a fundamental aspect of livestreaming but a useful way of reducing toxicity stemming from online disinhibition. Of course, to conclusively determine the statistical impact of streamer interaction on online disinhibition and toxicity, a quantitative study capable of isolating those variables would be needed.

In addition to regular streamer interactions, PaladinAmber has reduced online disinhibition in her livestreams by engaging in public moderation. Her viewers understand that toxic behavior in her chat can result in being called out and publicly shamed for misbehavior, effectively reducing feelings of anonymity and invisibility. While her methods have earned her media attention, appear to have reduced levels of toxicity in her livestreams, and increased her popularity on Twitch, it is unlikely that public moderation, at least in PaladinAmber's fashion, will be adopted by most streamers as a strategy for reducing toxicity. Not only does PaladinAmber's approach require a level of brazenness, but it also will quickly become a part of a streamer's personal brand. PaladinAmber recognizes that she has become 'the news lady' (Grayson, 2019b) and that some viewers attend her livestreams to see her do these segments. To appease these viewers and maintain her following, she has made these segments a regular part of her livestreams, a concession that some streamers would be unwilling to make. Although it is unlikely that this strategy will start trending on Twitch though, its potential is undeniable, and other methods of public moderation should be explored to determine their effectiveness and how they can be applied more generally to livestreaming behavior.

While online disinhibition on livestreaming platforms cannot be prevented entirely, it appears that making viewers feel seen discourages such feelings and thus may contribute to a reduction in toxicity. When users know their messages are being seen by the streamer and other viewers, they may be less likely to engage in face-threatening behavior. Of course, in communities where toxicity is encouraged, either by the streamer, their community, or both, feelings of online disinhibition should not be constructed as solely responsible for such behavior, as behavioral imitation also likely plays a role. Behavioral imitation – when one observes a behavior, perceives it to align with the social norms of the space, and then mimics it (Seering et al., 2017; Wheeler, 1966) – can result in either prosocial behavior, as seen in Dodger's community, or antisocial behavior, as seen in Pokimane's community. When instances of toxicity go unregulated or unaddressed, users may assume that such behavior is acceptable and attempt to replicate it. A prime example of antisocial behavioral imitation is spam, which was most pervasive in Pokimane's community. Users see messages being copied and pasted in chat without consequences and begin to participate in the behavior themselves. Although Pokimane attributes much of the spam in her chat to bots, the spam in Pokimane's chat is unregulated in the data, contributing to user consensus that such behavior is acceptable.

Prosocial behavioral imitation is also more likely to occur in communities in which members feel strong attachment either to the community as a whole, to fellow members, or to both, such as in Dodger's chat. Viewers in Dodger's chat actively engage with one another and with Dodger in prosocial ways. There is a high level of phatic communication, signaling the value that viewers place on community relationships, and

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Dodger, channel moderators, and established community members model behavioral norms, which are then picked up by other viewers, reinforcing Dodger's community expectations and encouraging imitation. All of these aspects contribute to a significant reduction in online disinhibition and toxic behavior and speak to the ways in which streamers (and, in some cases, their channel moderators by extension) can actively shape their chat environment and broader community (Seering et al., 2017).

In addition to feeling seen and having prosocial behavior modeled for them, users are less likely to experience online disinhibition if a streamer's community is highly regulated. The regulation strategies utilized by the three streamers in this study are detailed in the next section.

Prevention and Resistance Strategies

The three streamers in this study utilize diverse methods of preventing and resisting toxic behavior in their livestreams. These strategies can be grouped into three categories: Twitch affordances, third-party tools, and human intervention and assistance. Each category is discussed in turn.

Twitch Affordances

As a service provider, Twitch is responsible for addressing the needs of its users, including ensuring that user behavior is legal and abides by the platform's Terms of Service and Community Guidelines. These parameters ban a variety of behaviors, including but not limited to hateful conduct, harassment, sexual harassment, terrorism, terrorist propaganda, sexual conduct, nudity, pornography, violence, gore, threats of extreme conduct, and spam. As the data for this project shows, however, some of these

behaviors occur regularly, in some cases without punishment. This is due to Twitch's affordances, including its approach to moderation and enforcement. According to Twitch (2021, Safety Philosophy section), "we try to make clear what expression and behavior are allowed on the service, and what is not. We then rely on community moderation actions and user reporting, along with technological solutions, such as machine learning and proactive detection, to ensure the Community Guidelines are upheld." Crucial here is Twitch's own admittance that they depend on streamers and their community to uphold the rules and users to report infractions, which is why streamers ultimately have control over the level of toxicity in their livestreams and why it is critical that streamers engage in proactive strategies to combat this behavior.

However, Twitch also remarks on the technological solutions that they have implemented to reduce misbehavior, including AutoMod, which was featured in chapter four. AutoMod prescreens all utterances posted in a streamer's chat and holds back messages that may not comply with Twitch's Community Guidelines until the streamer or their channel moderators reviews them, and Twitch recently reported that 71% of content viewed on Twitch occurred on channels that use AutoMod (Twitch, 2021). While AutoMod works best when streamers and/or their channel moderators are actively regulating chat, as the program learns from this regulatory behavior, allowing it to adapt its practices to the needs of individual streamers, it can also serve a vital function on its own, particularly when a streamer first starts their channel on Twitch and has yet to develop their own rules or enlist moderators. AutoMod has been programmed according to Twitch's Community Guidelines and can be used at five levels ranging from no

filtering to strict filtering, which helps streamers catch potentially toxic user behavior

before it is posted in chat to other viewers, ultimately ensuring that they abide by

Twitch's Terms of Service.[51]

Like all machine learning programs, AutoMod is limited by its nature as a speech

detection algorithm. In their discussion of the challenges involved with online automatic

approaches for hate speech detection, MacAvaney et al. (2019) argue that "automatic hate

speech detection is a closed-loop system; individuals are aware that it is happening, and

actively try to evade detection. […] It will be a constant battle between those trying to

spread hateful content and those trying to block it" (p. 13). Although programs like

AutoMod can easily detect slurs and other common instances of misbehavior as defined

by its training, humans can just as easily develop evasive tactics (such as those seen in

example 4.4), which make it difficult for bots to keep up with and accurately flag/remove

the speech being tracked. The fluid, constantly evolving nature of online speech forces

AutoMod and other similar speech detection programs to consistently retrain themselves,

learning from user and designer feedback on the utterances being selected/ignored to

determine what utterances should be flagged. This is only one of the many factors that led

Jhaver et al., (2019) to encourage the use of mixed-initiative regulation systems, which

require humans to work with automated systems rather than relying on one or the other.

Thus, for moderation to be truly effective on Twitch, humans (including streamers,

channel moderators, and Twitch employees) must work with AutoMod to regulate

behavior.

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[51] Twitch has been enforcing stricter punishments recently for streamers who do not regulate the content posted in their chat. In February 2021, a streamer was banned on Twitch for "unmoderated hateful content" in his chat (Lister, 2021).

Third-Party Tools

Twitch recognizes the importance of using both human and automated methods of regulation, which is why it advocates for the use of third-party tools in addition to AutoMod. One such tool relevant to this analysis is beneficial bots, like Moobot, a popular bot that can be integrated into the Twitch dashboard. Moobot (whom Dodger renamed Purrbot) posts customizable messages in a streamer's chat in response to prompts, which are expressed using an exclamation point before a trigger word, such as *!uptime*, which tells a user how long a streamer has been live. As chapter six shows, Moobot can be used to post reminders about a streamer's rules, as well as general information about the streamer and their community. Bots like Moobot alleviate some of the labor of streamers and can improve the viewing experience for users, as it allows them to easily get their questions answered and learn more about the community with which they are engaging. While streamers have diverse uses for Moobot, including advertising their sponsors or merchandise website and providing their livestreaming schedule, in terms of preventing rule breaking, beneficial bots help establish community norms for new viewers and remind returning viewers about behavior expectations. When a specific type of misbehavior occurs in chat, such as spam or backseating, the streamer or their channel moderators can prompt their bot to post a reminder about the rules, which not only addresses the offense in a non-face-threatening manner but also reduces the labor of the channel moderators. Like AutoMod, bots like Moobot can be customized to fit a streamer's needs. Both Pokimane and PaladinAmber used a similar bot called Nightbot, which has many of the same features. In contrast to Dodger though, Pokimane

used her bot mostly for self-promotion, including links to her sponsors, Discord server, and Twitter profile, while PaladinAmber took a more balanced approach, with a blend of self-promotion and general reminders about rules. This is in line with the three streamers' broader approaches to rules as well, as discussed in the next section.

In addition to beneficial bots, all three steamers expand the boundaries of their communities beyond Twitch by encouraging their members to engage with one another in other designated community spaces, such as on their Discord servers. Dodger's Discord server even has a special channel where users can engage in backseating behavior without fear of being reprimanded. For streamers, spaces like Discord provide community members with a place where they can interact with one another when the streamer is not live and engage in slower, more meaningful conversations with community members. Providing these spaces encourages the development of strong community bonds, which not only benefits the health and longevity of a streamer's community but also encourages rule-following and support for prosocial behavior. As chapter six shows, having alternative spaces for users to interact with one another aids the community as a whole and may contribute to a reduction in toxicity. Thus, although tools like AutoMod, Moobot, and Nightbot may have a more immediate impact on user behavior during a livestream, other third-party tools can also play an important role in developing communities that do not tolerate such behavior and therefore should not be overlooked.

Human Assistance and Intervention

Because most of the labor of regulating user behavior falls to streamers, the three streamers in this study have developed unique and individualized approaches to managing toxicity. Pokimane largely disregards the toxicity in her chat during the livestreams analyzed for this project.[52] This aligns with her assertion that toxic behavior should be ignored (Clayon, 2019) and may reduce the emotional labor of managing her unruly community. At the same time, Pokimane uses a text-to-speech program to read monetary donation messages aloud, meaning that users who donate money to her are rewarded by having their message recited to Pokimane and her viewers. These messages, which are quite toxic at times, cannot be ignored by Pokimane, and it is in those engagements that her perspective on toxicity is revealed (see example 4.5). Pokimane ultimately does not condone toxic behavior but is faced with the insurmountable task of moderating an audience averaging 20,000 people (as of early 2021) and thus has chosen to avoid addressing the issue almost entirely.

In contrast to Pokimane, PaladinAmber pays close attention to what users are posting in her chat, which, as discussed in a previous section, significantly reduces viewers' online disinhibition. Furthermore, while Pokimane's rules are limited to "1. Be meme, not mean. 2. No racism," PaladinAmber has slightly more detailed rules, which include no racism or excessive vulgarity, no links to inappropriate content, use English in chat, respect one another, and be inclusive. Like Pokimane, however, these rules are

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[52] Since the data was collected, Pokimane has adjusted her approach to livestreaming, including chat moderation, although her personal brand is largely the same. She has even posted a video to her YouTube channel in which she reviews users' ban appeals. Unfortunately, this extends beyond the bounds of this project and thus is addressed as a limitation in the next section.

vague, which may make it difficult for users to determine the norms and expectations of PaladinAmber's community. While her breaking news segments and other acts of public moderation quickly make it clear to users what behavior is not allowed, as Dodger's community shows, having explicit rules that include examples and consequences for misbehavior makes it easier for new viewers to adapt to the community's expectations and understand the social parameters of the space. Therefore, a key recommendation for streamers who seek to reduce toxicity in their communities is to establish well-defined rules. This could be as simple as linking to Twitch's Community Guidelines, which were revised in 2020 to include descriptions and examples of prohibited behavior. However, Twitch asserts that "safety should also be a reflection of the creator" (Twitch, 2021, Channel-Level Safety section). Thus, adapting said guidelines to fit the personality of the streamer would likely be the most effective method of implementing rules regarding viewer and community behavior.

For these rules to have a meaningful impact, however, they must be prominently displayed and easily accessible. Dodger includes a link to a webpage with her rules in the "About" section of her Twitch channel and advertises them in a pop-up message the first time a viewer opens her chat. She also employs Moobot, discussed above, and her channel moderators to post reminders about her rules, and these reminders play a prominent and consistent role in her chat data, occurring significantly more often than in PaladinAmber's chat data, while Pokimane did not post any reminders about her rules. This pattern significantly reduces opportunities for viewers to make excuses for their

behavior, including claiming that they were unaware of the rules. Thus, ensuring that users are aware of the rules should be a priority for streamers looking to reduce toxicity.

While bots like Moobot and Nightbot are easy methods of providing such reminders, they are not programmed to regulate misbehavior when it occurs. This is where the most fundamental aspect of reducing and preventing toxicity comes in – channel moderators. Channel moderators, as discussed in chapter six, are members of a streamer's community who are given special permissions by the streamer that allow them to regulate user behavior in the streamer's chat. While the primary role of moderators is to enforce a streamer's rules, moderators "play many roles, from welcoming new viewers to the channel, to answering questions, to modeling and enforcing community standards" (Twitch, 2021, Channel-Level Safety section). As chapter six shows, at their best, moderators function as devoted community members invested in the health and safety of their streamer's community. Dodger's moderators blend regulation with general interaction with other viewers, while also making themselves available to answer questions and, if needed, settle disputes (see examples 6.5 and 6.6). In this way, they exemplify strong bond attachment (Ren et al., 2007) and position themselves as pillars of the community, which encourages viewers to model their behavior. While not all streamers have community members who are willing to serve as moderators or communities large enough to generate credible and reliable moderators, streamers should attempt to enlist channel moderators whenever possible. Because moderators are often

volunteers, streamers should also keep in mind the labor involved in human moderation[53] and endeavor to reward moderators when appropriate and possible.

While it is impossible to detail all of the aspects that contribute to prosocial livestreaming communities and low levels of toxicity, the three streamers in this study demonstrate a blend of popular and unique methods for regulating viewer behavior and encouraging users to abide by the social norms of their communities. Individual streamers will undoubtedly need to test strategies in their own communities to determine what methods best fit their personal brand, but some, such as AutoMod, channel moderators, and explicit rules, stand out as straightforward tools for framing behavioral expectations and reducing toxic behavior. In the next section, the limitations of this project are considered, along with several suggestions for future research.

Project Limitations[54] and Suggestions for Future Research

In early 2021, Twitch saw an average of 120,000 concurrent livestreams (TwitchTracker, 2021b). In contrast, this project examines just three streamers, and the data for each is isolated to two livestreams and their accompanying chat logs (three streamers x two livestreams = six video files and six chat logs) for a total of 30 hours of video data and 132,502 utterances from viewers. The scope of this project, therefore, must be considered when considering the generalizability of the findings. As with all case-study endeavors, generalizability may be hypothesized but must be thoroughly tested using a quantitative approach to a representative sample. The streamers selected for this project are also all popular, established videogame streamers with sizeable

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[53] See Wohn (2019) for a detailed discussion on moderators and their emotional labor.

[54] Additional methodological limitations are addressed in chapter three.

audiences. Given the diversity of streamer categories on Twitch and the inevitable differences between streamers with small versus large audiences, it is unwise to assume that their experiences parallel those of other Twitch streamers. Thus, while this project examines the nuances of three women streamers' individual experiences with toxicity on Twitch, a logical next step in this style of research would be to determine whether the conclusions noted here reflect the experiences of other women streamers, other underrepresented groups, and/or more broadly of Twitch streamers in general. Likewise, to determine the effectiveness of the methods utilized by the streamers in this project, a mixed methods approach incorporating statistical analysis and interview data with streamers would be necessary.

Furthermore, constraints of time and resources necessitated a case-study approach to the data resulting in three distinct chapters that isolated the experiences of each streamer and relegated broader conclusions regarding similarities and differences to this final chapter. This approach was intentional, as the focus of this project was to examine the nuances of these streamers' experiences rather than make overarching claims. However, with the unused portion of the dataset from this project, which originally included 43 livestreams from six women streamers for a total of 394 hours of video data, this project could be expanded in future stages to present a more comprehensive analysis that is focused on overarching similarities and themes, as such conclusions would carry more weight when it comes to addressing user behavior and platform policies and affordances more broadly.

Finally, the timespan of this project inevitably impacts the accuracy of the findings. Livestreaming is an ever-evolving digital practice. Not only has Twitch as a platform implemented changes since the data was collected in June and August 2018, but the streamers themselves have changed as well. While the researcher has remained connected with the three streamers' communities since the data collection period, investigated changes put in place by the platform, and included details pertaining to events outside the data collection, the data itself has aged. Thus, readers must keep in mind that the streamers may have adapted their approaches to managing toxicity since the data was collected and contextualize all conclusions within the time frame in which the data was collected.

Concluding Remarks

This project expands current conceptions of toxic behavior and how it manifests on the livestreaming platform Twitch. By examining how three women streamers – Pokimane, PaladinAmber, and Dexbonus – and their communities experience and respond to toxicity, this project brings crucial visibility to this issue and considers the ways in which variables such as streamer interaction, use of channel moderators, and strength of community bonds impact the levels of toxic behavior in a streamer's community. As the American news media and previous academic scholarship have proven, toxicity remains a pervasive and challenging issue on Twitch. Grounded in feelings of online disinhibition, toxic behavior has historically been accepted as part of the viewing experience on Twitch. However, more recently, Twitch and nonprofit organizations like AnyKey have been challenging this status quo and encouraging

streamers and Twitch users more broadly to take an active role in curbing this trend. Because Twitch functions as a service provider and therefore has limited control over user behavior, it has invested heavily in tools designed to support streamers and channel moderators and platform enforcement strategies in the form of user reporting and machine detection. Largely though, the labor of regulating user behavior and preventing toxicity falls on streamers, hence the focus of this study.

The analysis revealed diverse approaches to this issue. While all three streamers expressed that they neither liked nor approved of toxic behavior, their methods of addressing it varied greatly, from Pokimane's choice to ignore the thousands of viewers posting in her chat, which resulted in an unregulated overflow of toxicity, to PaladinAmber's artful breaking news segments, in which she admonished users directly for misbehaving in her chat. Because regulating user behavior is inherently intertwined with the success and health of a streamer's community, streamers much approach this issue carefully to determine how behavior regulation fits into their personal brand and how they can implement rules and regulation in a way that their community finds natural and acceptable. Streamers that are too lenient may find themselves in uncontrollably toxic communities, while streamers that are too strict may impede their community's ability to grow or even survive. Thus, the methods outlined in the previous chapters should be positioned as products of careful forethought and likely trial and error.

Moving forward, research on this issue would benefit from examining how streamers talk about the issue of toxicity on Twitch. Thus far, much of the scholarship on this project has used livestreaming data as a source for its conclusions, leaving the

perspective of the streamer unexplored. Partnering with Twitch or with streamers directly would allow for a level of insight previously untapped and could potentially address important questions that, as of this moment, remain unanswered. How do streamers select their methods of regulating user behavior? How to they perceive and use AutoMod, and how would they improve this program? What strategies or initiatives would they like to see implemented on Twitch to prevent toxicity? What types of support would they find most beneficial when it comes to managing user behavior? Because the most popular streamers have reached celebrity status, it may be difficult to reach them. However, there are many opportunities for reaching mid-tier streamers, including attending TwitchCon, engaging with streamer organizations and groups, or simply reaching out to streamers via social media or email. Thus, the potential for exploring this issue from multiple angles is there, given enough time and resources.

Ultimately, toxicity will continue to be an issue as long as users feel uninhibited and the consequences for misbehavior are minimal. Thus, it becomes the burden of users to regulate one another, demand accountability, and call upon platforms to create and enforce standards of behavior that are inclusive. Content creators, including streamers, who challenge toxicity through explicit rules, transparent regulation, and the use of technological and human moderation should be praised for their efforts and given space to voice their concerns and needs. Platforms like Twitch should cultivate support structures to alleviate some of the regulatory labor placed on content creators and implement policies that hold all users – creators and viewers – accountable for their behavior. As more scholarly and media attention is given to this issue, additional

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opportunities for positive change will inevitably present themselves, allowing for new

and creative approaches to managing toxicity to emerge with the hopes of one day

bringing this issue under control.

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APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF ANALYTIC CODES

Streamer	Primary Code	Subordinate Code	N (Stream 1)	N (Stream 2)	N (Total)
Pokimane	toxicity	spam	2064	93	2157
Pokimane	toxicity	sexual	263	251	514
Dexbonus	moderation	Purrbot	93	201	294
Pokimane	toxicity	harass	173	99	272
Pokimane	discussion	commentary	82	151	233
Pokimane	moderation	moderate	83	83	166
PaladinAmber	discussion	response	57	72	129
PaladinAmber	toxicity	caps	44	75	119
Dexbonus	toxicity	backseating	78	22	100
Dexbonus	moderation	moderate	68	18	86
PaladinAmber	discussion	commentary	69	14	83
Pokimane	toxicity	white knight	64	15	79
PaladinAmber	discussion	exchange	40	39	79
Dexbonus	discussion	community	61	15	76
PaladinAmber	moderation	rules	40	31	71
Pokimane	toxicity	sellout	46	23	69
Pokimane	toxicity	gender	34	32	66
Dexbonus	discussion	commentary	53	10	63
PaladinAmber	moderation	community	41	10	51
Pokimane	toxicity	troll	10	29	39
PaladinAmber	toxicity	repeat offender	33	5	38
Pokimane	toxicity	dating	0	35	35
PaladinAmber	discussion	gender/sexuality	26	8	34
PaladinAmber	toxicity	sexual	16	14	30
PaladinAmber	discussion	praise	17	10	27
PaladinAmber	moderation	moderate	15	12	27

Pokimane	discussion	toxic	15	8	23
Pokimane	toxicity	scam	16	6	22
PaladinAmber	discussion	feet	21	1	22
PaladinAmber	discussion	reference	11	9	20
Pokimane	toxicity	tech	0	19	19
Pokimane	toxicity	private	3	15	18
PaladinAmber	toxicity	personal	13	3	16
PaladinAmber	discussion	advice	10	3	13
Pokimane	toxicity	legs	0	12	12
Pokimane	toxicity	race	6	6	12
Pokimane	toxicity	virgin	9	3	12
PaladinAmber	toxicity	feet	2	8	10
PaladinAmber	toxicity	gaming	9	1	10
PaladinAmber	discussion	thirsty	5	5	10
Pokimane	toxicity	pepega	8	0	8
PaladinAmber	moderation	feet	8	0	8
PaladinAmber	moderation	bath	7	0	7
PaladinAmber	toxicity	bath	4	0	4
PaladinAmber	discussion	bath	1	0	1
Total	3	40	3718	1466	5184

APPENDIX B

CODES, DEFINING CRITERIA, AND EXAMPLES FOR POKIMANE'S CHAT

DATA

SUBORDINATE CODE	Defining Criteria	Example
spam	Repetitive messages	"🐸👉☑️ MALDNESS 🐸👉☑️ MALDNESS 🐸👉☑️ […]"
sexual	Sexual or objectifying comments	"I would lick your armpits"
harass	Utterances that berate, rebuke, or inappropriately criticize	"fuck u poki"
commentary	Observations made regarding the livestream	"what does one need to do to get banned here"
moderate	Attempts to moderate user behavior	"chat stfuuuuuuuuu"[a]
white knight[b]	Comments that reference users who seek to protect Pokimane from toxic behavior	"haHAA WHITEKNIGHT DONO haHAA"
sellout	References to streamer inauthenticity, particularly in relation to brand deals, ads, or other types of sponsored content	"This stream is the biggest sellout i ever seen, don't know why i even still following it"
gender	References to Pokimane's gender or to gender stereotypes	"lmao just hold her[c] back with one hand"
troll	Utterances that seek to disrupt the livestream or cause conflict	"I'm going to stream snipe you"
dating	References to Pokimane's relationship status	"are you and TSM_myth girlfiend and boyfriend"
toxic	Comments labeling the livestream as 'toxic'	"poki's chat is toxc"
scam	Messages that are intended to swindle or defraud users	"You have been gifted a subscription! Type "claim" to redeem your reward!"
tech	Remarks about the quality of Pokimane's technology	"Imagine investing in your stream just to use shit hardware 😬"
private	Utterances that divulge private	"my wife left me 😊"

SUBORDINATE CODE	Defining Criteria	Example
	information about the user and that are inappropriate given the context	
legs	Comments about Pokimane's legs	"look at those sexy legs"
race	References to race or racism	"are u asian or something?"
virgin	Remarks about specific users being virgins, as a justification for their behavior	"This chat is full of virgins 🐸"
pepega	Use of the term 'pepega,' a euphemism for 'retarded'	"🔨 🐸[d] POKI COMING THRU 🔨 🐸 POKI COMING THRU […]"

[a] 'Stfu' means 'shut the fuck up.'

[b] White knights are not viewed positively on Twitch. They are often constructed as individuals who feel the need to defend women, even when those women do not need to be defended, which reinforces the stereotype that women are weak.

[c] 'Her' in this instance refers to Pokimane.

[d] This is the pepega emote.