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Rethinking Discourse Communities in the Digital Age: The Effects of Streaming on Discourse of Gaming Communities

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RETHINKING DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE EFFECTS OF

STREAMING ON DISCOURSE OF GAMING COMMUNITIES

by

RUSSELL BEASON

Under the Direction of George Pullman, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis applies of John Swales' theory of discourse community (DC) to online streaming sites—a context that creates what this thesis defines as a *streamed-discourse community*—while examining the context of online streamed discussions, and why they are relevant to rhetorical barriers to digital community building within composition/rhetoric scholarship, especially discourse community research such as Swales' that considers how discourse within a group can create distinct types of communities and social activities.

INDEX WORDS: Discourse Community, John Swales, Communities, Rhetoric, online gaming, rhetoric and online gaming

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my dad who helped me take a vague idea and turn it into something I can be proud of.

And to my girlfriend and her amazing patience for putting up with me as I took far too long to write this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

F2F: Face-to-face
DC: Discourse Community
MMG: Massively Multiplayer Games

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Understanding What a Community is

The meaning of community can vary from one culture to another but, "it derives from the same Latin root as *common: communis,* meaning, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "fellowship, community of relations or feelings" (Levinson xxxvii). In an academic collection *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World* David Levinson explains that "medieval Latin used *communis* to mean 'a body of fellows or fellow-townsmen'" (xxxvii).

In the broadest terms, *community* nowadays is a sense of commonality amongst a group. This suggests that almost any group can conceivably be a community as long as they share some belief, history, values, etc.—a meaning so flexible and expansive that it might seem arbitrary. However, Levinson goes on to state that:

> Absolute definitions are not necessary; it may be the fluidity of a core concept that makes it so useful. A community may be thought of as a geographical place, shared hobbies or interests, a warm sense of togetherness, interaction in a common space such as a chat room, and so forth. (xxxvii)

For this thesis's purposes, a flexible definition of *community* is worth noting, for it helps differentiate a discourse community as a specific category of community. Members of a traditional community share a location, and when a member leaves the location, they are also leaving the community. Most often DCs can be composed of people who live in different parts of the world, often only sharing a linguistic space and a set of overlapping goals.

Our current idea about rhetorical discourse as a function of community organization and building come from Athens. While public speaking was a primary means of community building, the community it spoke for did exclude women. Understanding and acknowledging this

exclusion is important in order to not replicate an ancient error by again failing to grasp the importance of gender within community building and development. Women were often part of the larger community, but at the same time, in many ways, they were excluded from the political community, especially in some sub-communities. While male citizens formed much of the public sphere, such as the political sub-community. Biesecker explains that "Athenian women were not permitted to participate in the social, cultural, economic, and political arenas of Athenian life in the same ways or to the same degree that their men counterparts did." Laws prevented women from directly participating in politics and preventing them from public office, voting, and serving as jurors or soldiers (99). Furthermore, laws prohibited women, children, slaves, and foreigners from participating or holding office, excluding them from the community. While not to the same extent as outright exclusion from participating within a community, we still, to this day, can witness exclusion or different treatment of women within certain communities. For this thesis, we can see this within the gaming community in the form of sexist remarks, being treated differently, or on the more radical side (GamerGate) actual exclusion through the argument that gaming companies need to focus on pleasing their male customers instead of trying to be inclusive towards female customers.

Section 1.3 elaborates on specific criteria defining a discourse community. Still, an example here might clarify the overall concept and show how it applies to academic or workplace groups and everyday life. In his analysis of one discourse community, Skalicky asserts that even people who post product reviews on Amazon.com form a discourse community, whether intentionally or otherwise. By evaluating products in a way considered helpful by Amazon's readers and users, reviewers share common goals, fitting the aforementioned definition of "community." Most importantly, Skalicky demonstrates how this group depends on

specialized discourse conventions to form and maintain the community, creating a discourse community dependent on language in general but also on these linguistic conventions. For instance, an expected pattern of language use among reviewers includes the following:

- authoring product reviews that require a five-star rating system,

- commenting and voting (whether the review is helpful or not) on other members' assessments of products, and

- discourse among reviews that can take place on separate discussion boards on Amazon.com.

Such discourse norms are essential to forming the community and, as Skalicky argues, reflect "implicit and explicit values of the Amazon discourse community" (85). As Skalicky also demonstrates, a discourse community can evolve to include groups that partially or wholly dependent on digital communication, especially on the internet.

One such group conducive to establishing a discourse community is comprised of people who play video games. Some have an online option of fighting against or along with other gamers. Indeed, many games are played exclusively online. Even more might be played offline but became the basis of online gaming forums and websites, allowing players to interact and communicate about the game. Papia Bawa offers one of several studies revealing how these digital activities can create a discourse community. She focuses on the popular genre of online "massively multiplayer games" (MMGs) and points out this specialized group's linguistic conventions. These conventions, in fact, are so crucial to forming and maintaining their online community that novice players can reveal their "newbie" status by their lack of familiarity with their specialized language choices that have non-conventional meanings, such as "own" and "negotiate" (Bawa 13).

MMGs might be the most extreme example of gamers forming a sizable community in digital environments, but they are not alone in the online gaming community. Members of the gaming community, or "gamers" (though this term has fallen out of favor amongst many members of the community by appropriation by both large video game companies as well as 'influencers'), devote much of their free time to video games—not just to gameplay but to engage with other players, be it for a simple discussion of games online such as rumors or game development, new trends (as in strategies for gameplay), and new gaming technology. These groups of players come together to communicate in ways that go beyond merely being functional and incidental. Bogost explains:

> Video gameplay could be understood as a "community of practice," a name Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger have given to a common social situation around which people collaborate to develop ideas. In this sense, the people who play video games develop values, strategies, and approaches to the practice of play itself. For example, a large group of Animal Crossing players contribute to an online community called Animal Crossing Community (ACC for short) to discuss the game, share things they've made, find strategies, or look up different fish's value insects, or furniture. Within this community, as in all communities, cultural values develop, both by design and by evolution. (119)

Bogost's explanation showcases how gaming can evolve into a community activity centered around the in-group discourse. Or, as described in another article, video gaming "has all the potential to be the medium of a specific discourse community, a community of practice or even a virtual learning community" (Kehus, Walters, and Shaw 68). This same article states that a virtual discourse community is a DC (discourse community) in which members can conduct

public discussions (typically via forums or sites such as Discord) long enough and with enough human feeling that personal relationships form within the cyberspace. Thus, a virtual group becomes a virtual DC once members first are able to gain a sense of unity through interaction amongst members through discourse tailored for their common goals, fulfilling the requirements for a DC (69).

DCs by definition have tacit or explicit procedures, guidelines, hierarchies, and language choices that create a community that forefronts members' discussions. And because the discussion is typically focused on the topics of gaming or gameplay, members can gain more knowledge and insight about these matters. By having tacit or explicit guidelines (which I will explain in detail shortly), the DC can go beyond the traditional rhetorical situation that defines other groups or communities because DC members have built-in mechanisms for discourse that can facilitate clearer communication. As one professional writer explains while describing benefits of DCs in varied writing situations, their focus on a common topic and their discourses about it have multiple benefits because of shared linguistic assumptions among "people who share the same language":

> Understanding discourse community extends beyond simply knowing your audience and purpose—it means understanding what words to use, how to frame those words into units (sentences, paragraphs, etc.), and what information is already possessed by community members. (Mascle)

No doubt, any community will eventually engage in discourse about a shared topic or interest, but a key difference between a DC and a non-DC community involves a focused vs. an open-ended purpose. A DC has a stated and focused purpose—such as sharing techniques and recipes for a DC made up of bakers—that unifies the group around this purpose, and it has discourse

norms that facilitate members' understandings of the topic. A non-DC community can also result in greater understandings, but without specialized conventions for how their discourse proceeds toward meeting a specific and all-controlling goal that regulates group interactions, a conventional community is perhaps too open-ended in terms of what the results of their discussions might be.

Most studies investigating discourse communities among gamers focus on groups who are playing together, online but sometimes offline (as in the same physical room). However, as my analysis will show, other types of gaming discourse communities exist besides those devoted to gameplay, such as on websites devoted to the discussion and viewing a single player's gameplay synchronously streamed on a website for the group. As my analysis will demonstrate, such digital websites are conducive in many ways to forming a discourse community because, to compensate for group-bonding mechanisms one might find in face-to-face settings (e.g., eating and drinking together, these gamers depend on discourse and their own specialized conventions for language. These sites might be favorable for constructing discourse communities. Still, it is important to recognize the disadvantages the online gamers have in constructing a discourse community, or a community at all.

1.2   Understanding Digital Communities

Thanks to the internet, a global audience and the ability to be an anonymous participant within an overall gaming community, social and geographical barriers have shrunk for gamers. Indeed, as I myself have encountered, it is easy sometimes to not realize that you are chatting online about a game with someone in, say, Scotland. Even with this opportunity for widespread communication and potential for diverse group members, new "digital-based" barriers exist that can forestall, prevent, or dismantle an online community. The problems can lead to members

creating their own sub-communities within or outside the group. Such splintering often reflects negative feelings toward some or most of the original DC, not helping at all to preserve the broader online gaming community.

These digital-based barriers include ways in which existing biases and preconceptions of people and certain groups of people can affect the idea of an "online gaming community." One bias I observed appeared so often I examined it closely: representations of gender, females in particular, found in the chat discourse located within virtually all streaming websites focusing on one person's gameplay. Perhaps not surprisingly, the rhetoric of gender, which is a major concern in contemporary rhetoric/composition scholarship, can be an impediment to developing a community of any sort. Scholars in various disciplines have long studied the role of gender and the representation of females in gaming. Yet the interest in this complicated subject shows no signs of going away.

As Cassell and Jenkins explain, media and society often consider video games to be "a boy's activity" (194). In fact, media and scholars have ridiculed the gaming community for perpetuating misogynistic tendencies. These sexist predispositions usually come in the form of chauvinistic portrayals and constructions of women within video games, often with the excuse that "guys are the main audience." Thus, it is not just the general public that views video games as being "a boy's activity," but also large portions of the gaming community itself. Furthermore, the gaming community has faced such accusations for certain sub-communities such as GamerGate on Reddit using the hashtag GamerGate. GamerGate is a forum that believes developers should base games on traditional male values (Massanari). GamerGate is the most known example exemplifying these accusations. Peaking in the years 2014–16, GamerGate is a community of men gamers on Reddit and Twitter. They claim that, because there are so many

male gamers, companies should design games for heterosexual men at the cost of objectifying women (e.g., scantily clad women characters). Too often, the games themselves encourage objectification through the portrayal and roles of females within the games, and the some parts of online gaming community such as GamerGate offers little respite from the traditional portrayal of women as being heavily sexualized and relegated to support roles for male characters.

Some studies (e.g., Nardi) reveal that many women gamers choose not to identify their gender or identity online. Nardi goes on to explain that, when females do indicate their gender in an online forum, their fellow gamers will more often than not switch from discourse about the game to discussing the women gamer herself in a way diverts the conversation from gaming to social or interpersonal matter. In a manner reminiscent of a friend asking about how one is doing, the discourse will become more friendly rather than focused on gaming. While group bonding is important, the bonding in these friendly situations is not about bonding over selected individuals' common gaming interests but more about wanting to connect with the female gamer or gain her attention.

Other barriers to productive communication and group-bonding within a forum or chat box exist—which I will explore in subsequent research. Currently, my analysis focuses on one game-streaming website (Twitch) and specific channels in which a gamer streams his/her gameplay. At the same time, viewers watch and are able to provide discourse for the group and the person playing a game.

In 1986, compositionist Joseph Harris notes that the term "community" is a contested word in terms of meaning being "so vague and suggestive" (15). While he has issues also with the meaning of "discourse community," the model proposed by Swales and others after Harris's article appeared have helped clarify the concept enough though. My thesis will show, a focus on

Swales' six criteria for a DC can lead to an analysis of a community that is based on a mechanism that rhetoric and composition scholars know well—the use of language to construct meaning and to reflect the values and culture of a group.

1.3   Understanding Discourse Communities

As Erik Borg observes, "the concept of discourse communities developed from the concepts of a speech community and interpretive community, and sits somewhat uneasily between them" (398). Borg draws on linguists such as Hymes to explain that a speech community is a group of people, or a community, grouped together by their language use as different from other language users (Hymes). One such example involves American English and British English. Both Americans and British speak English, yet there are sufficient differences to separate the two language variants, along with their speakers. In regard to this thesis, such language use may take the form of gaming terminology. Many terms can carry over no matter what the focus for a game, but there exist some terms or words that will have a different meaning depending on the community's focus. The simplest example of this is the word 'psychic.' In most genres psychic can mean to manifest powers of the mind; however, in a community that focuses upon *Warhammer 40,000* psychic means to tap upon the powers of an entirely different dimension. However, interpretive communities are not as linguistically exclusive, being able to have multiple languages in common. Speech communities refer to an open community of people focused upon sharing "ways of reading texts, primarily literary texts; this term, therefore, highlights the social derivation of interpretation" (Borg 398).

Discourse communities stand somewhere between both speech and interpretive communities, being a hybrid of the two. DCs possess qualities of both, such as with a common language but also the use of a specific lexis, as well as not being linguistically exclusive as seen

in interpretive communities; though, unlike interpretive communities there is not as much of a focus on sharing "ways of reading texts." Furthermore, "unlike a speech community, membership of a discourse community is usually a matter of choice; unlike an interpretive community, members of a discourse community actively share goals and communicate with other members to pursue these goals" (Borg 398). However, there is an additional trait typically associated with DCs: a focus on the use and guidelines for communication within the community.

In 1990, John Swales published his landmark article "Discourse Communities, Genres and English as an International Language," in which he writes that "in a discourse community, the discourse creates the community" (212). That notion forms the basis of his assertion that not all communities have this distinctive role of language in their formation and evolution. Swales offers a list of oft-quoted criteria in order for a community to be a discourse community. These criteria are important to my analysis and adaptation to streaming communities, specifically what is one of the best-known websites (Twitch).

Linguist John Swales' work served as the theoretical framework for this thesis. His theory and analysis of DCs is still used to study diverse contexts (e.g., Barton and McCulloch). My thesis demonstrates how his framework is relevant in this digital age in communities outside of the business, academic, or professional worlds—contexts that focus on most scholarship—as well as how Swales' approach might be updated for streamed DCs.

The abovementioned article by Swales serves as the basis for my establishing and examining what DCs entail. In brief, Swales proposes the concept of a discourse community as a goal-directed grouping that sets it aside from ordinary communities (or as he refers to them,

"speech fellowships"). He provides six criteria for what defines and distinguishes a discourse

community:

1. A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.

2. A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its

   members.

3. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide

   information and feedback.

4. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the

   communicative furtherance of its aims.

5. In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired a specific

   language.

6. A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree

   of relevant content and discoursal expertise. (212)

 In explaining these criteria and the notion of a DC, Swales states that his goal is to

"examine that concept's potential for developing insight into the relationships between texts,

text-roles, and text-environments in the modern professional world" (213). In the years after this

article, other scholars have written much about DCs. Like Swales, they emphasize the DC's

place within a professional environment, mostly face-to-face rather than digital contexts.

James Porter published "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community" prior to Swales'

1990 article. Porter's article, as its titles suggest, links a theory of intertextuality to DCs. In

addition to drawing on Swales, my thesis considers Porter, who places a stronger emphasis on

the notion of common interests than Swales does. While Swales does suggest there is a level of

common interests (e.g., a DC of engineers at NASA), Porter emphasizes them in several ways,

such as specifying these interests (e.g., NASA engineers who focus on alternative approaches to chemical propulsion). The language for Porter's specific DC will undoubtedly share similar trends as the Swales' more general group. However, as Porter underscores one particular topical focus, there may be language trends common under Swales' but are not necessary within the more specialized group. This is to say, the "Porter specific" DC will use some of the same language but notably different words and explanations reflecting members' specialized emphasis. In the context of my proposed project, Porter's take on DCs results in how I analyze channels that have a particularly specific interest: specific games and the applied gameplay of a Twitch streamer.

The study of DCs for all intents and purposes seems to have peaked by 2020 in rhetoric/composition studies, as in the last decade, there seem to be fewer published works that use his framework. Wac.colostate.edu's database showed 42 publications with "Discourse Community" as a keyword published throughout the 1990s. The same database showed 8 results for the previous ten years (2010-2020).

When DCs are studied, scholars typically apply the theory to professional or business communities. Admittedly, this is a crucial area Swales identified. Even so, one can find other theory applications, such as to the tabletop game *Magic the Gathering* (as seen in Rodolfo Barrett's thesis). However, relatively few scholarly works focus on applying DC theory to digital, online groups, especially to the increasing ways in which gaming fosters online communities. One exception is "Definition and Genesis" by Marcella Kehus, Melanie Shaw, and Kelley Walters. Their article focuses on explaining how the internet and its common use in everyday life allows and even encourages the development of online DCs, in large part due to social networking websites.

Swales' conception of a DC recognizes that membership changes over time, but is for the most part stable, with the majority of members being constant. This thesis presents the idea of a streamed DC—an amendment to Swales' theory of DCs. Regarding membership, in a streamed DC group membership is in near-constant flux. This flux is not necessarily an impediment to forming a group identity and a community, as more established members may welcome newcomers to this community. What aids in setting apart a streamed DC from Swales' DC (herein referred to as a traditional DC) is the reliance upon what I refer to as *discourse-driven communication*. Discourse is, of course, a significant part of a traditional DC, but its discourse is what I call *action-driven*. Members are able to take part in the subject matter as a community easily; however, the very nature of a streamed DC prevents this engagement of the community because normally only one member (the streamer) is playing a video game at the time the gameplay is streamed online. The result is inter-group communication will more often be discourse driven within a streamed DC than being driven by the activity of members playing a game.

1.4   Video Games as a Social Activity

For scholarly purposes, it is important to establish what might be common knowledge in a general but not specific sense: how prominent gaming and social media are in society, especially American culture. Social media and online games are steadily competing with offline social activities and entertainment in terms of popularity, especially with younger Americans. The two (social media and online games) have become an everyday part of many people's lives. According to the gaming-journalism website Polygon, 63% of U.S. households include at least one frequent gamer. In 2019, women made up 46% of gamers, while men made up 54% (Gough). Some 47% of gamers are between 18 and 49 years of age, with the average male being

35 and the average woman 44. The popularity of gaming is a part of our culture, making it worthwhile for composition/rhetoric scholarship to continue considering these matters, especially when attending to the cultural and social factors that affect discourse relevant to video games. In addition to game-related articles appearing in composition/rhetoric journals and books (e.g., Biesecker), several scholarly journals are devoted to or normally include video-game studies. These include *Games and Culture*, *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, and *Computer Games Journal*. The popularity of gaming and scholarly interest in it seems a direct consequence of what is happening in our society and around the globe. Indeed, with the coronavirus pandemic affecting the world at the time of this writing, online providers' reports indicate that online gaming increased by 75% in just a week during a recent quarantine (Verizon).

In the 1990s, internet allowed the creation of a new genre of multiplayer games based *entirely* around the premise of playing with other players in different geographical locations. These games took the notion of communication developed for older games even further, largely out of the necessity of players needing to understand another player's logistics when working with (or against) other players. Furthermore, the ever-growing popularity of video games resulted in a spectator sport known as "e-sports"—another highly social form of gaming and communication because spectators, like fans of other sports, created their own forums for discussing and debating "e-athletes" who play games in front of a virtual or physical audience.

Just as video games have become a form of communicative interaction, they are no longer simply restricted to computers or consoles such as the PlayStation or Xbox. We can now play them on a cell phone (something nearly always close at hand for most people in developed countries in particular). Thanks to the internet and the wider availability of games, they have

become a widely broadcasted and viewed form of social interaction, whether done through YouTube or specialized streaming services such as Twitch that are largely devoted to broadcasting gameplay and gaming forums. One can find such communities on Twitch, YouTube, Discord, along with text-based forums such as Reddit and Gamespot.

I will focus on Twitch, one of the most popular platforms for streaming and watching a gamer's video gameplay is Twitch (www.twitch.tv). There are over 15 million daily users of Twitch, including both viewers and streamers (Smith). Here, gamers stream can stream their gameplay as well as communicate with viewers in real-time. Especially important for my focus on discourse communities, Twitch enables written communication (chat texting) between viewers and a streamer (or between viewers) through a chat room or chat box on each streamer's personal channel. A Twitch channel is not unlike a traditional television channel associated with a specific network that hosts different shows; the difference is that instead of a network, the channel is associated with a specific gamer sharing his/her gameplay of a specific game. Furthermore, instead of hosting different television shows created by a variety of developers, the host on the Twitch channel is the owner, although sometimes they have guests or other streamers who might stream their gameplay. Often, a channel is associated with only one game, but others might vary the host's choice of a game. While streamers can post in the chat, it is far more common for a streamer to talk directly to viewers via an audio-enabled webcam. Thus, streamers rely on their oral discourse, while viewers use text-based messaging displayed on the channel.

Twitch has transformed gaming culture to allow viewers and streamers to have the power to communicate and see streamers actually playing a game. Visitors to the channel can view these videos and chat-logs (chat-log is a record of text-based discourse on the streamer's online chat), and it is fairly common for these logs to be archived and accessible on a gaming channel.

For logistical reasons, this thesis uses archived videos (along with the chat-logs) rather than live videos to explore this discourse's dynamics and results for a given channel. As will be explained, these archives indicate that DCs require a re-thinking of a theory of discourse that has been influential in linguistic and composition research—Swales' model and approach that focused on formal discourse especially in classrooms and academic settings, not in a digital context involving informal discussions of popular culture phenomena such as video games.

But how does the popularity of streaming and gaming more specifically relate to discourse studies and scholarship? Video gaming has long been commonplace, but increasingly it involves varied types of online social experiences, as seen in best-selling games such as *Overwatch*. In 1980, Atari recorded sales up to 2 million for the Atari 2600. Meanwhile, in 2015 a report indicated that at least 1.5 billion people with internet access play video games (Chikhani). Gone are the days in which playing video games with other people made it essential to sit together playing on the same screen or at least in the same room. With the ability to play games online with people across the world, online gaming has become a potent form of social activity and communication. In the early days of video games (especially in the early 1980s but even in the early 1990s), the multiplayer aspect of video games was secondary to gamers, mainly because there was little or no robust form of connecting online with other players within a given game. Some "text-based" games before the mid-1990s necessitated limited communication through entering text or computer code (as with the text-adventure game *Zork*, first developed in the late 1970s). But those were niche games that, while still released today, do not command a strong worldwide or even national following.

Scholars have researched gaming for decades in many disciplines, including rhetoric/composition[1]. Annette Vee is one such scholar that has made a study of the procedural

rhetoric and literacy of video games in her article "Procedural Rhetoric and Expressiom." This article primarily works as a review of other scholarship within the field of rhetoric and composition as related to video games.

In examining some of this research below, I focus on research that is especially relevant to my thesis goals and approach.

The article "46 Amazing Twitch Stats and Facts" provides information on matters such as the number of viewers. It offers data on streamer information such as the number of women streamers. Such information helped me determine how to select streamers to view and examine their respondents' language choices. Additionally, I used this article to provide basic information on Twitch itself, such as the average number and streamers' demographics.

While my thesis is not focusing on gender per se, I want to point out several sources dealing with gender studies because my analysis found gendered rhetoric to be a notable factor in whether discourse (chats) in a streaming channel could be an asset or barrier to forming a community. My initial analysis indicated that gender-related language was a major determiner of what distinguished the different discourse communities isolated in selected Twitch streaming (specifically, in the chat-log portions of streaming on various channels). This language could lead to the community digressing from its original purpose, hampering its sense of community. Alternatively, the discourse might actually unite at least a portion of the participants in terms of a common reaction to certain statements made by individuals about gender, usually related to the gamer streaming his/her gameplay.

Some research indicates the limits of analyzing digital communication just in terms of participants' demographics such as gender. For instance, Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* reveals that categorizing in terms of gender alone can overlook or minimize contextual factors

that also affect language and social interactions. After my initial analysis using the certain

categories used to break down the chat discussions on Twitch (e.g., Male versus Female

streamers), my present found that I could further divide the Female category into two subgroups

(Popular versus Less Popular). To determine which category a channel fell into, this present

study looked at subscriber count, and based on relative numbers for different counts, I decided

that having 100 thousand or more subscribers would clearly be considered popular. The Popular

Female category was most often characterized by the sexist language. To further aid in analyzing

sexist language on Twitch, I drew on Beauvoir's book, as she extensively covers the notion of

objectification of women that I found to be all too common in the chat logs. Although the binary

of Men and Women is not ideal, it serves the purpose of considering how participants are most

likely to categorize and use language based on the streamer's gender. Because the streamers

invariably appear on their video gameplay, it was an uncomplicated categorization process

according to this binary distinction.

My thesis also draws on *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat Gender and Computer Games*

by Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins. This MIT publication proved relevant because my initial

analysis indicated a major difference in language choices of viewers based on whether the

streamer was male or female, and this book also discusses how these language choices could lead

to distractions that detracted from the community's goal. The book covers many stereotypes of

the "woman gamer," as well as exploring assumptions the public is prone to make about gender

as it relates to video games. For instance, Cassell and Jenkins examine how people are apt to

consider gaming to be "the guy's space," and both my initial study and follow-up analysis

covered in this thesis indeed found many Twitch viewers share this attitude on gaming channels.

Other scholars (e.g., Nakandala et al. in "Gendered Conversation in a Social Game-Streaming

Platform") also indicate that the construction of gender roles among gaming streamers can reflect overgeneralizations if not stereotyping of female identities in particular.

Like Beauvoir's book, Rae Langston's *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* focuses on actions that females themselves can make that perpetuate sexist discourse. While her work does not directly deal with gaming or streaming, Langton extensively describes how pornography subordinates and silences women. While I did not find any chat message that clearly falls under the label of "pornographic," Langton aided in my understanding and explaining how discourses in Twitch chat-logs can exhibit sexist behavior such as sexualization and objectification of women, which the initial study examined and this present study continued to find in surprising ways. For example, my initial study that one way some female streamers perpetuate their own oversexualized objectification occurs when, as Longton's book would suggest, they seem to enable the community's sexist language—as with "wardrobe malfunctions" that seem too artificial or planned to be inadvertent. Streamers Alinity and Pokimane are two such examples that have had multiple instances of wardrobe malfunctions, usually taking place shortly after voicing complaints about a lack of donations from viewers (asking for donations is common throughout Twitch). Or female streamers engage in other sexualizing actions and discourse to draw in more viewers, causing these communities to digress from its original purpose. By no means should we place "blame" on the streamer for sexist comments from viewers, but the actions do seem to support Langton's contention that females often contribute to their objectification in an attempt to gain acceptance or a larger audience.

Although a few sources I used are not scholarly, they proved useful by offering credible information, data, and assumptions regarding gaming, gender, or streaming. Entertainment Software Association published one such work, providing relevant statistics of the gaming

industry. This information is useful because, as noted previously, my analysis of streaming discourses indicates some community members use, excuse, or even stridently defend sexist language toward females based on their flawed perceptions of who plays video game. In contrast, Entertainment Software Associate indicates that females make up a substantial proportion of gamers, at some 40%.

An article by IGN (a non-academic website devoted to gaming) entitled "Fat, Ugly or Slutty: Sexism and the Regression of Women Gamers in 2012" examines stereotypes commonly associated with female gamers. The article describes how males often consider women gamers "sluts" if the males perceive them as "hot." If female gamers are perceived as "fat and ugly," male gamers will frequently make these views blatantly obvious in writing and/or speech.

1.5   Purpose of Thesis

My project applies Swales' theory of discourse community to online streaming sites—a context that creates what I refer to as a *streamed-discourse community*. Furthermore, this thesis examines the context of these online discussions and examines why they are relevant to composition/rhetoric scholarship, especially DC research such as Swales' that considers how discourse within a group can create distinct types of communities and social activities. These examinations confirm Swales' theory that, within an overall DC, there are subcommunities having their own distinctive traits in terms of language and the procedures that the DC establishes for in-group communication.

This thesis examines how communities within Twitch fulfill and or fail to create DCs by applying Swales' criteria to selected Twitch chat logs. My overall goals are can be specified as seen below:

1. Demonstrate the viable application of DC theory to streamed digital spaces while updating this theory by considering new literacies and the nature of online communication.

2. Establish how streamed-discourse communities differ from conventional DCs. For the former to be true DCs, there must be some key similarities, but the differences highlight ways in which conventional approaches can be reconsidered.

3. Show how some digressions within the discourse in streamed-discourse communities, especially when gender issues are involved, can hamper or prevent a channel's audience from becoming a DC. These digressions affect the group's discourse by not clearly or adequately being connected to the group's public goals, even though digressions are relatively benign or even helpful in promoting group bonding.

In having those goals, I found that chat messages from a game-streaming social platform such as Twitch can serve as a medium for applying and re-considering DC theory as it applies to a "living digital space" (a streamed-discourse community)—a rhetorical context understandably not included in Swales' landmark work on DCs—in fact, seemingly excluded given his focus on more formal situations. Even so, other scholarship anticipates how digital DCs might come to be. In an earlier article examining the notion of discourse communities, James Porter writes, "A 'discourse community' is a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is regulated" (38). Given that simpler but more flexible definition, digital contexts can be viable contexts for a discourse community. I draw on Swales' criteria, but with Porter's emphasis on DCs being bound by a common interest that can go beyond formal situations, to show that discourse such as that found in Twitch, are relevant to scholarship on DC, perhaps even required if we are to address the writing practices and process

as they are used in this digital era. In fact, my thesis considers how streaming websites are places in which DCs can be not only created but jeopardized despite their potential to create a sense of community that goes far beyond a group member's physical "local community."

This thesis focuses on streaming websites rather than more traditional sites (such as social media or forums). In regard to DCs, streaming websites have not been a focus for much scholarly study. Though, this is not to say that gaming sites have not been studied. In fact Rik Hunter studied gaming forum sites and wikis in his article "Erasing 'Property Lines.'" Hunter notes that,

> Williams' description of fan forums—notably the discussion of popular culture texts—as giving students 'varied and deep experience in interpreting and evaluating' (p. 41) media echoes Gee's 2003) claims that good video games are powerful sites for learning because game designers incorporate a variety of learning principles into their games, even if unknowingly. (41)

Much like how Hunter indicates that video games and gaming forums are worthy of study, it is my belief that—due to the prominence of gaming in everyday life along with the growing popularity of streaming sites—these streaming websites are worthy of study.

1.6   Methods Overview

This thesis offers little numerical evidence because a focus on numbers (as in determining the relative frequencies of certain types of language) is understandably not often used in rhetorical scholarship on discourse communities. In addition, a quantitative study would be unlikely to examine the meaning and significance of the numbers. I found, for instance, that it takes only *one* aberrant message in a streamed DC to disrupt the group's focus on their intended

goal of discussing the streamer's gameplay. Quantitative analysis often cannot detect such instances because they involve meaning more than frequencies that lead to categorical thinking.

1.7   Initial Analysis: Methodology

This section describes the methodology used in my initial analysis and within this thesis, revealing adjustments based on the initial study.

Each Twitch channel has a collection of archived videos from the channel's respective streamer that display his/her gameplay and member's chat about it, and most allow public access. To focus on depth and not just breadth in my analysis, I selected two videos with the highest view count from each of the Twitch channels I used for this study (more on my selection criteria shortly). I examined a chosen video's written chat that was posted between June and September 2018. By "analysis," I meant that I identified what was found to be outright sexist language and objectifying cues (shown in Figure 1)—language choices and statements based on gender stereotypes and objectification. The lines to note in Figure 1 are, "y do woman with fake boobs still very sencetive can't spell" and "show your boobs 10 seconds and I give 350$ okok????" This thesis considers this information for analysis in light of DC theory, especially Swales' criteria for discourse communities and how they do or do not apply to these chats. A group becomes a DC when it follows Swale's criteria, so this analysis sought to make this determination and how this transformation process occurs, especially when gender is an issue that can disrupt the group unity needed for a DC.

Figure 1: Sexist Language (Linzjk21)

For practical purposes, I examined archived videos versus truly live videos, mainly to avoid fatigue, as many of these video streams last five to eight hours. Plus, my needing to record a live stream is unnecessary because of archived streams already stored as videos. For each written message posted in response to a selected stream, the following information is publicly available in the archived video: timestamp, channel content (the gamer's streaming of his/her gameplay), author, and the message itself commenting on the gameplay and other matters—as

seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Twitch Layout

Additionally, when using examples of chat messages, I chose not to include a full screenshot of the channel's page, instead only using a screenshot of the chat log, not including the gameplay. The exception to this is when the example includes dialogue from the stream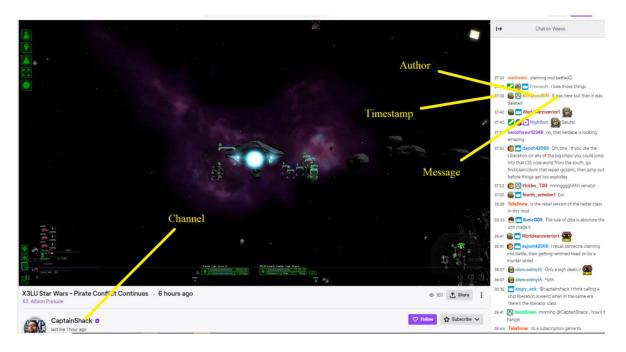er (as seen in Figure 2), in which case a screenshot of the streamer was included. Instead of typing the chat-log as an example, I found that a screenshot was appropriate because it more readily allows me to present emojis from the chats, which are common of the communication choices that help define a streamed DC and sometimes specific to a given channel (as seen again in Figure 2).

The channels devoted to gameplay that I chose for this present analysis included eight male and eight female streamers—a select and relatively small pool that requires explanation. I used criteria for my selective sampling based on language trends that I noticed during my initial analysis. These trends can be grouped based upon the aforementioned categories (popular vs. less popular streamers, gender, and e-sports" vs. "non-sports games). I first selected two games:

one identified as an "e-sports" community, and another without ("e-sports" is short for "electronic sports"). In e-sports, individuals play games against each other in tournaments for money and titles. These teams are similar to other professional sports teams that receive sponsorships and can shift owners. However, not all games are part of the "e-sports" community (such as Fortnite, which is the "non-e-sports" game my analysis concerns).

For each game, four males and four female streamers were selected. Because my initial analysis indicated the significance of the streamer's gender, this ratio was again used to have ample opportunity to examine statements dealing with this matter, most of which occurred with female streamers. For each streamer, I selected their two most-viewed videos for analysis (bringing the total number of my overall number of videos that I viewed to thirty-two). This number of streamers provides a manageable amount of "data" (numbers as well as statements relevant to gender roles) while still allowing some variety.

In the initial analysis, the most common types of messages fell into four categories: usernames mentioned, game-related language, sexually objectifying cues, and miscellaneous comments that fell outside the three other categories but not often enough to form meaningful groupings. "Objectifying cues" refers to language that seems to reduce females to their physical body—objects that can be owned or used (Langton). Though the pool for observations was limited, there no observed instances in which a male streamer was subjected to objectifying language. These cues are typically sexual in nature or focused on appearance. Game-related language refers to gameplay (as in the streamer's gaming skills or to strategy in general for the game being viewed). In regard to this present? study, sexist and objectifying language is still examined to determine if it caused a distraction from the community's goal. It remained a

relevant category largely because the gender-based comments in my initial study suggest they are especially important if not detrimental to formation of a group.

1.8   Present Study: Methodology

For this thesis, I built on the methodology of the initial study. The categories noted above (such as objectifying language) were still relevant, so I continued to analyze such language to determine their role in the formation or evolution of streamed DCs on Twitch. Unlike the initial study, this project also examined chat logs to determine if and how they reflect Swales' six criteria for a DC. Gender-related comments from the initial study were also relevant for this major goal because they have an impact on even the most general notion of what a "community" involves. Discourse can create a DC, but it can also create distractions from the group's purpose and focus. Thus, this thesis examines the groups identified in the initial study: male, female, popular (for each gender), less popular (for each gender), e-sports sponsored, and non-e-sports sponsored.

After the initial study, I reexamined chat logs on the selected channels on Twitch in light of Swales' criteria. In sum, his fifth criterion, a group's "personal-language trend," seems especially likely to sustain or jeopardize the formation or continuation of a streamed DC. A personal-language trend means that community members have a specialized method of communication that can help distinguish this community from others, such as jargon or names given to certain members. Additionally, language trends are highly dependent on the community's focus. For example, a Twitch channel that focuses on the game *Overwatch* would have some distinctive, common terminology in its chat-logs that would be rarely if ever found in a channel dealing with Star Wars games. For instance, the term "padawan" is used among Star Wars aficionados not only to refer to characters from the game or movie, but also to refer to

someone in the group who is just learning about the game or the group's conventions for chats. The term has no relationship to *Overwatch* and would be unlikely to be used within channels devoted to it.

The initial study found that, despite the limits of a purely quantitative methodology for my study's purposes, it could still help focus my approach and detect common or uncommon language trends. I thus created a word-frequency tally for each of chat logs in the selected channels from the initial study (the streamer's oral discourse was not included). For logistical reasons (e.g., keeping the counting manageable timewise), I excluded function words such as determiners and prepositions allowing the tally to focus on content words. For the tally, I composed a list of words used in each chatlog in the selected channels, revealing the most common terms in each channel. Using these tallies, I modified my quantitative approach due to the rhetorical aspects of the chat-logs as well as abovementioned research indicating the impact of gender construction. Accordingly, I identified "gendered terms" in my list, while also making note of such terms that might not appear often but were impactful given follow-up comments by other group members. "Gendered terms" is a flexible idea that I interpreted as wording that explicitly refers to males or females, whether it be game character, members of the group, or a reference to males and females in an abstract way going beyond a specific situation. Along those lines, I grouped channels based upon the gender of the streamer (the streamer's video provided reasonable evidence of his/her gender). The purpose of the tallies and groupings is to identify linguistic and rhetorical trends that could lead to DCs and to different types of DCs. My focus then is not on numbers per se (how often trends and wordings appear) but rather how a group, as Swales indicates in his fifth criterion, uses specialized language to create and maintain a DC, with special attention to how some discourse can hamper the latter action.

During the initial study, I originally intended to exclude the use of emojis from the tally. As my readers are likely already aware, an emoji is a small digital image normally used in online discourse to expediently represent a concept, reaction, or emotion. The best-known emoji is probably a smiley face referring to happiness or joking: 😁. Others are more complicated and specialized. For instance, the fire emoji (🔥) can refer to something physically being on fire or to someone being "hot" in an attractive way or to doing something particularly well (as in "I'm on fire").

The initial study revealed a trend, especially in the popular channels, that group members used custom emojis to communicate. This trend is in large part due to the amount of chat that and results in frequent scrolling of the chat box to keep up with messages, so emoji in general and those relevant to the streamed gameplay are expeditious ways to send and read messages. I thus kept emojis in the present tally due to Swales' second criterion: "The discourse community has a mechanism for intercommunication between members." In addition to his second characteristic, the heavy use of emojis may also fill the role of Swale's fifth characteristic. People not normally familiar with a group's specialized emoji might not understand its meaning, at least not initially. Still, regular members of a streamed DC are able to easily use them for communication with other members.

2   MEETING SWALES' CRITERIA

Before detailing differences between digital and traditional DCs, this section must first express that digital spaces, especially streamed ones, can legitimately be considered DCs, or rather, as streamed DCs. Despite their reflecting on Swales' theory's basic tenets, this thesis will later show that streamed DCs also diverge in some ways from Swales' original criteria (see Ch. 5). However, first, I will explain how streaming communities do reflect Swales' criteria (listed

below)—enough to consider them DCs though not in perfect accordance with his original theory, which of course, was developed long before streaming as we now know it was available.

Swales' criteria require an explanation of how a streamed DC meets them, some criteria more so than others.

2.1   Public Goals

The first criterion states that a DC must establish at least a general sense of common "public goals" that are known to at least members of the group. A public goal is a purpose or intent that is readily understood by newcomers and community members. Streamed DCs have two levels of public goals. The specific site hosting the streaming services defines the first of these levels, such as YouTube or Twitch (the site selected for this analysis). As noted on Twitch's "about Twitch" webpage, its common public goal is defined as creating a virtual space "where millions of people come together every day to chat, interact, and make their own entertainment." Twitch's public goal changed, or digressed, in 2016 from their original intent of being specifically focused on gaming. With this digression, more communication options for streamers accompanied the change. In particular, they added a component to their overall community dubbed "Real Life," now called "Chat." Twitch now consists of channels in which the host performing can focus on gaming or non-gaming activities (such as painting, cooking, or swimming—sometimes even just sleeping). This shift in Twitch's goals has shifted the discourse within the overall Twitch community by allowing discourse outside of discussion of video games—though more often it is still tied to video games. Now, though, there can be channels that are focused on music artists, music composition, or art.

The second level to a streamed DC's public goal is the streamer's specific objective. On Twitch and many other streaming sites, each streamer has his/her own channel where the

streamer can provide any personal information and his/her goal for the channel, the latter of which establishes the goal for the group of people viewing the host's channel and streaming. The format for browsing Twitch's channels usually points to at least a general idea of the channel's goals. When one sees a channel named "Minecraft" and having screenshot of gameplay within the game that goes by the same name, one would infer the point of the channel is to watch and discuss the game and the host's gameplay. Even so, most Twitch channels are more explicit and specific about the channel's (and thus the group's) purpose. Goals are listed on the streamer's channel for members or prospective members, allowing them to know what the channel will focus on. That is, viewers will be able to determine what type of community they may be joining a channel that indicates the focus and intent of the host's channel.

Figure 3 depicts goals shown publicly on different channels.

Hello Ladies and Gentlemen! CaptainShack here and welcome to my personal channel TheXpGamers. Here you will find videos primarily focused on one of the best hobby's in the world. Gaming. With a focus on Sand Box / Space Sim / Indie games and dedication to help support one of the most talented groups of gamers, The modding community.

I run one of the largest scifi gaming communities in the world. ARMCO. Join us on the discord!

About innocents

innocents streams Fortnite, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare and Halo: The Master Chief Collection.

About Aspen

I play a lot of Overwatch

About ops1x

6'2 pro fortnite player for @MisfitsGG

Figure 3 Channel Goals

The first channel, XPGamers, is explicit as to the public goal of the host (CaptainShack) and what the streamed channel should expect if people join in. The others simply state what games they stream; however, by listing their games, viewers will know what to expect (i.e., what the

channel's focus will be). Even disregarding the first level of the DC's goal, the streamer's listed

goals on channels that they meet Swales' first criterion for a DC

Of course, any person's or organization's "official goals" might not be adhered to all the

time or might not be honest statements of one's goals and intentions. However, the stated goals

on Twitch channels remain a public statement of the common objectives of the group. For now,

my point is that streamed DCs inevitably have public goals that focus the participants (the group)

in examining and discussing a streamer's gameplay.

2.2   Intercommunication

An intercommunication method is essential for a community to be a discourse

community; otherwise, group discussion based on the channel's public goal is difficult if not

impossible. Swales explains that "the participatory mechanisms may be various: meetings,

telecommunications, correspondence, bulletins and so forth" (*Discourse*, 212). For streamed

DCs, communication among the channel's viewers most prominently takes the form of the chat

log (see Figure 2) within the stream itself; this communication includes the streamer's audio

dialogue, which often prompts or perhaps responds to the viewer's written texts in the chat log.

Many streamed DCs also take advantage of social media platforms such as Twitter or Discord to

communicate in forums outside the webpage, although gamers (often comprised of

"multitaskers") might simultaneously participate in the channel's chat. Twitter allows the

streamer to communicate easily with members of the community via short texts. Platforms such

as Discord allow the streamer to communicate with other members orally as well as through text.

Members can communicate with one another easily, even when they are outside the stream.

A brief explanation of Swales' next criterion and its relevance to streamed DCs is

warranted, though this matter is closely related to the second criterion noted above and put into

the same sub-section of this thesis. Criteria 2 and 3 both center on the purposes and processes of intercommunication among DC members. Swales states that they use certain communication methods (Criterion 2) to provide one another information and feedback (Criterion 3), and a streamed DC routinely meets these requirements. The streamer, for instance, might provide information to members such as the channel's schedule for its synchronous video of his/her gameplay and, if the channel is not always focused on a specific game, what game will be viewed and become the topic of discussion in the chats. The mechanism might be text messages within Twitch, Twitter, Discord, or another widely-used platform. This information typically concerns such logistics, including informing the group if there will be any delays or a need for rescheduling. For example, as seen in figure 4, "GFUEL PURFECT" tells viewers "we are live! Widepeepopohug to you <3" as a way of communicating to members when they have begun streaming.
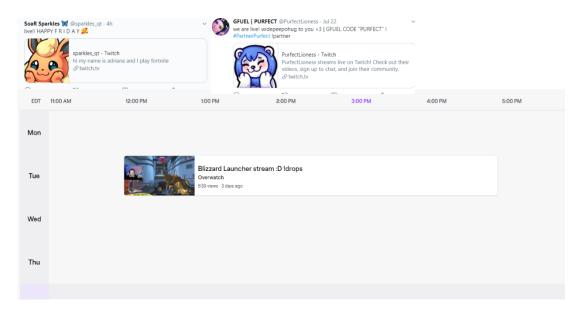

Figure 4: Channel Stream Schedule

Within the mechanism of the channel's chat log, members are also able to share information and give feedback to one another (including to the streamer). Figures 1 and 2 reveal the range of feedback that members might give regarding the gameplay video, other members' comments, and the streamer's persona—the latter being a noteworthy form of feedback I will discuss later. While Swales and other scholars, as noted previously, tend to focus on DCs in formal contexts such as the workplace, classrooms, and academic conference, streamed DCs on Twitch expand the purposes of intercommunication beyond providing information and feedback. My point for now is that streamed DCs can easily fulfil Criteria 2 and 3 by providing purposeful intercommunication through three primary mechanisms: the streamer's audible broadcast, the channel's text-based chat, and off-site social-networking platforms such as Discord.

2.3   Possessing Genres of Communication

Swales explains that a DC is characterized by one or more genres, meaning that the discourse community

> has developed and continues to develop discoursal expectations. These may involve the appropriacy of topics, the form, function, and positioning of discoursal elements and the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community ("Discourse Communities," 212).

In other words, DCs have communication genres that form and evolve as a result of the expectations for discourse taking place within the group. A given genre will therefore be defined by topics appropriate to the group along with how and why the intercommunication takes place. For instance, Skalicky's analysis of one DC centered on Amazon reviews of products, as discussed earlier, and found these reviews not only fit the widespread genre of "online product reviews" but also reflected a distinct sub-genre because of feedback mechanisms Amazon builds

into the reviewing mechanism—particularly how a reviewer's evaluation of a product is itself evaluated by readers, increasing the importance of community approval in this DC (85).

Swales goes on to refer to James Martin's definition of genre as a linguistic mechanism used to get things done (qtd. in "Approaching" 250). This description means that, for Swales' criteria, "these discoursal expectations create the genres that articulate the operations of the discourse community" ("Approaching" 6). Previously, I provided examples from selected channels that suggest they use certain genres of communication, including discussions that focus on e-sports or use platforms such as social networking (e.g., Twitter). However, Twitch offers clear examples of genres developed to meet the context, goals, and membership of a channel's group.

One such genre is defined not by assorted traits of discourse but by the overall focus that relates to the group's public purpose and channel: the game that the streamer decides to focus on the streaming and discussion within the channel. Except for digressions and disruptions, the topic (as in the game choice) indeed determines the appropriateness of intercommunication within the channel and "helps get things done" within the discussion. The primacy of this topic determines whatever genres of discourse can be included in this channel's discussion. For instance, some games such as *League of Legends* require more strategic gameplay than others, as also seen with a "stealth" y game such as *Division II* compared to a "first-person shooter" (FPS) such as any version of the Doom, which often involves near-constant fighting or fleeing the mayhem. Chats for strategy games involve genres of intercommunication that accordingly focus on the tactics that work best for players throughout the game but also for certain scenes in the game. FPS channel create their own niche for the types of chats one sees there by dealing less with strategy other than suggesting what weapons one prefers or displays of emotion or surprise regarding the

mayhem shown in the host's gameplay. Other games are especially "story-driven" (e.g., *Last of Us*), so when such games are the focus of a Twitch channel, a common genre would be an analysis of the characters and especially the plot, such as its strengths and shortcomings as a narrative. (In contrast, the protagonist in the Doom series is the so-called "Doomguy," who has virtually no personality, while the "plot" is perfunctory at best and merely an excuse to destroy an array of monstrous opponents.)

Still, another genre might be akin to gossip: discussing the validity of rumors associated with a game, such as whether there is a sequel planned or if a company has fired staff as a result of the game sales, cost overruns, and ratings from gamers. The topic's predominance and its effects on discourse genres are not restricted to Twitch. No matter the platform or subject matter, many streams and digital forums have a genre of focus that depends on a specific game chosen the streamer, while also allowing for more widespread genres across gaming forums.

Just because a community has a primary genre of discussion (a focus), the group is not necessarily a DC because, as with Twitch, one can invariably find channels that have a focus. Often, no sustained discourse takes place, for whatever reason. Normally such channels include a communication medium such as a chat box, but there is often little if any discourse takes place. There might be communication, but it typically has little to do with any genre or game and will be small talk (e.g., "How is your day going?"). These discussions have purpose, such as "ice-breaking," that might foster socializing, yet on some channels, yet unlike many if not most gameplay channels on Twitch, the discussions on these discourse-sparse channels are not conducive to forming a discourse community, if a community at all (just viewers).

2.4   Unique Language

Swales' fifth criterion, discussed previously in Section 1.8, states that a DC must have a distinctive lexis. Again, there are multiple levels in which streamed DCs fulfill this criterion. One level is similar to the lexis of traditional DCs, as with face-to-face (f2f) groups that discuss certain types of games or gameplay. That is, each channel or community, uses language associated with the genre or topic of discourse that serves as the public focus of the channel. For example, one will rarely see a community centered around *Overwatch* tactics that uses the same specialized terms as a community focused on tactics used in *Fortnite*. There are lexical choices dealing with the game plot, as with characters, items, or places. For example, in many games such as *Don't Starve*, the term "food" is used, as one might expect, to refer to actual food in the game, but there is a meaning behind its usage. In *Don't Starve*, as well as games such as *Monster Hunter*, "food" has another meaning, such as any item in the game that gives power boosts or healing. In *Super Mario Odyssey*, anyone who has played the game will know what is meant by "moons" (powerup items that advance the game but also can offer healing or other character bonuses). Streamed DCS also have discussions using lexical terms regarding the type of game being played rather than items or characters. For instance, players in military-type games who find a place to hide and shoot are referred to as "campers"; the specialized nature of this lexical choice is also reflected in how other players usually use "camper" in a pejorative way because it is a type of "exploit" (taking advantage of certain oversights the game designers made). The term "swarming" is typically used in the genre of real-time strategy games. It

is worth mentioning that some lexical terms (e.g., "exploits") are used in many gaming genres and Twitch channels, which might not distinguish groups from one another but still provides a specialized vocabulary that aids in the formation of a DC within channels, possibly

across them. Such examples include "newbie" (aka, "noob") and "NPC" (non-playable character in a game).

Additionally, streamed DCs have a unique language all unto themselves noted in Section 108: specialized emojis. There are the common emojis people around the world know through texting and social media, but then there are custom emojis, such as those found in many streamed channels. It seems increasingly common for sites on Twitch to allow each streamer to create custom emojis, despite the fact that there is an entity known as Unicode Consortium that regulates and approves a list of standard emoji used elsewhere (as with cellphone text messaging).

Figure 5 shows a collection of customized emojis used to communicate with a streamer, helping to fulfill Swales' criteria of unique lexis. Both common and customized emojis have a meaning associated by these symbols, constituting a means of communication. Streams of all sorts often use emojis to compensate for heavy chat and expedite reading and writing. In particular, a streamer on a gaming channel would have difficulty reading while also engaged in whatever activity the stream is focusing on (gameplay). Customized emojis are often unique to each channel, as they are custom made by the streamer. If, by chance, two streams do share similar emoji, the streams will likely have different meanings associated with the emojis.
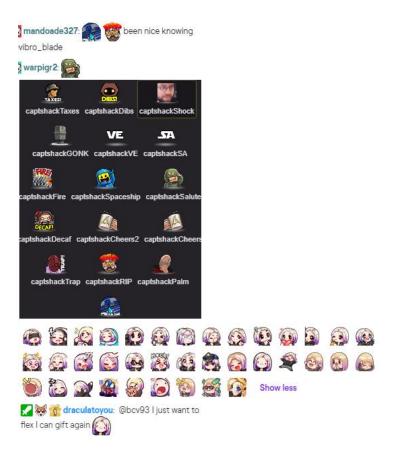
Figure 5: Use of Custom Emojis

2.5   Threshold Level of Membership

Swales' final criterion states that a DC has a threshold number of members and that members possess a degree of expertise about a topic in order to engage in discourse about it. In large part, due to the nature of streamed DCs, this criterion requires some reinterpreting. Membership in a streamed DC is capable of near-constant fluctuation, especially compared to the traditional f2f versions of a DC. Unlike the traditional form, members of a streamed DC are highly subject to considerable membership change—even within a few days, hours, or minutes. The "hierarchy" Swales suggests with this criterion thus seems dubious for the formation and continuation of a streamed DC, which lacks the constancy one would expect in terms of "who is in charge" and "the level of expertise" needed. Swales' criterion might seem to exclude such

groups, but the exclusion is not logical unless the streaming DC fails to meet other criteria for being a true discourse community. In 2017, Swales himself revisited this criterion, noting the importance of recognizing how "new literacies" might or might not be relevant to the creation of a DC:

> We now need to emphasize the roles of new digital channels, such as emails, blogs, tweets, etc. We also need to stress that there is no real community without any means of intercommunication of any kind. Subscribers to *Le Monde* may share certain characteristics, but they do not form a discourse community. (*The Concept of Discourse Communities*)

Swales' article also presents a digital example of a failure to meet other criteria while acknowledging that it is feasible for a DC to be online—*if* they meet other criteria. For reasons explained above, streamed DCs meet the criteria as a whole. It would undermine the larger concept and framework for DC studies if we rigidly hold to communications norms from the 1980s and 1990s.

Consequently, there is a need for a more flexible interpretation of at least Swales' sixth criterion, while still adhering to the basic notion of a discourse community being a group or community that depends on discourse norms that fit their purpose. Indeed, Swales' article from 2017 also attempts to avoid a "static" approach to his sixth criterion:

> A discourse community has an explicit or implicit hierarchy and/or structure which, inter alia, manages the processes of entry into and advancement within the discourse community. The stress here on managing discourse community affairs reduces the somewhat static impression that the 1990 formulation produces. (*The Concept of Discourse Communities*)

In any case, there is at least one constant member with expertise in the focus of streamed DC: the streamer, who is practically always experienced with the game (not to mention his/her own gameplay, which is a major topic of discussion within the channel's group). Additionally, many channels on Twitch and other streaming web sites use moderators to prevent spam or highly inappropriate topics. They are often long-time members and help fulfill Criterion 6. And while there is usually heavy fluctuation in membership, Twitch channels have "regulars" who habitually engage in group discourse. Indeed, members of the community can often obtain distinguishers to their usernames to showcase how long they have been members of the community, as seen in Figure 6.
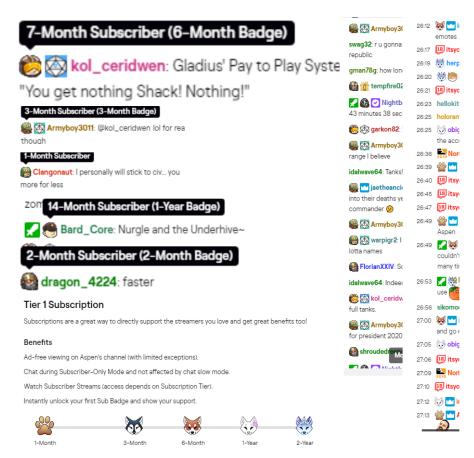

Figure 6: Length of Membership

As can be seen in the rightmost collection from a chatlog, there are very few subscribers present; while in the left-most collection, most subscribers have been such for 1-3 months.

The second part of Swales' sixth criterion (members have a certain level of expertise) can be difficult to meet within some streamed DCs. As noted, the streamer, and thus the community's focal point, has expertise with the channel's topic and discourse norms. However, it is difficult to gauge the expertise of the other members, the viewers. The only characteristic known about them is their username and how long they have been official members (subscribers) to the channel. Thus, my reinterpretation of the criterion allows for the key member's level of expertise (the streamer) to guide discourse by being proactive and competent in reminding members, less experienced or otherwise, of the channel's focus and discourse norms. Usually, this proactive behavior is evident simply through visual communication (the streamed gameplay) that all members should be viewing. It serves as a constant and sometimes gripping (for gamers anyway) reminder of the channel's purpose and public goal.

2.6   Summary

Though some reinterpretation of Swales' criteria is necessary at times, streamed communities can fulfill the requirements for being a DC—though a specific form that my thesis refers to as a "streamed discourse community." In particular, one factor makes such a digital DC distinct from the traditional f2f DC: the considerable flux in membership and participation within the group. The impact of this trait affects group membership in no small way. Yet, through mechanisms noted above—all the way from a specialized lexicon and a binding purpose—a streaming community still exists because it is the group discourse that builds and maintains the group.

Swales' original wording might indeed need updating to accommodate streaming and other new literacies. Most notably, reformulating his sixth criterion as "a streamed-discourse community host member should possess a relevant degree of expertise or experience to provide and encourage discourse." This change allows for reasonable flexibility and greater relevance to a streamed DC. This revision focuses on a level of expertise upon the streamer, who is also fulfilling a need for a threshold level of membership by having a host who serves a specialized and essential function within a channel (presenting his/her gameplay).

3   TRADITIONAL AND STREAMED DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES

3.1   Activity-Driven Traditional Discourse Communities

This chapter compares two types of discourse to show how online technology is highly conductive to re-thinking the notion of what is and is not a discourse community (DC). The first type is the traditional DC, which is in line with Swales' description. Minus the occasional member leaving or new members joining, its DC members are a relative constant. Furthermore, in this traditional form, the DC is what I refer to as *activity-driven*. That is, the traditional DC is largely a result of the communication and linguistic norms that developed for a particular group of people having shared interests and goals—usually some form of activity (e.g., bowling). In an activity-driven DC, the activity is the focal point for constructing, maintaining, and even controlling the community, including its hierarchy and the implicit or explicit rules for actively participating in the DC. Participation within DCs involving video games is not amongst scholarly works, as show cased by Kevin Moberly in his article "Composition, Computer Games, and the Absence of Writing." In his article, Moberly writes that,

…instructors can teach a lesson that is always present, but perhaps not always explicit in

the composition classroom—that whether reading and writing takes place in the context

of a computer game or a research paper, its effects are ultimately not manifested on the

screen or on paper, but on the individuals who, in expressing themselves through the

surrogate of the screen or paper, produce the discourse communities in which they are

involved. (294)

Moberly in his article shows that not only are video games relevant to DCs but that video games are relevant to pedagogy—creating new ways to help students better their writing.

Even though by definition a traditional DC is a group of people who use Swales' discourse norms as a basis for the community, the impact of the activity or interest that brings them together is also essential. Indeed, when the group meets, they usually can and will engage in the actual activity that helped bring the group together in the first place. Outside of an online forum, this discourse typically occurs during periodic f2f meetings. A group of bowlers might bowl as well as discuss bowling. A religious-based DC might worship while conversing about their beliefs or engaging in discourse, such as prayer, that reflects their group's linguistic norms. And a traditional DC of scholars in rhetoric might meet at a conference to discuss their research while also doing scholarship by revising it based on what they hear or read there. In other words, the traditional DC can normally involve hands-on application of the shared activity or interest of the group.

Together, then, three factors separate the traditional Swales DC from a streamed DC: activities that drives the community's discussions, face-to-face meetings, and a relatively-constant core of individuals who participate in group discourse about the activity.

3.2   Streamed-Discourse Community

Just as there are defining traits of a traditional DC, so are there key traits of a streamed DC. Previously, I discussed such traits, but now I will elaborate on important details that distinguish them from a traditional DC.

We can understand this form of a DC as a living "forum space" — an evolving virtual space mimicking as well as altering the notion of the physical space that a traditional DC typically uses in its f2f interactions. Of course, a streaming community does not literally appropriate a physical space, but rather it reflects the nature of a f2f setting that can create a sense of place for social interaction and group bonding—all the while using discourse that furthers a common goal or interest for any DC. However, what largely separates the two types of discourse communities is that membership in the streamed DC is capable of near-constant flux, especially compared to the traditional f2f version. In contrast to the traditional DC, a streamed DC's members are highly subject to considerable change in membership, content, tone, linguistic norms for the DC.

One might understandably assume such flux in a streaming community might weaken the sense of place, fellowship, and cooperation needed for any discourse community. Rather than being seriously hampered by a continually changing membership, streamed DCs can utilize options that can mimic what is normal for traditional DCs. If implemented effectively, these options allow a viable sense of belonging and a binding purpose. What are these optional mechanisms? Answers can be found by examining the streaming channels themselves and the streamer. In brief, I found that members gain a sense of community through their reaction and engagement (emotional or cognitive) with the streamer, especially the interrelationships between his/her content (what is said) and its presentation (how it is put visually and auditorily).

My observations and analysis of streaming channels found it common for "veterans" (members who had been part of the community for several months or more) to quickly welcome, if not befriend, new members or visitors. Nor is it uncommon for viewers to greet each other during a stream. An obvious form is a simple "hello" or "welcome," but members have other means to seem accepting of "newbies" in particular. During the welcoming or soon thereafter, veteran members (or those who appear to be well established in the streamed DC) will sometimes attempt to include the newcomers in conversation.

While seemingly trivial, greetings can help foster a sense of community amongst viewers, as linguists have long demonstrated (e.g., Duranti). Greetings can be sporadic with only a few members involved, but even these can help create a sense of community. For example, Figure 7 shows "juanluca2007: hi" which was followed up by "abioticie: sup" and "thesodiumman11: "helloooooo." Indeed, I found that some streamers will spend 5-30 minutes at the beginning of a stream greeting and making small talk with old and new viewers. I also noted how that welcoming is especially common with some channels, such as TheXPGamers.
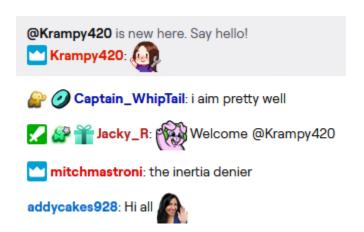

Figure 7 Greetings

Figure 8: Further Greetings

Of course, greetings are not in themselves unusual for a DC (or any community). In fact, it is an example of one way in which Streamed DCs mimic the bonding strategies of traditional DCs. This open-armed approach can readily foster a sense of community. They are not necessarily highly successful but are capable of maintaining at least a semblance community and belonging. Such politeness mechanisms, relying largely if not totally on discourse, is what allows communities with inconsistent membership to exist.

Perhaps the most distinguishable trait of a streamed DC is it relies heavily or even primarily on *discourse*-driven communication, in contrast to the activity-driven discourse that, as previously noted, largely defines the traditional DC. Within streamed DCs, viewers flock to a particular channel because of the content or activity on which its discourse focuses. At first glance, it may seem their gathering is solely a matter of the gameplay the streamer is showing and orally discussing—the channel and group's shared interest. If so, then streamed DCs would be shaped and driven much the same way as seen in traditional DCs: Both would be *activity*-driven DCs with the mode of communication (streaming vs. f2f talk) being a secondary factor in defining the DC.

However, such is not the case. In contrast to a traditional DC, members of a streamed DC do not come together to engage in the activity that brought them together. Members come together to view one person's gameplay, comment on it, and not play the game themselves during the streaming. That is, they come together to engage in texting other members about one person's streamed gameplay and his/her oral commentary. For the most part, this is a meta-activity; the goal often is not necessarily to improve one's own playing by watching and listening to an expert. Though some viewers undoubtedly do that, typically when game-improvement is the primary goal, viewers will instead go to YouTube videos, which is replete with instruction on how to improve gaming strategies. A streamed DC's inter-communication about the streamer's gameplay *is* the reason members convene, with little if any opportunity for members to engage in and hone their gameplay during the streaming. (Admittedly, some members might be multitasking by watching the stream and playing a game, but I found little evidence in the streaming sessions I examined formally or informally.)

In contrast, a traditional (offline and activity driven) DC of, say, bakers or sports fans will meet to engage in an activity that goes well beyond just conversing about their shared interest. They might rate recipes or cheer on their sports team, among other activities and purposes. Recall that one of Swales' first criteria is that a DC has a broadly agreed-upon set of common public goals. The discourse helps maintain this traditional DC, yet the discourse itself is not necessarily the explicit point in a f2f meeting. Members' conversations are largely just a means to an end—to furthering their goals associated with being a fan, baker, etc. But in the examined streamed DCs, participants must focus more directly on the "talk" (chatting) that, along with watching streamed gameplay, becomes the end goal—not just a means to something else. While it might seem redundant, I refer to these groups as discourse-driven DCs because discourse is

especially prominent even if discourse is always a key factor in any DC, traditional or otherwise. However, while it took me some searching, Twitch channels do exist where the discourse itself is centered around strategies for the game being played. These channels are usually based around strategy-based games (discussed is Section 2.3) or e-sports team sponsored channel. Even these channels, however, hinge of course on discourse about strategies, rather than actually practicing them as might easily be done in a f2f traditional DC.

In short, playing video games is not a streamed DC's defining purpose. It might seem a liability for viewers not to be able to engage in the activity. Nonetheless, that potential shortcoming can actually lead to a substantial group-bonding in a streamed DC because members should focus on productive and respectful discourse about the streamer's gameplay, which can minimize critiquing other members' gameplay (a delicate subject with many gamers, who are often highly competitive). The limitation of hands-on activities—except for watching, listening, and texting one another about the stream—thus heightens the role of discourse.

For example, gamers joined hypothetical Channel A (produced by a "professional" gaming streamer) because they know the streamer is a sponsored e-esports streamer who plays *Overwatch*. That known background means viewers can expect the channel's primary discourse to focus on the streamer's strategies. Meanwhile, Streamer B (casual streamer) also plays *Overwatch,* though an e-sports team does not sponsor him/her. In turn, this background means viewers who join Streamer B's channel are less likely to desire discourse centered around strategies one may better observe in a professional gamer setting. In other words, the professional streamer/gamer is far more likely to share strategies that members of the channel might want to learn—secrets to success in the game. Members' chats in Streamer A's channel accordingly make it clear they want information on how to win in the game, as seen in Figure 9.
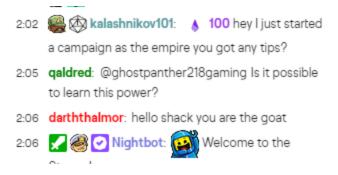
Figure 9: Seeking Help

As one can mostly discern in Figure 9, the viewer kalashnikov101 makes a request for tips/strategies, and then the streamer provides tips (via voice chat, not pictured in the Figure).

Comparatively, Streamer B's channel's discourse is typically centered around matters other than just strategy: the game or gaming in general, socializing, or even "gossip" such as rumors concerning the game being streamed. In fact, my analysis found that while discourse within a casual streamer's channel occasionally includes strategy-based topics, it is more often friend-esque chatting (see Section 1.2). The discourse often begins with streamed gameplay but soon moves on to semi-related topics on popular culture or upcoming video games. Members thus join such channels if they desired open-ended and (usually) friendly discourse.

A note of interest suggested through my observations of the selected streamed DCs, requiring future study in a later project, is that male streamers' channels were prone to discuss gaming strategies, while female streamers' channels were more casual and less focused on "winning" the game being viewed, fusing more on friend-esque discourse, the lore of the game (the story), or rumors of upcoming games.
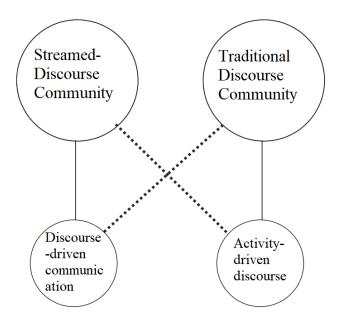
Figure 10: Terms and Relationships

Figure 10 represents the complicated relationships between major terms I developed from my study. Rhetorically, graphics can be categorical and inflexible than the ideas behind them really are (i.e., dichotomous thinking or the black-or-white logical fallacy). Consequently, Figure 10 attempts to avoid making excessive claims about groups and their discourse. The solid lines connecting terms represent the most common relationship (e.g., discourse-driven communication seen within streamed DCs). Dotted lines symbolize the potential for overlap, options, or a blending of goals, such as a streamed DC in which members have a lengthy discussion of strategies that members other than the streamer) use to win a game. An example of a crossover, as seen in Figure 10, would be an instance in which a streamer will invite players to play with the streamer. In most cases this will be a small pool of players, the high number being 10. However, some games will allow a much bigger pool. The streamer known as RTGame will open up a *Minecraft* server for his viewers to join him in, the average number of players allowed will be

upward of 300 players. This creates a situation where you have a streamed DC in which a pool of viewers are able to also engage in activity-based discourse.

3.3   Discourse-Driven DCs and Moderation

This brings us to consider in more detail how the streamed DC is able to compensate for its flux in order to create a sense of community in its evolving digital "home"—the streamer's channel. Discourse-driven communication, primarily a hallmark of streaming rather than traditional DCs, is largely an artifact of not having a true moderator—or any form of directed moderation. In many online groups such on Facebook, there is usually someone who moderates the discussion to abide by the group's discourse norms or the person who created the digital space the group uses. These norms or rules are often codified and posted for members, and at least one person (the moderator) enforces them. Not so with the vast majority of streamed DCs—ironic because they are, as explained above, more focused on postings and group discussion than what you would often find in traditional DCs.

Other than generally announced guidelines and requests (e.g., be polite), having a moderator and codified rules, which are usually tacit, are rare in the channels I analyzed. The streamer is not seen as a moderator but as the focus of discussion, meaning it could seem inappropriate for the streamer to take on a more authoritative role with the group by moderating chats about his/her gameplay. Instead, my analysis found that varied members of a streamed DC seek to keep the discourse on track, guided by general and commonsensical rules for effective or civil communication. The community, therefore, drives the discourse, not a single moderator or set of formalized rules. In turn, the discourse defines the streamed DC, as discussed. It is this complicated but informal cycle of following loosely and tacitly defined rules for discourse that,

in theory, then define the ever-evolving streamed DC, not just the act of watching the streamer's gameplay.

Lacking formal moderation and rules allows the group's discourse to move from one subject to another quickly, even digressively. Although the streamer's gameplay is always woven throughout the chat, the topic is subject to change at any time, often with multiple discussions occurring—all in adherence to the community's whims. Indeed, it seems a given that unordered discussions are a norm for a streamed DC, perhaps a desirable option for members who might become bored otherwise. Unlike what might happen in any f2f meeting, there was seldom an instance where members complain that the discussion is too random or that too many people are "talking" at the same time. What might well be chaotic and random in an offline DC is almost always acceptable in streamed DCs that I examined, at least within the limits of the aforementioned assumptions of what is appropriate for a given channel (especially in eventually remembering and adhering to its public goal). An example of such shifts in topics, mostly still relevant to gameplay, within a discourse-driven DC is shown in Figure 11.
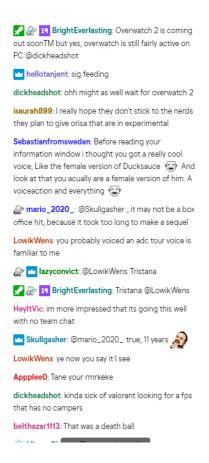
Figure 1: Shifting Topics

The figure presents an ongoing shift, which continues beyond what the image shows with three separate topics of discussion. The discourse shifts between the game's future, the streamer's work as a voice actor, and the streamer's gameplay itself.

Again, stepping outside the role of moderator found in many online forums, the streamer sometimes even encourages the chat to move unpredictably from topic to topic. On some channels, the streamer prompts viewers to come up with topics for discussion, often with random results. This approach is most often seen when the channels focuses on video games that are not fast-paced like *Overwatch* or other first-person shooter games. In channel XPGamers, for instance, the streamer is especially likely to have ongoing discourse with viewers, typically beginning with requesting chat-worthy topics from them.

Finally, I should point out that technically some gaming channels on Twitch do have moderators; however, streamers utilize them primarily or solely to ensure no one is spamming the chat box, engaging in inappropriate topics (subjects considered "NSFW"), raiding (when viewers of another channel visit another channel in order to spam or disrupt the group's discourse), or self-advertisement (when a streamer joins a channel to advertise their own channel). In many ways, the moderator's job is not so much "policing" the DC's members as much as dealing with pseudo-members who do not really belong and disrupt the already erratic flow found in the group's chat log. Figure 12 provides an example of what a moderator might do on the rare occasion an "intervention" is needed.

Figure 2: Moderators in Action

3.4   Summary

While both traditional and streamed-discourse communities rely on discourse, their context (f2f vs. online) is a major factor in differences that warrant a reconsideration of what a DC is and how it is constructed. In particular, streamed DCs are marked by members' limited ability to participate with the community in the activity that establishes the public purpose of the DC (gameplay). When members of a streamed DCs do play the game, it is normally not at the same time they watch and discuss the streamer's gameplay. And while lack of a moderator might seem a liability to community building, it actually can strengthen the community's role in

governing their own group's discourse and developing at least an implicitly shared notion of the mechanisms that govern their own discourse.

As a result, these digital communities have become heavily discussion-based, or rather, they have become genuinely discourse-based despite not being included in Swales' original conception of a discourse community. In fact, through this inability to engage in the focal activity of gameplay, streamed-discourse communities can encompass the very idea of what a discourse community is. Instead of participating during group meetings by each person playing a game (an physical activity), members must find new ways to participate in creating and sustaining their evolving streamed DC. For this reason, a new understanding of what it means to participate in a streamed-discourse community.

4   DIGRESSIONS FROM THE GOAL

Any DC, or truly any group, has the potential for a digression during group discussions. For the purpose of this thesis, a digression is defined as any discourse among members that do not relate to the community's public goal. In the case of gaming DCs on Twitch, a digression, in general, would distract from a primary discussion on a video game and the streamer's gameplay of it. Or, in the case of specific Twitch channels, a digression would be anything that distracts from either a channel's focus (i.e., its publicly listed goal) or the chosen focus for the day if the game choice might vary. There are various types of digressions, some of which could be benign or highly disruptive to the DC. This chapter will briefly discuss a frequent example of a benign digression before moving on to a more disruptive type of transgression. It is here where rhetoric is especially important—being able to consider the discourse situation and make a case for a digression or disruption. Likewise, members have to do the same thing: weigh the impact of the digression on the group's goals.

4.1   Gender-Related Digressions

Some digressions within a chat log on streamed DC, such as greetings noted in Section 3.2, might actually be appropriate considering the flexible flow of discourse on chat logs in a streamed DC. And they can further the DC's public goal by helping establish the group unity needed for a DC. Not all digressions are so productive or even benign.

In the initial and continuing analysis of Twitch, one form of digression that I found is not uncommon and is surprisingly complex: chat posts dealing with gender, especially comments that seem to reinforce stereotypical constructions of females and female gamers. While discourse within most gaming channels is not "locker room talk," the rhetorical situation is conducive to a member being able to post straightforward comments dealing with gender, again largely because of the given the flexible and open-ended flow of chats discussed in Section 3.3.

Cassell and Jenkins explain that video games have long been considered by the general public to be "a boy's activity" (8). Perhaps as a result, the gaming community has been ridiculed for perpetuating misogynistic tendencies; these predispositions usually come in the form of sexist portrayals and constructions of women within video games, often with the excuse that "guys are the main audience." As a result, it is not just the general public that views video games as "a boy's activity," but much of the gaming community itself. Furthermore, the community has faced such accusations for certain sub-communities such as GamerGate, a forum focused on how gaming should be based on traditional male values (Massanari). As noted, the games themselves often encourage female objectification through the portrayal of females within the games, and parts of the gaming community such as GamerGate offer little respite from this objectification. Some studies (e.g., Nardi) reveal that many female gamers hoping to avoid sexist treatment choose not to reveal their gender or identity online. Nardi goes on to explain that, when females

do indicate their gender in an online discussion, other gamers often switch from discussing a game to discussing the female gamer and her gender in general—a digression that, as discussed below, can be particularly disruptive depending on the level of sexism and persistence.

4.2   Disruptive Digressions

Such disruptive digressions act as a threat to the DC's solidarity and its focus on the group's public goal. Disruptive digressions can pose an enormous threat to a DC's unity and purpose, and they take a variety of forms. These digressions and its disruption can be a relatively short-term or can become a lasting problem. Gender-related digressions serve as the primary example I have drawn from my observations of the selected channels because they were one of more common digressions and, more importantly, seemed to most likely type to be disruptive to the DC's inter-communication and even its unity.

Due to all the ways in which a person might digress, this thesis cannot cover every type. Still, gender-related digressions alone can illustrate how disruption takes different forms, from relatively "passive sexism" regarding a female streamer to more blatant chauvinism that belittles and/or objectifies females in general. My use of "passive sexism" describes forms of sexism in which it may not be obvious at first glance that what viewers are witnessing is sexist, which is not to say that passive sexism should be a minor problem.

Figure 13 presents a frequent manifestation of passive sexism. Despite the DC's public goal of focusing membership discussion on gaming, the chat seen in this figure has little if any talk about gaming, instead consisting primarily of posts that might be overly friendly or even flirtatious. Friendly banter, as explain previously, is not always sexist or detrimental to a DC, for it can aid in creating a sense of community. Nevertheless, passive sexism becomes disruptive when the banter dominates a discussion. The comments listed in Figure 13 all come from the

same discussion that should have focused on the streamer's gameplay. Along with the general

banter, which continues throughout much of the stream, the posts focus more on the streamer's

appearance. Notice there is little discussion of the game the streamer is playing, save for posts

with the time stamps 8:27 "notinnocenttt There's no coming back from that lmfao if you're a

simp you're a simp," this line interrupted discussion about game discussion to belittle another

viewer. Time stamp 17:16 reads "Hasieffdaus just want to tell you you're so beautiful," this line

distracted discourse towards remarks about the streamer's physical appearance. Not surprisingly,

my analysis found that this sort of digression was far more common when the streamer is a
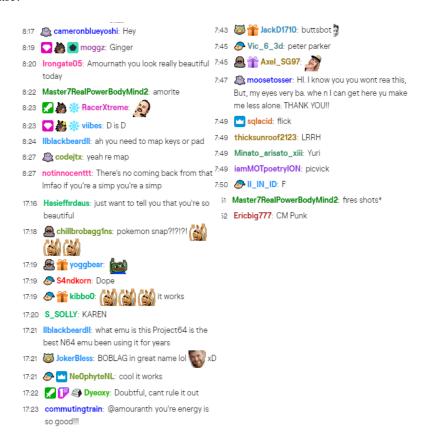
female.

Figure 3: Digressions

The more blatant sexism I found in the channels I examined involves discourse centered on the streamer's body. Like passive sexism, this form was more common when the streamer is a female; throughout my analysis, there was little discussion of a men streamer's body. Anatomically-focused digressions can be highly disruptive by unmistakably diverting the topic of discussion away from the public goal of being centered on gaming. Blatantly sexist discourse, as seen here in Figure 14, is identified by heavy use of objectifying cues. As noted previously, an objectifying cue is language used to reduce women to just their physical body as an object that can be owned or used—in the case of steamed-DC, to be used for viewing (Langton).
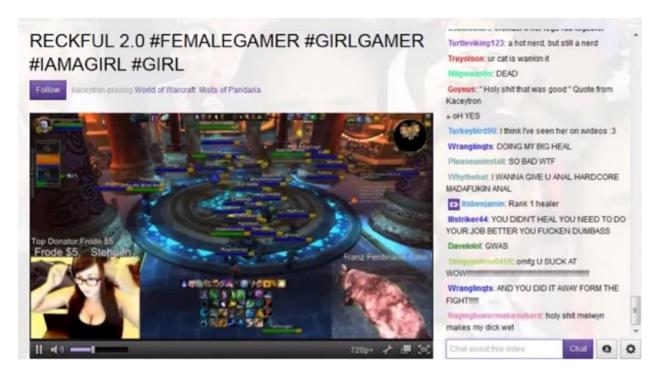

Figure 4: Sexist Talk (linzjk21)

True, one could argue that these sexist remarks work as a mechanism for promoting in-group bonding of those members who are not the target of sexism, such as sexist humor belittling women. As Thomae and Pina explain, such as "dispersion humor" might promote in-group bonding of some men while creating a "social abrasive" between men and women (188). Thus,

the body-focused comments I found seem disruptive to the DC because they do not promote the larger group's unity, just a (sexist) portion of it. Because the streamer in such cases is almost always a female, these comments can exclude the most essential DC member, the streamer. Thomae and Pina also point out that sexist humor can achieve a number of goals that go beyond a group's supposed intent.

> In times when gender equality is high on political and social agendas…men who feel an unjust threat to their privileged group position may resort to sexual harassment (including sexist humor) to reduce threat and simultaneously stabilize the status quo by undermining women in the workplace and creating a hostile environment. (195)

As discussed earlier, gaming has long been seen by insiders and outsiders as a male-driven space, but the increasing number of female gamers challenges this belief. If sexism, such as anatomically-focused discourse, has a goal of keeping gaming sites as a "man's space," then it is disruptive to the DC's public goals and should not be dismissed as in-group bonding.

Another gender-related disruptive digression I found on Twitch is a result of both technology and the monetary value of being a popular streamer. It is important to realize that streamers can make money from ad revenue but also from viewer donations. A recent article explains the varied ways streamers can earn money from their channel, with one channel alone bringing in $39,360 per month (Wang). While such huge amounts are difficult to verify, this sort of information has been circulated for years on the internet, meaning that monetary profit-making is indeed an important concern among streamers even if not an official goal of the streamer's DC.

In brief, the more viewers a channel has, the more revenue the channel can earn for the streamer (and for Twitch, which takes 30% to 50% of the channel's subscription income). Given

the gamer's dream of obtaining huge profits and just playing games to achieve both fame and enormous sums of money, some streamers have a reputation for provocative, highly sexualized language and behavior—all in an apparent attempt to bring in more viewers and donations. As first pointed out in Section 1.4, this approach is most often seen on the channels of some of the top (most popular) women streamers—those with the highest subscription or viewer counts. As the adage goes, "sex sells" (whether it be tractor parts, swimsuits, or streaming). What is the specific behavior, though? Outright nudity is prohibited, yet some streamers are known for wardrobe malfunctions while streaming. Several, such as Amouranth, have become known among the online gaming community for such incidents whenever her subscriber count or donations begin to go down. A recent article explains how she actually has been banned multiple times and lost subscribers after each incident (Penney).

One problem with such "audience gathering" tactics in a DC is that they can easily be seen as approving the use of female bodies as objectification, especially with a male audience. If the female streamer is sexualized, then the female viewers might not be taken seriously when they try to focus on the DC's public goal. That is, the streamer's use of sexualized "assets" can be a way of reinforcing male-dominance within the group, with female members by implication relegated to sexual objects. Some female streamers' sexualized performance, as a result of the objectification, disrupts from Twitch's and the DC's public goal of a way to focus on gameplay and gaming. When the streamer uses such tactics, the discourse is often shifted away from gaming and towards the streamer's anatomy and sexuality.

This issue is complicated and can be construed in many ways. For instance, female sexuality has often been "controlled" in organizational settings around the world, such as in schools and the workplace. The results of this supposed attempt to keep people focused on the organization's

goals can have a detrimental effect on females in particular, even when the organization claims to be "protecting" them. Hira Naaz writes on Indian schools and their focus on controlling girls' appearance:

> When you are asking the women teachers or students in an educational institution to tie up their hair or not wear jeans for the sake of boys, you are sending out a very dangerous message to the young men and boys coming there to be 'educated.' You are telling them that women who wear jeans and keep their hair loose can be teased, harassed, and molested.

Thus, I am by no means saying the "popular girls" on Twitch are wholly misguided and require more stringent rules from Twitch. I am pointing out how females themselves might accept stereotypical roles when economics come into play. The acceptance of these roles is a type of digression that can be disruptive regardless of its theoretical or monetary value—a digression that itself could warrant an entire study.

5   CONCLUSION

This final chapter will summarize the purpose and major findings. In doing so, however, this chapter shall further discuss some findings. The final section will indicate how I might follow up on this analysis.

5.1   Research Question

This thesis has three primary goals:

1. To demonstrate the viable application of discourse-community theory to streamed digital spaces. In so doing, my thesis would attempt to update this theory by considering new literacies and online communication.

2. Establish how streamed-discourse communities differ from conventional discourse communities. For the former to be true discourse communities, they must have some key similarities, but the differences can highlight ways in which conventional theories of discourse communities might be reconsidered.

3. Show how some digressions, especially those related to gender issues, can hamper or even prevent a streaming group from becoming a discourse community. These digressions affect the group's discourse by not clearly or adequately concern the group's public goals, while other digressions are relatively benign.

Below, I examined these goals and my basic conclusions for each after recapitulating how I approached this study.

5.2   Application of DC Theory

Chapter 4 establishes how streamed DC's meet the essential notions behind Swales' six criteria for DC's, as summarized below.

Not only does the streaming website have a publicly stated goal (in the case of Twitch this is to build a community around gaming), but—more importantly—the streamer has a publicly stated goal for the community they are building, thus meeting Swales' requirement for having a public goal.

Additionally, streamed DC's use, as all DC's must, a method of intercommunication, largely limited in streamed DC's to one medium: a chat log allowing members to communicate with the streamer and other members. The streamer can communicate via voice to the channel, supplementing intercommunication and keeping it focused on the channel's public goal. Chapter 4 also briefly considers how the major form of intercommunication (chats) can be supplemented, either during or outside the channel's chat, by a medium used by some members: social media

such as Twitter and Discord. While it was impossible for me to consider these conversations, they were occasionally mentioned in the streamer's chat and focused on sharing additional information about a video game.

This thesis also explains that streaming websites such as Twitch organize discussions and channels by game genre (a conventional categorization of games or activities). Still, there are also "unofficial genres" that Twitch channels might fall into. The official genres are categorized by game, with the exception being the "Just Chat" genre, while unofficial genres are unspoken but understood by members of the community. These unofficial genres can include how the channel focuses on lore, rumors, etc. XPGamers, for example, typically falls under the official category of focusing on Star Wars Empire at War, with an unofficial genre of focusing on the Star Wars universe and its lore and stories.

Streamed DCs possess a variety of specialized language. As seen on the Twitch channels I studied, this unique language can be distinctive of specific gaming genres and specific games within a genre. Any one channel can have its own specialized terminology or language norms, as with certain emojis. Ch. 4 reveals how these can have a variety of meanings depending on the DC and the situation, from inside jokes to communicating expeditiously without text.

Lastly, it was explained that streamed DC's have a threshold level of membership. This member threshold, while in a near-constant flux, does still have some constants. These constants are the moderators who are still very much community members and will engage in discourse. Finally, the other constant, is the streamer themselves who help to drive the discourse.

In sum, this thesis concludes that streaming sites on Twitch can, in fact, be discourse communities, despite the notable differences discussed below and elsewhere.

5.3   How Streamed-Discourse Communities Differ

After establishing that Twitch groups can qualify as DC's, it was sought to show there was still enough of a difference to make it a distinctive sub-category of DC's in general. Hence, The name "streamed-discourse communities" was given to this category, as their identity emerged during analysis. Below are the main differences between Swales' original conception and what revealed the impact of the digital context that defines streaming channels.

The first difference is profound in its effects: group membership, which in a streamed DC is in a near-constant flux. Swales' conception of DC's recognized, of course, that membership changes. Still, the rate of change with streamed DC's is so great that even within five minutes that viewers would come and go, although there was almost always a group of participants who would stay with the stream for its duration. Fluctuation was not necessarily an impediment to forming group identity, as more established members frequently welcome newcomers to their community, setting a tone for both "veterans" and newcomers that the group welcomes the "flux" of gaining new members.

However, what truly sets apart a streamed DC, as discussed in Chapter 5, is the reliance on *discourse*-driven communication, whereas in a traditional DC, the discourse is *action*-driven. In a traditional DC, members can easily take place in the subject matter as a community (in a bowling DC, members are able to meet in person and bowl); however, the very nature of a Streamed DC prevents members from engaging as a community; thus, meaning that communication will more often be discourse driven rather than being driven by the activity taking place.

5.4   Digressions, Disruptions, and Gender

Chapter 6 introduced what is referred to as digressions from a DC's goal. A digression is any discourse among group members that does not relate to the channel's public goal that forms any DC basis. Of course, any group (DC or not) bound by a common goal might have digressions. Still, with a streamed DC, the lack of a face-to-face situation seems especially conducive to digressions because of the aspect of anonymity, something that has been discussed and examined in regards to online forums. The anonymity of viewers may allow for a sense of freedom to break from what would typically be socially acceptable, thus leading to an increased potential for digressions.

As noted in Chapter 6, not all digressions endanger group solidarity or a focus on the public goal. Benign digressions can be as simple as welcoming new members, which, as noted, can promote group solidarity and a positive tone in the group's chat. Benign digressions only momentarily shift the discourse away from the public goal's and the topic under discussion, having little if any negative impact unless a benign comment is misunderstood as patronizing or insulting, in which case the comment might lead to the more serious type of digression discussed. Friendly banter or off-topic humor is not always a problem but becomes one when it gets in the way of accomplishing the community's goal.

While it might be misleading to suggest a digression falls into an either/or classification, the chat within the gaming forums indeed exhibits digressions that evoke more serious reactions from members, which is referred to as disruptive digressions. These, unlike their benign form, act as a threat to a DC's solidarity, if for no other reason than they are almost always extended conversations that pull the group away from the public goal of discussing gameplay of the streamer. In addition to longer "time not on task," disruptive digressions often involve opinions,

remarks, insults, and other content that can alienate or marginalize some members, fractioning group solidarity. In online contexts, the hazards of "flaming" and "trolling" remarks are well known—scholars perceive that this discourse results from the lack of face-to-face contact and relative anonymity of people who make such remarks. Such discourse applies streamed DC's and again creates an important difference with a conventional DC.

When addressing disruptive digressions, the focus is placed on gender-related digressions given their unfortunate frequency on some channels, especially when the streamer is women. Still, it must be stressed that disruptive digressions are not restricted to gender-based remarks. In terms of such remarks and replies on the chats examined, both passive and blatant sexism fell into one of two forms of disrupted digressions. Passive sexism is typically found when the streamer is a woman, and instead of members focusing on her gameplay, they will often be noticeably friendly if not flirtatious. By "passive sexism," by no means is it suggested to be unimportant. It is often still a form of sexism, yet at least appears to be unintentional or, if anything, meant as a complement, with little if any negative response from streamer or members. It is, then, "benign" based on the streamed DC's reaction, not in its practical or theoretical implications. In its own way, passive sexism that seems to go unnoticed and "accidental" can be just as harmful as more serious sexism that cannot be ignored or dismissed, not by most members anyway. That issue is beyond this analysis's scope but worthy of examination when it appears in online contexts. For now, the point is that some comments at least seem "benign," even if they have underlying, tacit degrees of sexism and stereotyping.

A more blatant form of a gender-based disruption, as discussed in Chapter 6, is when messages on the channel's chat become centered on the streamer's body—a digression that happens surprisingly often. (Keep in mind that the video being streamed often shows part if not

most of the streamer's body.) Shall be referred to as blatant sexism and are anatomically-focused digressions, which can be hard not to notice because the topic of discussion is clearly being diverted away from the community's goal, whether the streamer commented or not on it. As discussed, one can potentially see these sexist as a mechanism for promoting in-group bonding of those who are not a target of sexism. However, in actuality, these comments are disruptive to the DC because they do not promote the unity of the largest group, just a men portion of it. Unlike the brief benign digression, blatant sexism can exclude and marginalize members, men or women, who find anatomically-focused digressions to be counter-productive if not offensive. While people have long made sexist comments within groups of any sort, the online context of streaming DC's, especially when the stream draws attention to a women streamer's body, makes these DC's especially prone to blatant sexism if for no other reason than the way digital conversations allow a person to say things s/he might not have "the nerve to say" in a face-to-face discussion.

5.5   Future Work

The assorted findings and explanations of this study can help clarify the rhetorical nature of discourse communities. I hope to have shown how the digital nature of a discourse situation creates problems and strengths for groups that become a discourse community. When discussing these DCs, this understanding can contribute to the theories of DCs that seem to dominate scholarship. These matters are important because there is no indication that New Literacies, such as streaming channels, will become increasingly commonplace around the globe.

Areas where I chose to focus on just one aspect of streamed DC's in order to keep within the limits of thesis requirements, have been previously mentioned. Still, it is hoped one day to follow up on some matters scarcely covered.

The first such matter involves disruptive digressions that are not strictly gender-related. What other types of digressions are present that can be harmful to both a streamed DC as well as a conventional DC's unity, solidarity, and public goal? While some such digressions were noticed, I did not categorize or question them as much as would be preferred. Another type of digression seen that involved the streaming technology on both the streamer's and the audience's side of things, such as connection problems or computer malfunctions. These might seem as important or intriguing as other types of digressions covered, but it is a type of disruption one does not commonly find with conventional DC's, whose technological glitches normally do not affect the intercommunication required of a DC. Technical problems can essentially shut down the entire streaming in a given day, while a pattern of such errors could seriously harm the DC's membership. I would hope to examine the strategies the DC uses to address these problems— whether they seem effective or not.

Finally, I wish to look more closely at the linguistic differences used by viewers for men or women streamers and how this may relate to the DC's unity. As noted in this analysis, some linguistic differences, but it is desired to further explore this area by drawing on research in various disciplines that have found patterns associated with participants' gender in a given discussion. Along these lines, I would hope to take into account how gender is increasingly being seen as a non-binary distinction, as with individuals who are transgender. Given participants' relative anonymity in a streamed group, it might not be possible to quantify some of these matters. However, I believe that rhetorical analysis that draws on interviews with willing participants might prove insightful.

My study suggests possibilities and implications for future rhetoric/composition research, especially the study of discourse communities when they are (or are not) manifiested online.

My hope is this thesis has shown a new way in which DCs can be studies, especially why—if we make reasonable adjustments to Swales' framework—DCs are not restricted to academic communities, the workplace, or f2f gatherings. Despite their ever-evolving membership, researchers concerned with contemporary means of communication should consider how digital sites such as Twitch reveal a need to re-think traditional criteria for a DC— not just re-think them now, but as new online formats appear or gain popularity. One such platform is *VRChat*, which is a VR game centered around community building.

Furthermore, my suggested terminology and concepts—such as those centered around digressions—can be applied to traditional DCs to see ways in which they might be subject to forms of digressions or disruptions and how they compare to digital DCs.

Though they are beyond the scope of what this thesis could reasonably cover, I found several questions in particular that scholars might consider in order to shed light on the notion of community in emerging forms of literacy.

How might online DCs be affected by social crises, natural disasters, and civil unrest? At present, the COVID-19 epidemic curtails f2f meetings that might result in more online communities being formed. Also, if present splits and bitterness continue to result because of politics and social unrest, to what extent do these carry over to specialized forums such as streaming DCs?

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