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Relationships to Video Game Streamers: Examining Gratifications, Parasocial Relationships, Fandom, and Community Affiliation Online

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RELATIONSHIPS TO VIDEO GAME STREAMERS: EXAMINING GRATIFICATIONS,

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, FANDOM, AND

COMMUNITY AFFILIATION ONLINE

by

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ABSTRACT

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by

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Advances in media consumption and viewership have expanded the use of virtual communities such as streaming platforms (e.g., Twitch,tv, Azubu.tv, YouTube Gaming, AfreecaTV) and the ways individuals satisfy individual and social gratifications within these communities. Further, the connection viewers make with streamers as both fans and parasocially (i.e., a perceived friendship with media figure) has a number of implications for the communities that support them. This dissertation tested fandom and parasocial relationships (PSR) as mediators of the relationship between sense of community (SOC) and gratifications. Users of streaming platforms ($N = 624$) were surveyed regarding the gratifications they seek from streaming platforms, their fandom and PSR with their favorite streamer, and their sense of community on the site. Mediation analysis showed that PSR and fandom mediated the relationships between SOC and the gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism. In other words, viewers for whom these gratifications were more salient reported higher PSR and fandom, and higher PSR and fandom predicted higher SOC. Unlike PSR, fandom mediated the relationship between SOC and the gratifications of cool and new trend and companionship. There are a number of theoretical and practical implications

of PSR and fandom as they relate to gratifications and SOC. Specifically, the social nature of streaming platforms provide new opportunities for media consumers to satisfy individual and social gratifications. Additionally, the swings in popularity of microcelebrities on streaming platforms aligns well with traditional celebrity worship research (i.e., popularity dictates who receives special promotion). Streaming platforms provide opportunities for the building and maintenance of relationships comparable to previous research on streaming platforms. Ultimately, the streamer acts as the mechanism that enables to relationship between gratifications and SOC for stream viewers.

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Relationships To Video Game Streamers: Examining

Gratifications, Parasocial Relationships, Fandom, and Community Affiliation Online

The relationship between viewer and media figure has grown more complex as communication technologies have increased access to celebrities. Research has begun examining *microcelebrities*, or individuals who have amassed a large collection of followers in an online context (Senft, 2008). Recently, streaming platforms (e.g., Twitch.tv, Azubu.tv, YouTube Gaming, AfreecaTV, etc.) have acted as incubators for individuals to stream themselves playing games and, through popularity, achieve the status of "microcelebrity." Twitch has an estimated 45 million unique viewers each month who spend an average of 106 minutes watching streams per day (Eadicicco, 2014). However, despite a large exodus from traditional viewership (e.g., watching an episode of a television or radio program once a week), interactions with microcelebrities and other viewers are currently understudied from a communication perspective.

Similar to the growth in access to celebrities, the perception of what constitutes a celebrity in contemporary culture has expanded. Fandom involving celebrities has existed in a variety of mediated contexts dating back to members of high society or radio personalities. Traditionally, Booth (2010) describes a fan as a, "person who invests time and energy into thinking about, or interacting with, a media text: in other words, one who is enraptured by a particular extant media object" (p. 11). In the digital era, interactions with a media figure have become commonplace due to access to communication technologies. In many circumstances, a viewer can move from admiration of a celebrity to a perceived relationship with them, which is described as a parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These relationships may be continuous as viewers become regular viewers of streams and even seek out other ways to stay involved with their favorite streamer (i.e., online communities, social media, etc.).

Users who routinely watch streamers may be seeking to fulfill a variety of individual or social needs. That is to suggest viewers are not simply fulfilling gratifications through traditional channels of entertainment (i.e., television, magazines, etc.). Instead, the explosive growth of streaming platforms has supplanted traditional viewing habits in favor of more personalized content from the parasocial personality him or herself. Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) suggests that media consumers are psychologically and socially motivated to select media as a means to satisfy individual needs and desires (Rubin, 1994). Viewers seeking to satisfy needs (e.g., social interaction, information-seeking, entertainment, etc.) may participate in online communities that support their parasocial figure, which results in a shares sense of community and closeness to the streamer.

Large communities are established in support of favorite media figures. Rafka, Carson, and DeJong (2014) describe online environments such as social media, blogs, and bulletin boards as providing users with the ability to "hang on" (p. 3). The resources gained (i.e., closeness to the community) impact the future use of these technologies. The present study consists of surveying stream viewers (e.g., Twitch.tv, YouTube Gaming, Azubu.tv) about their connectedness to their favorite streamer (i.e., as a fan and/or parasocial figure), gratifications sought while online, and relationship to their online community. In short, viewership and participation on streaming websites is motivated by individual gratifications, and in turn impacts how closely a viewer feels connected to their community.

This dissertation begins with the examination of the growth and merits of online communities. Next, the dissertation focuses on the different uses of streaming platforms including the impact of parasocial and fan relationships on online communities. Specifically, a reconceptualization of parasocial relationships and its current state given advanced in

technologies is provided. An updated perspective on U&G is required to successfully examine and understand new media technologies and their impact on parasocial and fan relationships. The study addresses similarities and differences between fandom and parasocial relationships. After the literature, the methods of data collection, results of data analysis, and discussion of significance of the dissertation are examined.

Literature Review

The proceeding information provides an overview of research involving the foci of this dissertation. Firstly, interactions with other members of the community may result in a sense of belonging within online communities. Next, an examination of the evolution of fandom is required before drawing a comparison to parasocial relationships. To clarify, fandom is the adoration of a media figure whereas a parasocial relationship more accurately describes a perceived relationship between viewer and media figure. Additionally, an examination of parasocial relationships as they function in new media is required to accurately set the stage for streaming websites. Subsequently, individuals seek a series of gratifications while watching streamers online while simultaneously interacting with other members of the online community supporting the streamer. Finally, a culmination of literature and description of the mediation model is presented.

Sense of Community

Online communities are conceptualized as collections of individuals using technology to interact around a shared interest that is guided by a set of norms (Porter, 2004). Many of these norms are predetermined by the channel itself (e.g., Twitch's chat function) or established over time (e.g., adoption of terminology from the community). Utz (2008) argues that communities function as networks of members and ties that are established. These relationships require

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resources (e.g., time commitments, interactions, intimacy) from users to help sustain the community's overall success.

Tied to the ideas presented within the fandom literature, Williams (2005) describes economic models of media texts acting as goods that are in some way tangible for communities. Online communities allow individuals to exchange ideas, opinions, and other resources related to their favorite media figures and programs. In part, online communities look to control the content posted on forums as well as the interactions between users. Furthermore, online communities impose their norms and expectations of behavior based on what representation exists of their characters in popular texts.

Relationships that are developed over time within online communities are built on a sense of community. For instance, interdependence with other members of communities is positively related to sense of community and relational switching costs (i.e., negative feelings resulting from changing games or groups) (Tseng, Huang, & Teng, 2015). Expectations of continuing as a member of the online community is predicted by team participation and compliance to social norms (Teng & Chen, 2014). An underlying principle within these online communities is the expectation of social interactions among each other (Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010). As suggested above, continuation of these interactions has been found to provide social benefits for gamers in particular (Hsiao & Chiou, 2012). Continued interactions provide opportunities for more complete, established relationships across users who have perpetual contact inside and outside of the already established communities. More importantly, interactions with other users in these communities is not always within the confines of the community itself. Instead, users may continue interactions through direct messages and into other overlapping communities.

Work by McMillan and Chavis (1986) notes that the concept of psychological sense of community (SOC) consists of four elements: *membership, integration and fulfillment of needs, influence,* and *shared emotional connection. Membership* and identification within these communities requires a shared sense of interest and personal investment for the community to establish stronger bonds. Membership in fan communities can manifest itself as denoting oneself as a fan through a common symbol system that connects the community together. Specific examples of these symbols include profile settings touting the streamer's name or team insignia, using vernacular of the media figure or greater community, and so on.

Second, *integration and fulfillment of needs* corresponds directly to social elements of uses and gratification theory (e.g., *companionship, social interaction, etc*.). Continued work by Chavis, Lee, and Acosta (2008) describes the *integration and fulfillment of needs* (i.e., validated feelings of community membership) as being contingent upon the social elements of community interaction. A sense of togetherness and association within the group is rewarded, or gratified, through continued interaction within the community. In many cases, the medium selected is contingent on the viewer's belief that involvement in the community is in his or her best interest.

Third, individuals within the community experience *influence*, or some degree of control over close others and the group as a whole. Within the streaming context, viewers are able to make contributions through viewership, contributing to online discussions, and interactions through social networking sites. Contributions of information to the community at large provides users with a sense of significance among peers. The increased relationship between individual and community corresponds to the connectedness that is experienced within the network. Fourth and finally, *shared emotional connection*, is conceptualized as the bonds of the close relationships and the associated rewards.

Interactions on streaming platforms are comparable to those described in online community's literature. Twitch users share a set of social norms across users that helps to solidify relationships built (Kobayashi, 2010). Twitch's user base can be particularly fragmented when considering the specificity of certain groups that share an interest with one another. Access to support systems and relationships online help to reinforce connections to other members of these virtual communities. As a result, individuals are able to establish and maintain relationships through streaming platforms. Relationships developed through a platform like Twitch.tv are comparable to other new media counterparts (i.e., Twitter, Instagram, etc.). These newly minted relationships have the potential to flourish as individuals further their relationships with one another with continued contact and persistent interaction, which results in the emotional connection of friendship shared with other users (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002). Ultimately, the connections established are a byproduct of being in the same streamer's profile. In other words, these specific relationships (i.e., individuals becoming connected to one another) are contingent upon meeting by being a fan of the stream him or herself. Streamers inadvertently assume the role of friendship maker simply by garnering the attention or adoration of stream viewers. Fandom brings viewers into the profile initially, which then holds the potential for viewers to establish relationships with one another.

Fandom

Fandom has evolved rapidly as a result of alternative ways to consume media (e.g., Twitch, Twitter, etc.) becoming commonplace over more traditional technologies (e.g., television, radio, etc.). Buschow, Schneider, and Ueberheide (2014) describe a social TV, or the merging of television with social media technologies to help drive simultaneous communication and interaction through consumption. As a result of the emergence of social TV, consumption of

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paralleled media (e.g., watching television while using Twitter to comment on the program simultaneously) is impacted by interactions corresponding to live events on the screen. Booth (2008) argues that technologies allow for the co-creation of meaning across online fandom, which impacts the culture that is shared within online communities of fans. That is to suggest fan interactions inherently impact the culture that is shared with in-group members and displayed to onlookers.

Conceptually, fandom and communities go hand-in-hand. Members of the communities gather for annual events, panels, and conventions (e.g., Comic-Con). Fandom without face-to-face contact, however, precedes these face-to-face interactions. Although fandom can happen independent of communities (i.e., participating in viewership alone), new media has united like-minded fans across the world. More importantly, the advent of online technologies allows for the uniting of fans, which brings a whole new meaning to the word "community." In other words, online chatrooms and social media has provided a vast network of fans to connect to one another. Work by Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith (2002) finds that a sense of identification as a self-proclaimed fan is an integral component of belonging within a community. Moreover, considerations such as belonging, friendship and support, and conscious identification impact the overall communal element of being a fan.

Lyden (2012) argues that fandom may manifest itself in ways analogous to religion, bearing similar markers such as communal identity, a system of beliefs and values, and so on. With the growth of digital media and social networking sites, fans are now able to interact on platforms such as Twitter in conjunction with real life events. Highfield, Harrington, and Bruns (2012) define the term "audiencing," the public performance of belonging to the distributed audience for a shared media event online. In other words, the use of hashtags (e.g.,

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#TheForceAwakens for *Star Wars*) allows fans to publicly self-identify on a platform that extends across the globe. The use of hashtags and other emblems (e.g., filters placed on profile photos in support for France after the terror attacks) allows for individuals to stake a claim as a member of a particular community.

Public displays of fandom are present in other live broadcasts that Harrington, Highfield, and Bruns (2012) describe as "virtual loungerooms," or communal spaces where audience members can come together to discuss their response to what they see on the television. These virtual loungerooms are present across multiple platforms and even embedded into the design of streaming websites (e.g., chat function) as well. These online platforms allow for fans to interact in sync with other members of large audiences ranging from fans to onlookers to potentially rival fans (Wood & Baughman, 2012). In gaming communities in particular, interdependent relationships are created to overcome challenges together (Teng, 2013). Streaming adds an additional nuance to the idea of overcoming challenges as viewers are participants in the achievements made by the streamer. In other words, watching a streamer overcome a challenge while the community encourages his or her success leads to satisfaction in the individual. Continued viewership with a particular streamer may lead to the development of an affinity or connection to the streamer. As a result, viewers experience transportation into the perspective of the individual experiencing the game or program (Greenwood, 2008). Over time, stream viewers may develop parasocial relationships with the streamer as they experience the achievements of the game together.

Parasocial Relationships in New Media

Formative manuscripts of PSRs have ranged from investigations of television programming (Horton & Strauss, 1957; Koenig & Lessan, 1985) to fiction novels (Oatley, 1994).

More recently, shifts in research agendas have included celebrity worship (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Sun & Wu, 2012) and identification in video games (Yee & Bailenson, 2007; Klimmit et al., 2009). There have been a number of investigations of parasocial relationships including parasocial breakup (Cohen, 2003; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011), online communities (Soukup, 2006), and even dislike of media figures (Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

Researchers – most recently Dibble, Hartmann, and Rosaen (2016) – have long used the terms parasocial relationships and parasocial interactions synonymously, which can become problematic conceptually. Parasocial interactions are understood to be a viewer's response to a media performer in a "media exposure situation" (p. 23). These interactions are conceptually short stints of exchange between viewer and media figure. Furthermore, triggers (e.g., eye-contact, addressing the audience) from the media figure hold the potential to temporarily stimulate an illusionary exchange with the viewer. Ultimately, these interactions are fleeting and do not persist outside of the exposure. In other words, the parasocial interaction exists exclusively during the exposure to the media figure. Parasocial relationships, however, focus on the persistence of these parasocial experiences outside of the viewing of the media figure. The most complete conceptualization of parasocial relationships describes the phenomenon as, "a longer-term association that may begin to develop during viewing, but also extends beyond the media exposure situation" (p. 25). As this research investigates the continued and repeated relationship between viewer and media figure, the focus of parasociality is seated in parasocial relationships and not interactions. Therefore, transient parasocial interactions will be set aside in favor of the more accurate parasocial relationship hereafter.

Traditionally, PSR literature has focused on a lack of reciprocity between the viewer and the media figure described as being one-dimensional (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Stever & Lawson,

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2013). Parasocial relationships are now more accessible due to access to new technologies. Communities are now heavily housed online including social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) and live streaming video platforms (e.g., Twitch.tv, YouTube Gaming, etc.). Access to online communities that support users' favorite media figures provide a truly unique opportunity to satisfy gratifications with new media. Contrary to those criticisms, relationships established parasocially frequently persist after a viewer turns off their television set or puts down a romantic novel (Caughey, 1984). That is to say individuals are experiencing their relationships after the stimuli have ceased, which parallels more closely to interpersonal or romantic relationships. In many instances, PSRs are described as being close others by the viewers leading to continued interactions (Koenig & Lessan, 1985). Like friendship, PSRs are upheld as long as the viewer perceives value within the interaction. Individuals are able to dictate the frequency and duration of interactions with characters with new services available for use.

Recent advances in media and reach of communication technologies have increased the nuances of parasocial research. Traditional access to television characters is no longer exclusive to sitting down on a weeknight as it airs. Instead, entertainment subscriptions to Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube have emerged as trends for media consumption. In particular, a 2013 study conducted by Netflix noted that binge watching (i.e., watching 2-6 episodes of the same program in one sitting) has become the new norm of television consumption. The language used within the study matches that of parasocial research when participants reported that binge watching served as a "refuge from their busy lives." Binge consumption is not exclusively in isolation as an estimated 51 percent watch with another person, making the behavior communal. Streaming platforms allow for real-time interactions with these media figures as well as videos on demand for individuals to repeat previous videos. Streaming platforms are designed to have viewers

watch the media figure in real-time similar to the airing of a television program during the week. Additionally, many viewers will make their previously recorded streams accessible on the streaming platform as well as other video-on-demand websites (e.g., YouTube). Unlike a traditional one-hour timeslot to watch a program, a streamer will instead stream for four or more hours at a time, which is equivalent to the binge watching tendencies found on platforms such as Netflix. In other words, viewing habits of streams mirror other new media technology uses such as Netflix.

Parasocial relationships in a fandom context. Viewers are able to provide support and encouragement to the streamer as well as the community at large. As a result, some fans' viewership may shift from fan to friend with the streamer. Perceived friendships with the media figure are particularly tricky to parse when compared to more traditional face-to-face interactions. To reiterate an idea from Horton and Wahl (1956), pseudo-relationships with media figures are indeed non-reciprocal in the sense that the streamer may not directly respond to a message from viewers. That is not to say, however, that the viewer does not perceive their relationship to be genuine. In fact, work by Derrick, Gabriel, and Tippin (2008) suggests that viewers can satisfy the need for belonging through these parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships require continued exposure, which may in turn provide the experience of being with a friend rather than simply a fan of the streamer.

What separates a fan from a parasocial figure is the perceived relationship the viewer holds with the media figure. As a fan, admiration of a media figure and affinity to him or her does not constitute a perceived relationship. On the other hand, individuals in parasocial relationships describe their relationship to the media figure as a close other (Derrick et al., 2008). Viewers may opt for a fan relationship when the desire for friendship is absent. In other words,

the buy-in for being a casual fan of an individual is low. Fans come and go as they please without the need to consider if the streamer notices their absence. As a result of continued exposure, viewers are motivated to continue support of their favorite streamer as a way to demonstrate their investment into the relationship.

Differentiating a fan from a parasocial figure can be complicated. Simplistically, parasocial relationships involve the viewer as a fan of the media figure in terms of interest in their personal and professional lives. Additionally, individuals will allocate time to thinking about or interacting with the media figure (i.e., watching the media figure's programs or reading their social media). Additionally, identification with the media figure applies to both fandom and parasocial relationships (Soukup, 2006a). As little prior research examines the differences in behaviors between fandom and parasocial relationships, the nature of this study is primarily exploratory. As a result, comparisons will be drawn between these two variables (fandom and PSI) and the other variables within the study (gratifications and community affiliation).

Extensions of parasocial research into new avenues of communication technologies are important to the growth of understanding the phenomenon. Work by Marwick (2015) has continued exploration of microcelebrities suggesting that viewers are treating microcelebrities similar to more traditional celebrities. In other words, followers are perceiving microcelebrities less like other users and more like famed celebrities. Moreover, viewers receive interpersonal gratifications (e.g., immediacy and social support) by following microcelebrities and participating in a parasocial relationship.

An important element of these microcelebrities is the idea that they are "always on," allowing viewers to access their preferred parasocial figure more frequently (Mullen, 2010). To stay up-to-date with the streamer, the viewer must change his or her viewership habits around the

streamer's schedule. U&G theory examines audience involvement and gratifications (i.e., psychological, social, etc.) for media consumption (Rubin, 1994). In the circumstance of streaming, U&G allows for the focus to be placed on tendencies and behaviors of viewers – many of whom go to great lengths to continue consumption of their favorite media figure.

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory and approach is born out of media effects research that sought to understand which types of content satisfied the social and psychological needs of viewers (Cantril, 1942). Originally, U&G has been applied to a variety of contexts including tendencies of radio viewership (Cantril & Allport, 1935; Herzog, 1940) and newspaper reading (Berelson, 1949). U&G is built upon five primary assumptions as presented by Rubin (1994): (1) communication behavior (i.e., media selection and use) is goal-directed, purposeful, and motivated; (2) individuals select and use communication vehicles to satisfy needs and desires; (3) social and psychological factors mediate communication behavior; (4) "media compete with other forms of communication (i.e., functional alternatives) for selection, attention, and use to gratify our needs or wants;" and (5) individuals are commonly more influential than media in the relationship (p. 420). In short, individuals are motivated to satisfy their own needs with media as a vehicle for doing so. Decision making in terms of channels allows individuals to determine how and when gratifications are to be met. For example, an individual can download a movie to their tablet for the commute to work or at the gym.

Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) describe the seven gratifications of the approach as follows: *relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool and new trend, companionship, social interaction,* and *habitual time pass*. Each category of gratifications highlights different gratifications that individuals may seek to satisfy with media use. Below are

extrapolations of each gratification and how they manifest themselves in streaming viewership. There is not one steadfast way to satisfying a specific gratification. In other words, *relaxing entertainment* (i.e., finding joy in watching a streamer play) may not be a gratification that a user is looking to satisfy by tuning into a stream each session.

Gratifications sought through Twitch.tv are similar to those in more traditional media including television consumption. For example, *escapism* (i.e., the desire to escape from real-life circumstances and relationships) can be accomplished through a connection to the streamer. Work by Rubin and Perse (1987) focused on the portrayal of soap opera characters wherein viewers would imagine themselves through the perspective of the actors. In a literal sense, viewers are able to see the screen and game outcomes (e.g., winning, losing, playing the game) in real-time as the streamer. Certain viewers may watch a streams regularly as a way to *habitually pass time* when bored or as part of their routine.

In many cases, streamers are given access to content that is not readily available to the public (e.g., games before official release date), which is highlighted by the gratification of *cool and new trend*. Many streamers play games professionally, which lends itself to media and news coverage that may propel them into the limelight temporarily or virally. Just as a scandal may emerge regarding an Oscar-winning performer, a professional streamer may receive attention from the Twitch community. Twitch-partnered streamers (e.g., those who receive payments from Twitch to stream) are featured on the front page of the website, which may entice viewers to switch between communities as a result of Twitch presenting a *cool and new trend.*

Expressing information sharing (i.e., providing personal information) may manifest itself as self-disclosure across the community. Streamers have the tendency to expose personal anecdotes while recording, which exposes users to interpersonal disclosure. Additionally,

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expressive information sharing happens in response to commentary from the streamer themselves among the members of the community. By participating in this sharing of personal information, viewers build relationships and solidify the gratification of *companionship* with one another. *Companionship* (i.e., having a friend to offset alone time) reflects well with the literature of parasocial relationships as parasocial figure may serve as friends for viewers.

In many respects, parallels can be drawn between streaming platforms and the gratifications met through the watching of reality television shows. Although these programs are frequently scripted, the invasive nature of recording on reality television mirrors the raw viewing of streamers. In fact, individuals have been found to seek out reality television programming to fulfill individual gratifications of voyeurism and *companionship* – two gratifications that are present within streaming platforms (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Additionally, uses and gratification argues that there are competing forms of communication (i.e., television versus newspaper versus Twitch) vying to satisfy a users' needs.

Readily available access to other community members is a critical affordance provided within online contexts for users who are seeking *companionship*. Interactions online may serve as an alternative or supplement to more traditional *social interactions*. Continued access to others who share the same adoration to a media figure helps to alleviate loneliness within a social structure. Instead of meeting each week at a local bar, members of these online communities satisfy their *social interactions* through building or maintaining *companionship* often as a result of *expressive information sharing*.

Viewers seeking to satisfy individual needs participate in online communities, which continues the exposure to likeminded individuals and microcelebrities. Research on video gaming has found that individuals in gaming environments who develop parasocial relationships

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satisfy a number of gratifications such as enjoyment and feelings of belonging (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004; Peng, Lin, Pfeiffer, & Winn, 2012). These individuals seek out appropriate media to satisfy their needs as an active audience (Ruggerio, 2000) as stipulated by U&G theory.

Streaming platforms function similarly to other online platforms (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Specifically, streaming platforms function similarly to social networking websites in terms of the social gratifications that are met online. First, many of the communicative features (e.g., messaging, following other users' accounts, etc.) are identical to social networking websites which aid in maintaining relationships should the user desire to interact. These communicative features allow users to become active gratifications seekers while they are consuming media (Jung, Youn, & McClung, 2007). Previous generations of users bound to their physical desktop computers can now download applications on smartphones or switch between channels (i.e., smartphone to tablet to laptop) in seconds. Ease of access enhances the connection experience in parasocial relationships.

Second, the use of streaming platforms become habitual in terms of frequency of use. A large portion of the viewership on Twitch.tv access the site multiple times during the week, averaging around 106 minutes per viewing session. Another comparison can be drawn to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that do not require a user to stare idly into a screen. Instead, users can have Twitch.tv on in the background similar to a television while completing other tasks. Components of the U&G approach including *entertainment* and *time pass* have been found to be strong predictors of Twitter usage (Coursaris, Yun, & Sung, 2010).

Watching casually without interaction with others members of the community is certainly a common occurrence with stream viewership similar to more traditional television viewership.

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In many cases, users may opt out of participation in these interactions with members of the community for more isolated consumption. The individuals who do not interact with the streamer's community may instead use preexisting relationships from other online or offline groups to communicate about their favorite streamer. Availability of a preexisting online community may satisfy *social interaction* and *companionship* needs while the media figure provides *information-seeking* or *entertainment*. There is a shift occurring toward more community interaction as Twitch (2016) saw 17,446 messages per minute exchanged on their platform. In tandem, viewing a media figure while remaining engaged with companions online may very well meet a wealth of gratifications.

By moving toward a platform that encourages interaction across the community, Twitch allows for online communities to continue to flourish as more users login moving forward. Fischer and Reuber (2011) argue that community orientation (e.g., the extent to which an individual is interested in expanding their interactions with a community) involves a desire for engagement including socializing, helping others, and building relationships. Interactions are triangulated in a sense: user-media figure, media figure-community, and community-user. In other words, interactions in online communities supporting media figures intertwine the online communities and the users.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The current study examines the role of streamers in the relationship between viewer gratifications sought on streaming platforms and sense of community (SOC) experienced. The study is guided by two hypotheses and three research questions. The first hypothesis and two research questions examine the role of gratifications in predicting SOC and PSR/fandom,

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respectively. The second hypothesis and third research question look at the model in its entirety positing PSR/fandom as a mediator in the relationship between gratifications and SOC.

A basic principle guiding U&G is the notion that individuals will strategically select media to satisfy their social and psychological needs (Rubin, 1993). Moreover, individuals will use platforms that offer the highest potential for interpersonal communication and interactivity with those who shared a mutual interest in a topic (Ruggiero, 2000). New media technologies such as streaming websites seamlessly combine satiation of entertainment gratifications and social interaction. As a result, stream viewers will use streaming platforms to satisfy social, entertainment, and recognition needs (Leung, 2009). The desire to satisfy individual gratifications will lead viewers to have interactions with other viewers within the community.

H1: Gratifications (*relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool and new trend, companionship, social interaction,* and *habitual pass time*) will positively predict sense of community.

Certain gratifications – namely entertainment, escapism, companionship, and social interaction – motivate social media usage (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). The channel itself (i.e., streaming websites) may provide access to new relationships, escape from real-world issues, and parasocial relationships as well (Rubin, Haridakis, & Eyal, 2003). As a result, incentives to watch a stream (i.e., gratifications being met) are predicated on the presence of a streamer. After all, the establishment of an online community for a streamer requires the streamer to take on the role as the microcelebrity. Streamers may share experiences, stories, and snippets of their lives with viewers of the stream resulting in the development of fandom similar to work on celebrity disclosure on social media (Marshall, 2010; Click et al., 2013). Viewers may seek out specific streamers who cater to their individual needs. In other words, the process

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of choosing a streamer may be dependent on the viewers' desired gratifications. Work by Schiappa, Allen, and Gregg (2007) found that TV consumption, perceived similarity with the characters, and desire for watching TV were positively related to the experience of parasocial interaction. In short, the experience of PSR on streaming websites may be contingent upon the gratifications that are sought by viewers. Gratifications may differ between PSR and fandom due to the due to the trendiness of specific channels on Twitch (i.e., a streamer has access to a new game). Some viewers may tune-in to a stream due to their established connection to the streamer (i.e., PSR) whereas others may be more interested in the game or topic of interest (i.e., fandom). As a result, the gratifications individuals seek may be discernable given their degree of PSR and fandom toward the streamer.

RQ1: Which gratifications are associated with a) fandom and b) PSRs on streaming sites?

RQ2: Do fandom and PSRs differ in their associations with gratifications?

Twitch functions similarly to social networking sites in that making, building, and maintaining networks help to facilitate social ties (Donath and Boyd, 2004). In many situations, viewers who develop parasocial relationships experience a sense of enjoyment and belonging provided by online communities (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004). The gratifications associated with SOC may be impacted by the presence of the media figure. Individuals may use streaming platforms and affiliated online communities (i.e., Facebook, Reddit, etc.) to experience a sense of belonging within a community or social network (Williams, 2006). The streamer may function as the glue or core that connects the relationship between gratifications and SOC. In sum, viewers seek out streamers who are able to satisfy specific gratifications. Viewers' continuance of viewing a favorite streamer leads to the establishment of a PSR or fan-relationship during the process of satisfying these gratifications. As a result, the affinity to the

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streamer impacts the SOC experienced. Figure 1 illustrates the expected associations between gratifications, PSR and fandom, and SOC.

H2. PSR and fandom will mediate the association between gratifications and sense of community.

RQ3. Do fandom and PSR differ in their mediation of the association between gratifications and sense of community?

Methods

Participants & Procedure

Following UWM IRB approval, participants were recruited through a variety of online platforms including Reddit, Twitch.tv, Riot Games forums, etc. The survey was distributed through Qualtrics, a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee survey tool. As an incentive, participants were placed in a raffle to receive a $25 gift card for Amazon.com. The display order of items for all individual scales within the survey were randomized through Qualtrics to reduce the impact of item order effects.

A total of 624 participants took part in the study (age $M = 23.56, SD = 6.08$). Regarding ethnicity, 71.3% of participants identified as Caucasian, 9.6% identified as Asian, 7.2% identified as Other (e.g., Mixed, European, etc.) , 3.5% identified as Hispanic, 1.3% identified as Black, 1.3% identified as Pacific Islander, and .5% identified as Native American. Participants ($N = 540$) logged into the streaming websites when watching streams up to seven days during the week ($M = 4.73, SD = 2.07$). Additionally, participants watched up to 10 different streamers ($M = 5.05, SD = 2.76$) throughout the week across the following streaming platforms: Azubu ($N = 16$), Hitbox ($N = 41$), Twitch ($N = 587$), YouTube ($N = 183$), and Other ($N = 31$) (e.g., Panda.TV and UStream). Participants ($N = 587$) also indicate watching or rewatching content

from the stream as videos on demand (VOD) from 10 minutes to a maximum of 1,800 minutes per week ($M = 150.85$, $SD = 225.23$).

Participants were prompted to think of their favorite streamer, which was proceeded by a number of questions regarding the streamer's behaviors. First, participants identified their streamer's gender including Male ($N = 570$), Female ($N = 38$), and Other ($N = 15$). Participants used a number of social media platforms to follow their favorite streamer including Facebook ($N = 87$), Instagram ($N = 58$), Snapchat ($N = 43$), Twitter ($N = 375$), YouTube ($N = 368$), and *Other* ($N = 59$). Participants identified if they were a Subscriber (e.g., paid \$5 a month to the streamer for special privileges) including Yes ($N = 160$) and No ($N = 463$). Those who selected Yes also indicated how many months they had been a subscriber ($M = 9.68$, $SD = 8.71$) ranging from one month to a maximum of 48 months. Additionally, 138 participants were subscribers to other channels ($M = 6.55$, $SD = 20.23$). Participants ($N = 125$) had previously donated to the stream ranging from \$2 to \$2,500 ($M = 78.4$, $SD = 252.13$).

Next, participants identified games that the streamer played. The preset selections included were the top 15 games streamed on Twitch. These included CS:GO ($N = 62$), Dark Souls ($N = 14$), Destiny ($N = 10$), Diablo III ($N = 10$), DOTA2 ($N = 147$), FIFA15 ($N = 2$), Guild Wars ($N = 43$), H1Z1 ($N = 77$), Hearthstone ($N = 7$), Heroes of the Storm ($N = 44$), League of Legends ($N = 17$), Minecraft ($N = 201$), Overwatch ($N = 14$), Super Smash Brothers ($N = 29$), Variety (i.e., plays multiple games) ($N = 46$), World of Tanks ($N = 23$), Twitch Creative (e.g., cooking, painting, etc.) ($N = 215$), and Other ($N = 557$).

Participants responded to questions regarding which games they watched throughout the week, how much they watched, and which devices they used. Participants indicated the total minutes they watched streams during the week ($M = 204.84$, $SD = 407$) as well as during the

weekend ($M = 200.75$, $SD = 339.32$). The devices used for watching streams (answered by total minute per week) include Desktop ($N = 443$, $M = 128.11$, $SD = 251.95$), Laptop ($N = 215$, $M = 66.94$, $SD = 87.42$), Smartphone ($N = 258$, $M = 57.27$, $SD = 117.91$), Tablet ($N = 107$, $M = 44.14$, $SD = 99.51$), Video Game Console (e.g., Xbox, Playstation, etc.) ($N = 87$, $M = 24.14$, $SD = 48.09$), and Smart TV or TV-extension (e.g., Chromecast, Amazon Fire TV, Roku, etc.) ($N = 83$, $M = 75.92$, $SD = 372.74$). Participants identified which games they watched on stream including CS:GO ($N = 152$), Destiny ($N = 16$), DOTA2 ($N = 198$), FIFA15 ($N = 8$), Guild Wars ($N = 52$), H1Z1 ($N = 141$), Hearthstone ($N = 31$), Heroes of the Storm ($N = 78$), League of Legends ($N = 50$), Minecraft ($N = 268$), Variety (i.e., plays multiple games) ($N = 46$), World of Tanks ($N = 39$), World of Warcraft ($N = 90$), Twitch Creative (e.g., cooking, painting, etc.) ($N = 252$), and Other ($N = 623$).

Participants responded to questions regarding which games they played and how many minutes per week they played games. Participants indicated the total minutes played during the week ($M = 268.76$, $SD = 391.49$) as well as during the weekend ($M = 302.02$, $SD = 341.32$). Participants identified which games they played including CS:GO ($N = 144$), Destiny ($N = 28$), DOTA2 ($N = 200$), FIFA15 ($N = 17$), Guild Wars ($N = 48$), H1Z1 ($N = 33$), Hearthstone ($N = 147$), Heroes of the Storm ($N = 54$), League of Legends ($N = 79$), Minecraft ($N = 113$), Variety (i.e., plays multiple games) ($N = 248$), World of Tanks ($N = 57$), World of Warcraft ($N = 59$), Twitch Creative (e.g., cooking, painting, etc.) ($N = 45$), and Other ($N = 623$).

Measures

Fandom. Participants' fandom was assessed using the 13-item Reysen and Branscombe (2010) Fanship scale. Two items (e.g., "I want everyone to know I am connected to my interest" and "I want to be friends with people who like my interest") were removed from the scale due to

overlap with the other variables investigated in this dissertation (PSR and Sense of Community). The remaining 11 items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items include, "I have rescheduled my work to accommodate my interest," "I am emotionally connected to my interest," and "I would devote all my time to my interest if I could," $\alpha = .77$.

Parasocial relationships. Participants' parasocial relationship was assessed using the 13-item Hartmann, Stuke, and Daschmann (2008) Parasocial Interaction Scale, a multidimensional scale designed to assess degree of connectedness an individual shares with a media figure. Each of the 13 items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Researcher adapted the language on the scale to reflect streaming platform behaviors from the original television specific language (e.g., "My favorite media personality makes me feel as comfortable as when I am with friends" to "My favorite streamer…"). Items included, "I think my favorite streamer is like an old friend," "I miss seeing my favorite streamer when he or she does not post content," and "I am not as satisfied when other people criticize my favorite streamer," $\alpha = .89$.

Gratifications. Gratifications sought while watching streams was assessed using the 26-item version of Papacharissi and Mendelson's (2011) U&G Measurement. Each of the 26 items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The seven gratifications of streaming viewership included: *relaxing entertainment* (e.g., "Because it's entertaining," $\alpha = .74$), *expressive information sharing* (e.g., "To provide personal information about myself," $\alpha = .73$), *escapism* (e.g., "So I can forget about school, work, or other things," $\alpha = .80$), *cool and new trend* (e.g., "Because it is the thing to do," $\alpha = .65$), *companionship* (e.g., "So I won't have to be alone," $\alpha = .83$), *social*

interaction (e.g., "To keep in touch with friends and family," α = .75), and *habitual pass time* (e.g., "Because it passes the time away, particularly when I'm bored," α = .76).

   Sense of community. Participants' affinity to Twitch.tv as a virtual community was assessed using the Sense of Community 2 scale (Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008), which is directly adapted from the original iteration of the measurement (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986). The four subscales consist of 6-items for *reinforcement of needs* (e.g., "I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community"), 6-items for *membership* (e.g., "I can trust people in this community," "I can recognize most of the members of this community," etc.), 6-items for *influence* (e.g., "Fitting into this community is important to me," and "I care about what other community members think of me"), and 6-items for *shared emotional connection* (e.g., "It is very important to me to be a part of this community). Due to the high degree of correlation between the four subscales (*r*s = .81 - .86), the four subscales were combined into one measurement for analysis titled, "Sense of Community" or "SOC." SPSS was used to compute the proceeding analyses.

Analyses

   Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables are provided in Table 1. A mediation model was tested with causal variables of gratifications predicting the outcome variable of sense of community (H1), with fandom and PSR as mediators (H2). Research Questions 1-3 investigated which specific gratifications acted as causal variables in the mediation model. Specifically, RQ1 investigated which gratifications were associated with fandom and PSRs while RQ2 investigated the differences in these gratifications. Similarly, RQ3 posited the difference in associations of fandom and PSR between gratifications and sense of community.

The hypotheses and research questions were tested using Hayes's PROCESS macro (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). A separate model was calculated for each gratification, with the other gratifications included in the model as covariates. Participant age, sex, and minutes viewing streams per week were included as covariates. Confidence intervals were estimated using 1,000 bias-corrected bootstrapped samples.

Results

Gratifications and Sense of Community (H1)

As shown in Table 2, there were direct associations between SOC and viewers' gratifications of expressive information sharing ($b = .23$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.13, .32]) and social interaction ($b = .16$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.08, .24]). Viewers with stronger expressive information sharing and desire for social interaction gratifications reported higher sense of community.

Gratifications for PSR and Fandom (RQ1, RQ2)

PSR. As shown in Table 2, viewers' PSR was associated with gratifications of relaxing entertainment ($b = .48$, $SE = .07$, 95% CI [.34, .62]), expressive information sharing ($b = .11$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.01, .21]), and escapism ($b = .13$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.03, .22]). Viewers with higher PSR reported higher gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism.

Fandom. Similar to viewers' PSR gratifications, viewers' fandom was associated with gratifications of relaxing entertainment ($b = .33$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI [.21, .46]), expressive information sharing ($b = .19$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.11, .27]), and escapism ($b = .09$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.01, .18]). Unlike PSR, fandom was also associated with the gratifications of cool and new trend ($b = .10$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.02, .18]) and companionship ($b = .11$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.04,

.17]). Viewers experiencing high fandom reported high gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool and new trend, and companionship.

Fandom and PSR Mediating Gratifications and Sense of Community (H2, RQ3)

PSRs. SOC was associated with PSR (b = .42, SE = .06, 95% CI [.31, .55]). Those viewers experiencing high PSR reported higher SOC. Additionally, there were indirect associations between gratifications and SOC, via PSR, for relaxing entertainment (b = .21, SE = .04, 95% CI [.13, .30]), expressive information sharing (b = .05, SE = .02, 95% CI [.03, .11]), and escapism (b = .05, SE = .03, 95% CI [.01, .11]). In other words, PSR mediated the relationship between SOC and the gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism.

Fandom. SOC was associated with fandom (b = .32, SE = .07, 95% CI [.18, .45]). Viewers' experiencing higher fandom reported higher SOC. Additionally, there were indirect associations between gratifications and SOC, via fandom, for relaxing entertainment (b = .11, SE = .03, 95% CI [.05, .19]), expressive information sharing (b = .06, SE = .02, 95% CI [.03, .11]), and escapism (b = .03, SE = .02, 95% CI [.004, .07]). Unlike the indirect effect of PSR, there were indirect associations between gratifications and SOC, via fandom, for cool and new trend (b = .03, SE = .01, 95% CI [.01, .07]) and companionship (b = .03, SE = .01, 95% CI [.01, .07]). In summation, viewers' fandom mediated the relationship between SOC and gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool and new trend, and companionship.

Comparison of PSR and fandom. Relaxing entertainment's indirect effect via PSR (b = .21, SE = .04, 95% CI [.13, .30]) falls outside of the confidence interval of its indirect effect via

fandom ($b = .11$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.05, .19]), which is the only significant difference between the two mediators.

Discussion

The current study sought to discern the differences in parasocial relationships and fandom both conceptually and empirically. More specifically, how these two variables functioned as mediators in the relationship between gratifications sought and sense of community experienced by stream viewers. The significant findings within the mediation model are included in Figure 2. Streaming platforms provide opportunity for viewers to watch their favorite media figure in real-time while simultaneously interacting with others within online communities. While traditional media exposure to favorite media figures (e.g., television and radio) has been investigated, streaming websites' visceral experience and "always on" technology provides viewers with a new way of "interacting" with their favorite media personalities. Specifically, the present dissertation found direct associations between SOC and the gratifications of expressive information sharing and social interaction. Next, the dissertation found that both fandom and PSR were associated with SOC. The dissertation tested the relationship between gratifications and SOC with fandom and PSR as mediators. Results of the mediation model indicated fandom and PSR mediate the relationship between gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism. Finally, there were indirect associations via fandom between gratifications—cool and new trend and companionship—and SOC.

Gratifications and Sense of Community

Hypothesis 1 found a direct relationship between SOC and the gratifications of expressive information sharing and social interaction. Social technologies such as Twitch.tv provide unprecedented direct interactions with communities. Streaming platforms provide the ability to both share information as well as satisfy the desire for social interaction with members

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of the community. Selecting a specific streaming channel will automatically provide a chat box

on the side of the screen (see Figure 3). As a result, a viewer is given the ability to express

information and participate in the social element of the stream. Viewers who see and actively

participate are able to experience SOC. In particular, social interaction is the only gratification

that has a direct effect with SOC without being statistically significant within a mediation model

tested. That is to suggest that the gratification of social interaction does not rely on fandom or

PSR to encourage SOC. General stream viewership can be more focused on the game or event

rather than the streamer themselves. Many international tournaments are broadcasted on

streaming platforms. During these matches, viewers are less focused on their favorite streamer

because they may not be the focal point of attention. Instead, viewers are able to socialize with

other stream viewers comparable to being a patron at a bar during the Olympics. The experience

of community is less tied to a particular media figure in these circumstances and focused on the

shared experienced.

Social networks provide an alternative route to establishing and maintaining connections

with those with shared interests. Many relationships are preexisting friendships

(Haythornthwaite, 2005) that continue in support of the favorite media figure being observed.

Viewership is not exclusively passive. Instead, commitment to these established internet

communities intensifies as members discuss adoration of media figures (Soukup, 2006b). Twitch

provides an avenue for interactions with other members of the community. In particular, the

gratifications of relaxing entertainment and social interaction were directly associated with SOC.

Streaming platforms are built and sold on the notion of entertainment.

Gratifications for PSR and Fandom

RQ1 investigated which gratifications are associated with fandom and PSR on streaming

sites. As reported in both the results and Table 2, viewers' PSR and fandom were both associated

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with gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism. In short, viewers with high experience of PSR and fandom were those who sought out gratifications of relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism.

The core of streaming platforms is that streamers assume the role of entertainers. Different personalities may attract different viewers; however, the underlying expectation of being entertained remains consistent across all streamers. Linking back to preliminary parasocial and fandom research, the term "performer" as referred by Goffman (1959) can be applied to streamers. Unlike traditional media, there is not a delineation between the character and the person assuming the role of a character on stream (i.e., the famed personality is the streamer). Additionally, streamers utilize social media platforms (e.g., Twitter and Instagram) to connect and display their human-side to viewers. Streamers most often use their streamed content as material for multi-channel networks (i.e., using YouTube, Twitch, and Twitter for branding), which provides a consistent flow of content from media figure to consumer (Gardner & Lehnert, 2016). These platforms enable on-demand entertainment similar to television recording devices. Access to streamers is possible even when they are not streaming, which elicits the "always on" experience of fandom. In other words, individuals engaging in a fan-relationship or PSR have a number of tools to experience the connection to their favorite media figure. Readily available access coupled with the desire for specific gratifications establishes an easy-to-accomplish reward system for gratifications.

The presence of community is certainly a benefit to the viewer; however, the streamer themselves provides direct benefits to the viewer. Streaming platforms are often broadcasted from the perspective of the streamer playing a game. Viewers are able to escape and transport themselves virtually through the eyes and actions of the games, which parallels a television

viewer imagining themselves through the perspective of the actors (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Many of the famed and popular streamers are renowned for their skill or expertise in the games, which could make the experience of escapism through the streamer's gameplay more visceral (i.e., envision self being particularly competent). Watching a star player perform during a professional sports game (e.g., LeBron James in the NBA or Serena Williams in Wimbledon) allows the casual viewer to experience the highs-and-lows of their interest. Moreover, a viewer can suspend disbelief and escape into the perspective of the player. Although the technology has not enabled viewers to watch precisely through the first-person perspective of an athlete, streaming platforms come quite close. Specifically, a stream viewer is able to experience a heightened sense of escapism as they can see the actions on the game as though they themselves were clicking and selecting the keystrokes to play the game at an elite level. That is not to suggest, however, that all streamers are high-performance athletes in their respective games. Instead, the experience of satisfying gratifications through the streamer or in tandem helps to further establish the experience of PSR and fandom.

Similar to entertainment, the ability to present and share information regarding one's interests (i.e., expressive information sharing) is particularly important as streamers are the embodiment of those interests. In many cases, streamers themselves are the point of interest, or are tangentially related because they are active members of the community. New media provides hashtags, which allow users to find others with similar interests. The basic navigation of a website such as Twitch.tv automatically sorts the games into their own channels, which allows users to more easily find information removing one barrier of entry. Due to ease of access, viewers' interests are primarily sorted for them saving both time and effort. Similarly, many of the games played by streamers and viewers alike have prerequisite communication (i.e.,

information sharing) that increases success in the game (Liu & Chang, 2016). Social interactions through information sharing enables viewers to acquire new knowledge and share their own opinions regarding the game and themselves (Voiskounsky et al., 2004).

RQ2 asked about differences in associations of fandom and PSR with gratifications. Apart from the overlap with relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism, fandom was exclusively associated with gratifications cool and new trend and companionship.

Parasocial relationships are often developed with repeated and prolonged exposure to a media figure. Being a fan can be heavily driven by the popularity of a media figure – even if the fan worship continues for the same duration of a PSR. In particular, streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube gaming feature sponsored partners on their front page. Streamers who have amassed a large enough following (i.e., 500 concurrent viewers each stream) are further promoted on the platform. In a sense, streaming platforms funnel new viewers into already popular streamers to help promote the stream's overall success. Similarly, selecting a specific game will list the current streamers by total viewers in descending order. Seeking out a favorite streamer to be a fan (i.e., their gameplay style, humor, physical appearance, etc.) may be as simplistic as selecting the number one viewed player, which may be demonstrated in the association with the gratification of cool and new trend and fandom.

Another gratification associated with fandom exclusively was that of companionship. Operationalizing companionship begins with the social connectedness and assurances that individuals desire as a mechanism to experience likeness with others (Lee & Robbins, 1995). In a sense, companionship within the context of streaming platforms may be more heavily related to interactions with the community than with connectedness to the streamer. In fact, connectedness

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with the streamer as a pseudo-friendship would more closely align with PSR, which did not have an association with companionship. Instead, companionship entails spending meaningful time with other members of the community, which may account for the gratification of habitual time pass and its lack of associations with fandom, PSR, and SOC. Work by Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman (2015) notes companionship enables social media users to expand and strengthen their social network in addition to meeting others that share the same interests. Mutual interest in a game or streamer may lead a viewer to a specific channel with the intent of satisfying individual gratifications. There is a great deal of overlap with streaming platforms and other online communities. For example, the entertainment website Reddit has a number of subreddits or niche message boards used by different games and streamers. An individual may use a subreddit to learn more information or refine their skills on a video game. Often streamers cross-promote their videos and stream on the subreddits to help generate more viewers to their channels. In return, streamers will recommend newcomers seeking assistance in the game they are playing to the subreddit, creating a cyclical relationship between the two structures (e.g., subreddit and stream). The experience of companionship is then two-fold. First, a viewer will seek out the advice of a community for whom they share the same interests. Second, the experience of companionship on both platforms enables further interactions with the members of both online communities.

Fandom and PSR Mediating Gratifications and Sense of Community

As posited in H2, PSR and fandom both mediate the association between specific gratifications and SOC. For PSR, the indirect associations between gratifications and SOC include relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism. For fandom, the indirect associations between gratifications and SOC include relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism. Finally, the difference observed in RQ2 (e.g., "Do fandom

and PSR differ in their associations with gratifications?") is present as fandom exclusively mediated the indirect association between gratifications and SOC for cool and new trend and companionship.

One of the initial inquiries of this dissertation includes which gratifications stream viewers seek to satisfy when they visit websites including Twitch.tv, Azubu.tv, and YouTube Gaming. Work by Rubin (1994) suggests that media consumers are motivated to select media as a means to satisfy their needs and desires. The emergence of "social technologies" (i.e., media wherein viewers can participate in discussion with other viewers) presents researchers with unique avenues for U&G research. In particular, viewership is no longer happening in isolation. Instead, viewers are able to satisfy their need for expressive information sharing, social interaction, and other gratifications in the presence of their favorite media figure.

To echo the work of Hsiao and Chiou (2012), interactions within online communities provide gamers with social benefits. The gratification of expressive information sharing is provided by the streamer's platform. The discussions that occur are often in direct reference to the streamers' actions, comments, and interactions with other members of the community. There are instances where situations in the community become the topic of conversation without relevance to the current stream. For example, a famous League of Legends personality was alleged to have had sex with a minor. Days after the reports the vast majority of League of Legends streams had comments made regarding the situation. Stream viewers are able to experience their favorite streamers in the presence of others with similar sought out gratifications. Social interaction is an integral part of maintaining membership and experiencing the psychological sense of community as needs are being fulfilled (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Engaging with members of a joint online community provides an incentive for users to continue future interactions. Work by Chen (2010) suggests that social media users gratify their need for connection with others, which leads to continued social media use and further engagement. Continued viewership on streaming platforms provide opportunities for users to build, maintain, and even terminate their role within online communities. The ability to gain social influence and prosocial benefits (i.e., friendship, social interactions, etc.) moderates much of viewership behaviors (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015). In other words, interacting with other members of online communities provides incentive to return repeatedly.

The gratification of escapism (i.e., ability to get away from their lives or obligations) may be channeled through streaming platforms for viewers. Viewers are able to immerse themselves into virtual worlds vicariously through the streamer (Charlton & Danforth, 2010). Many of the works surrounding escapism have been linked to Internet addiction (Young, 1998; Charlton and Birkett, 1995), which could undoubtedly spiral into a separate dissertation. Simplistically, escapism is a gratification that is enacted by viewers for a multitude of reasons including the desire to relieve boredom (Bloch et al., 1994), escape from the real world (Hussain & Griffiths, 2009), and any other number of incentives. In fact, work by Caplan, Williams, and Yee (2009) suggests that gamers may experience adversely negative outcomes (e.g., increased stress, lowered self-esteem) while seeking to satisfy the gratification of escapism. Further research by Kardefelt-Winther (2014) suggests that individuals with preexisting high levels of stress may turn to online games in an attempt to alleviate real world stressors. It is noteworthy to qualify the preceding information about gaming as a form of escapism and to instead frame the parallel into watching on a streaming platform. Watching others—namely a favorite streamer—play the game may satisfy similar gratifications. The benefit of watching over streaming may be the presence of

others whom share the same interests. Not only are viewers able to escape their own troubles, but they are presented with a streamer and their community that may satisfy other gratifications namely expressive information. From a fandom perspective, the experience of escapism may be experienced in tandem with companionship. In other words, viewers are able to escape life's woes with the streamer as their companion and SOC as a prosocial benefit.

Overlap between Fandom / PSR

The overlap between fandom and PSR could be perceived as troubling as research continues to separate the constructs from each other. In fact, both fandom and PSR act as mediators in the relationship between gratifications (e.g., gratifications of entertainment, information sharing, and escapism) and SOC. Interactions with media characters have been frequently criticized as being non-reciprocal, or failing to provide the viewer with interpersonal resources. Specifically, earlier work on PSRs describe their role as being alternatives for individuals who were unable to maintain or establish more traditional relationships (Rubin & Rubin, 1985; Yanof, 1991). Celebrity worship under the umbrella of fandom studies operates under similar guidelines as PSR. Viewers attempt to alter their identities to more closely align with celebrities, which results in the perceived experience of connection (Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, & McCutcheon, 2002). Streamers function as entertainers, which explains how their presence would the relationship between gratifications and SOC. Similarly, Twitch allows users to explore beyond daily and immediate experiences (Williams, 2006) by interacting with different social networks. Interactions within the chat are not always related to the game. Instead, the conversations can be had across users and topics which accounts for both fandom and PSR in relation to information sharing.

Work by Greenwood (2009a; 2009b) notes that individuals experiencing a need for belonging or loneliness may turn to media characters to satisfy those needs. Similarly, Derrick, Gabriel, and Hugenberg (2009) suggest that feeling needed by a parasocial figure may be safer for individuals fearful of rejection or intimated by close relationships. Unfortunately, the desire for companionship to predict PSR was not found in the mediation model. The primary sentiment is that faux relationships provide viewers with a sense of friendship that is relatively fleeting and likely unsustainable. In essence, television shows and novels will reach diminishing returns for a viewer given cancelation or decreased access. The presence of a favorite streamer enables the experience of the gratifications. Perhaps it is the case that companionship itself is experienced as a fleeting or temporary gratification, which would lend itself to the transient nature of fandom. Instead of attempting to alleviate loneliness through the establishment of a PSR, individuals turn to the quick fix of fandom. Fandom requires less persistent attention and developed connection to the streamer, which could make the reduction of loneliness more appealing on an instant gratification basis.

The discernable difference between fandom and PSR lies in the gratifications and cool and new trend. In an almost demigod status – or microcelebrity – streamers amass a following around themselves. Stream viewers grow connected to the streamer and their brand. In the case of fandom, stream viewers are more concerned about the popular game or trend than the relationship itself. As a result, SOC is not present if a viewer is logging into streaming websites to have a PSR. Instead, the trendiness that follows Twitch is relegated to those who are more invested in what is happening on the platform (i.e., new game releases) rather than the streamer specifically.

Theoretical Implications

Unlike traditional channels of media, streaming websites provide an incredibly high transparency and realism of favorite media figures. There are not a number of takes and an editing process that occurs before a viewer can see their favorite media figure perform. Instead, viewers are watching their favorite personalities in real time. As a result, the disclosure and realism of these celebrities is omnipresent. Work by Kim and Song (2016) suggests that both personal and professional disclosures from celebrities increases followers' feelings of social presence, which in turn predicted the experience of parasocial interaction. Stream viewers are able to experience being connected (Stever & Lawson, 2013) to their celebrity as they consume hours of real-time versions of him or her. The lack of formal self-presentation provides viewers with a seemingly authentic experience alongside both the streamer and the community tuning in to watch at the same time. Research by Lin, Sung, and Chen (2016) found that viewers experienced greater satisfaction and investment in their favorite television programs while engaging with other viewers socially through CMC. Furthermore, the authors suggest that "viewers interact with programs and other viewers through social TV participation as an extension of their viewing experience," suggesting that the supplement of social interactions helps to amplify the experience of consuming media (p. 176). Streamers frequently read messages from a plethora of media (e.g., stream's chat, social media, news articles, etc.) while streaming, which provides a new extension for the viewer. The viewer is able to actively participate in watching the streamer play while simultaneously sending messages to and about the streamer. Nagy and Midha (2014) suggest that viewers who actively engage with others while experiencing social TV are more likely to further invest resources to connect themselves to the program and others.

Interactions within online communities fulfill a number of individual needs and gratifications including entertainment, information sharing, and escapism. Additionally, the streamers help to facilitate the experience of membership within the streaming platforms. Specifically, viewers pick their favorite streamers and use that membership as a way to further their identity and ideas within the community. Online communities allow users to learn about the norms and expectations of behavior, which impacts their identity as a whole (Wenger, 1998). Shared connections with other members of the community elicit a sense of belonging that allows users to reduce a number of negative affective states (i.e., depression, anxiety, etc.) (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). In short, SOC's needs coupled with the shared emotional connection helps to facilitate the positive experience on streaming platforms. Stream viewers' identities are likely shaped by the behaviors of other members in the community. More specifically, the streamer him/herself plays a pivotal role in the fulfillment of needs as PSR and fandom helps to mediate the gratifications sought and the SOC. Viewers are able to contribute to conversations during streams and alter their behaviors based on the norms that are established within their specific communities.

Practical Implications

On a basic level, streaming platforms are designed as entertainment channels. Brands and investors sponsor streamers as well as professional esports teams. Most notably, Amazon's purchase of Twitch.tv in August 2014 included promise of integration of other social platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and many more (Weinberger, 2016). Although partnered streamers are promoted within the platforms, streaming platforms are heavily-driven by individual streamers. There is not one streamer or program that all the viewers tune in for, unlike traditional television, which makes the monopolization of a commodity more challenging.

Given the presence of the gratification cool and new trend in fandom, the swings of popularity from streamer-to-streamer and game-to-game change considerably. As a result, the online communities found within streaming platforms begin to fragment based on the streamer who is popular at that moment, which makes consistent fandom rather volatile.

On the other hand, individuals who do not frequent streaming platforms regularly may have their interests dictated to them by the promoted pages. Brands and companies seeking to promote their products often pay popular streamers to have advertisements on screen (Figure 4). In many cases, the integration of a streamer's personal brand, social media, and other for-profit advertisements are included on the screen with links included in the streamer's "About" section.

The promotion of goods and services functions similar to product placement in advertising and television. Streamers split revenue generated from streaming through a number of partnerships including viewer subscriptions (shared with Twitch), purchased goods from stream (shared with retailer), and donations (shared with Paypal and other online payment services). Similarly, streamers use their social media outlets as a mechanism to promote their partners even further (see Figure 5). Streamers' contracts dictate the expectations and terms of service for promoting products including wearing the clothes, promoting the services on other outlets, or appearing in commercials for the product(s).

There is a great deal of expectations that are placed on the streamers themselves. A dark side of streaming is the uncertain future of the platform and the streamer. Work on parasocial breakup (Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Cohen, 2004) would suggest that viewers engaged in PSR with a streamer would experience negative affect, loneliness, and even breakup distress in the circumstance where a streamer discontinues their stream. Viewers may experience dissonance or any number of negative effects in the case that the stream is no more. Madison, Porter, and

Greule (2015) suggest that individuals do indeed use PSR to compensate for real-life interactions, which could lead to the emotional duress associated with the media figure no longer streaming.

Cohen and Hoffner (2016) describe how the death of a celebrity may require fans to participate in grieving measures including information seeking regarding the cause of the death. In the case of streaming, it may be the circumstance where the remaining members of the online community seek out similar or related streamers through the use of social media. Once the streamer is gone, however, the community itself does not immediately dissipate. Instead, relationships that are built are likely to flock toward new or different communities as a means to fulfill similar gratifications. A streamer can "host" another live-stream wherein the viewers on the first stream are transferred to a second streamer. Perhaps the online communities would begin this process independent of the streamer and find an equitable or relatable host based on the gratifications they sought. For example, a viewer seeking the gratification information sharing may seek out a new stream that has a community that participates in discussions while the streamer is on-and-offline.

Limitations

The measurement of social interaction is more aligned with preexisting friendships rather than interacting socially with friends. Items measuring social interaction (e.g., "To keep in touch with friends and family" and "To communicate with distanced friends") are focused on the real world element of U&G. In fact, the significance of a gratification such as escapism (i.e., getting away from the real world) may polarize the two gratifications. The term "friend" is potentially problematic within the survey instruments. Individuals who are "regulars" in streams commonly login under usernames and interact with individuals they have never met in person. As a result,

the development of friendships occur differently than traditional face-to-face exchanges. Future research investigating the role of social interaction should alter survey items to reflect the online relationships established (e.g., "To keep in touch with friends I have made online," and "To communicate with online friends."). Additionally, there is a clear avenue to exploring how offline friends use online communities as social interactants. Conversely, research may investigate the online-offline overlap and the process of online friendships moving offline entirely.

Similarly, the gratification of habitual time pass was not significant in the mediation model. Streaming websites align more closely with the experience of social TV rather than traditional media experienced in isolation. The engagement component of a platform such as Twitch is built into the website (e.g., chat native on the website) requiring less technological savvy than live-tweeting a television show. As a result, streaming websites are platforms that benefit from interactivity of a viewer.

Establishing causality is not possible given the data collection and sampling method. An alternative interpretation of the findings could be the configuration of the model. Connecting the literature for U&G with fandom and PSR made a compelling argument as to how gratifications would predict affinity toward a favorite streamer. Instead, fandom and PSR may predict the gratifications experienced by the viewer. Viewers may stumble upon a stream and take a liking to the style, gameplay, or any number of characteristics of the streamer. Over time, the closeness enables the experience of certain gratifications. Viewers who experience high PSR or fandom may subsequently satisfy gratifications. For example, UGR Gaming is a Twitch partnered streamer who plays a variety of games. A viewer's degree of fandom toward UGR Gaming may predict gratifications experienced such as escapism and companionship. In other words, viewers

may find the ability to satisfy social and psychological needs as a result of their connection to the streamer, which is the opposite of this dissertation's mediation modeling.

Future Research

Future research investigations should explore the predictors of viewership for streaming platforms and, perhaps more importantly, the different factors that predict picking specific streamers. In many cases, viewership is determined based on the game that a streamer plays. There may be competing forces (e.g., friends want to play a new game together) that make a viewer change their viewership habits independent from the stream themselves. Growing or new interest in a game, addiction (Hussain, Williams, & Griffiths, 2015), and extraversion (Stopfer et al., 2015) may also impact the likelihood of viewership within streaming communities.

Dark side research should begin by examining the denigration of streamers by viewers. The veil of anonymity provides viewers with the ability to negatively participate in the interactions with other streamers. Specifically, a Twitch-streamed Hearthstone tournament featured a black male named TerrenceM who was the recipient of a number of racial slurs (Campbell, 2016). Issues of censorship come into play as viewers and streamers alike begin to receive punishments for their actions. Similarly, the actions and advocacy of streamers may be ill-intended or hateful. Streamer LegendaryLea received a 30 day suspension from Twitch for accidentally exposing herself on camera, which has led to issues comparable to temporary breakup from the streamer (Mueller, 2016).

As habitual time pass has proven unfruitful for predicting SOC, fandom, and PSR, exploring how the new medium of streaming competes with traditional media (e.g., television and radio) is required. Viewers are turning to websites such as Twitch as background noise or as a way of unwinding after a long day's work. Twitch viewership is reflecting many of the social

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TV elements present (i.e., live tweeting during a stream-televised event), which paves way into how social media and Twitch intersect with each other. Similarly, streams meet-ups are being organized to further the online-offline overlap with members of the community.

Connection to the streamer follows the guiding principles of identification with a media figure. Viewers who perceive themselves to be similar to the media personality are impacted more strongly by the media figure's actions (Basil, 2000). Social media users seeking to gain entertainment and build relationships are more likely to form strong PSR with celebrities (Yuan, Kim, & Kim, 2016), which aligns with the work on microcelebrities within this dissertation. The gratification of cool and new trend certainly aligns well with entertainment and fandom. Similar to traditional celebrities, streamers' popularity may skyrocket as a game or publicity hits critical mass. Appearing on the front page of a streaming website, sharing of the streamer's profile from another celebrity, and other social media outlets may propel the streamer into a celebrity garnering fans. It may be the case that fandom has a certain shelf-life whereas PSR's perceived relationship requires maintenance and continued support. In other words, the popularity of a streamer may garner temporary fans whereas the perceived friendship from a PSR may result in a long-time relationship. Unfortunately, that does not account for fandom mediating the relationship between companionship and SOC. Perhaps it is circumstance that companionship (e.g., "So I won't have to be alone" and "When there's no one else to talk or be with") is closely aligned with the gratification of habitual time pass (e.g., "When I have nothing better to do," and "Because it passes the time away, particularly when I'm bored."). Fans use the stream as an avenue for companionship in the sense that they can alleviate loneliness by participating in the community itself. On the other hand, those engaging in PSR may be content spending time with the streamer and community without the underlying loneliness present.

Early work by Rubin (1982) describes the most prominent medium at the time, television, as having personalities that function as non-judgmental friends who offer companionship for viewers. Viewers perceive their favorite media figure as a friend or close other, which would lend itself to PSR mediating the relationship between companionship and SOC. Unfortunately, the present research found that it was instead fandom that mediated the relationship between the aforementioned variables. Formative research conceptualized companionship and time pass as mechanisms to alleviate loneliness and relegated for those experiencing social isolation (Donohew, Palmgreen, & Rayburn, 1987). Interpersonally, certain personality characteristics and traits may make a partner or close other undesirable as a companion (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). However, within the confines of a one-sided relationship, the pursuit of companionship may overlook these negative traits or flaws.

Conclusion

The current dissertation finds that media figures play a prominent role in mediating the relationship between the gratifications and SOC. PSR and fandom may be a gateway into better understanding the reasons why viewers continue to frequent streamers on a regular basis. A viewer may decide to become a reoccurring viewer and follow the streamer (i.e., social media, searching news reports, asking other viewers, etc.) if the intended gratifications are satisfied. Concurrent viewership may lead to viewer to develop a PSR or become a fan of the streamer. Once the relationship becomes established, the viewer's fandom coupled with the newly founded companionship may lead to the experience of SOC. In short, a digital "foot in the door" (i.e., clicking on the stream) may lead to repeatedly satisfied gratifications, a developed PSR or fan-relationship, and eventual interactions with other members of the community (i.e., SOC).

An initial assumption of habitual time pass was not found to be significant within the mediation models in the dissertation, which may suggest that active participation in the streams helps to reinforce the social interaction gratifications that are sought. New media provide the affordance of real-time interactions with others in comparison to consuming a medium in isolation. Fandom may mediate the relationship between cool and new trend and SOC as a result of swings in popularity for a streamer. Viewers engaged in PSR are likely more invested in the relational aspect of their streamer rather than the ebbs and flows of popularity. Ultimately, prototypical gratifications (e.g., entertainment, expressive information sharing, and escapism) are key considerations when understanding their impact on selection of a favorite streamer and the experience of SOC.
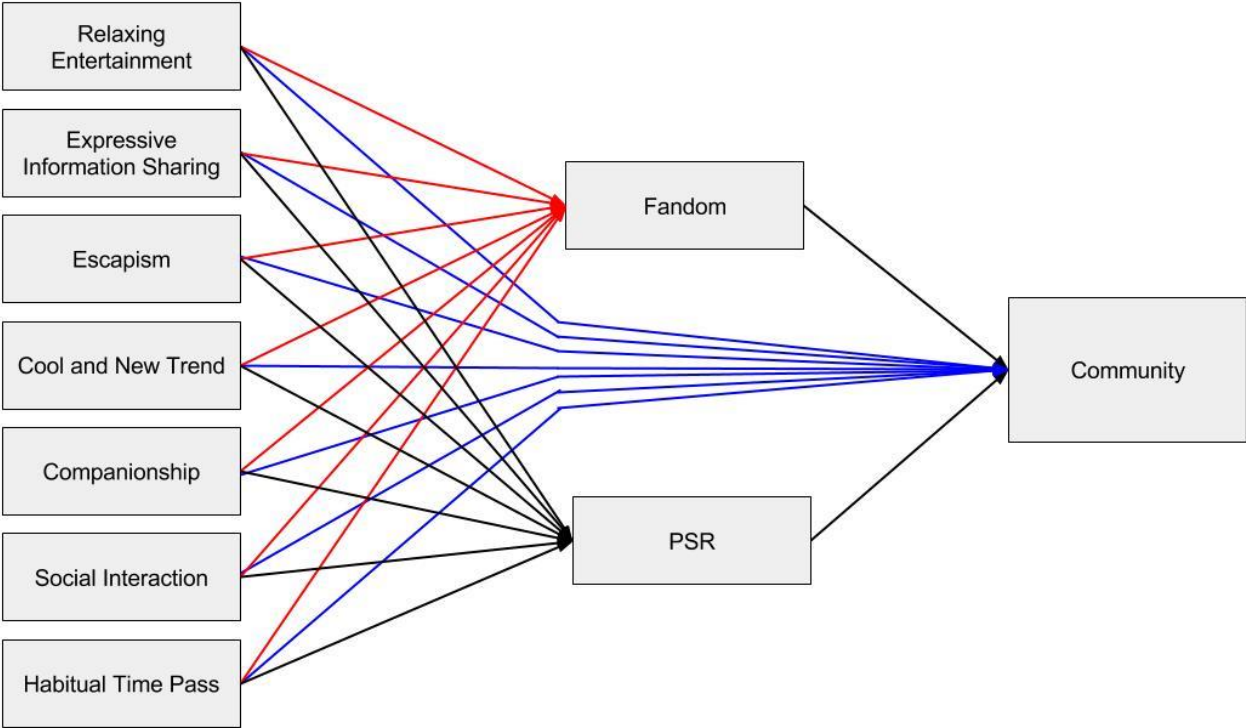
Figure 1. Proposed Mediation Model

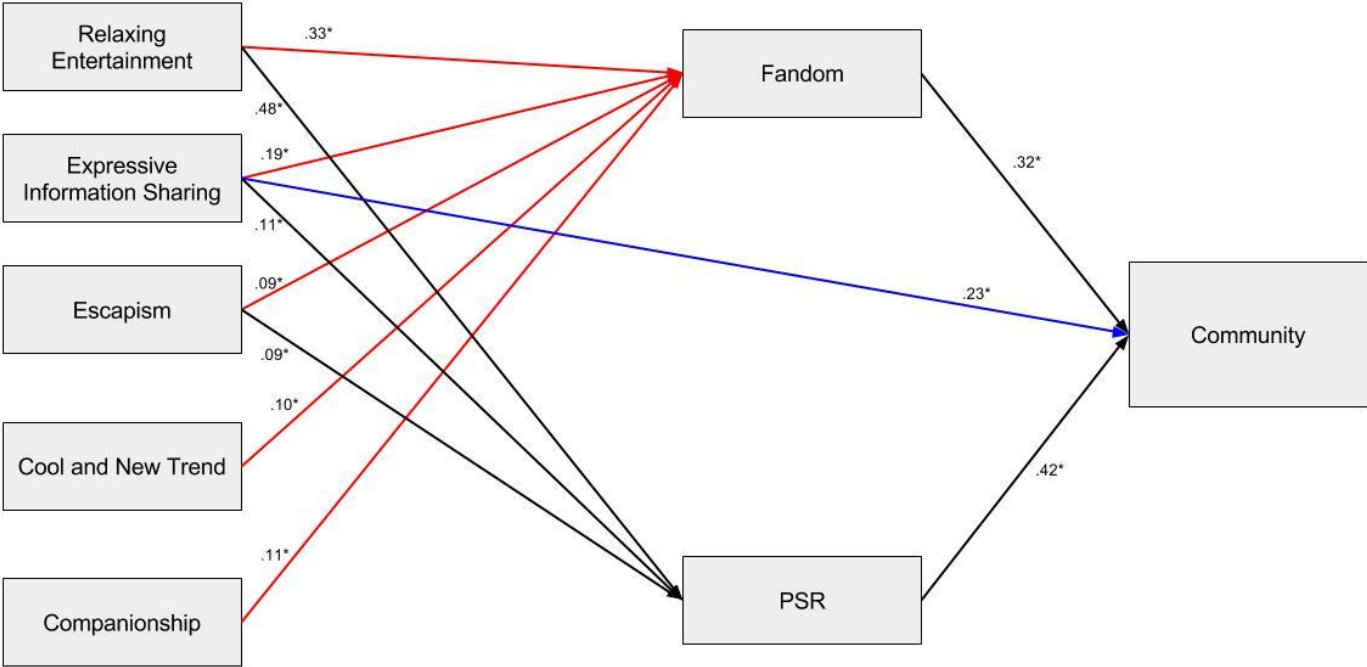Figure 2. Mediation Model (Significant Findings)

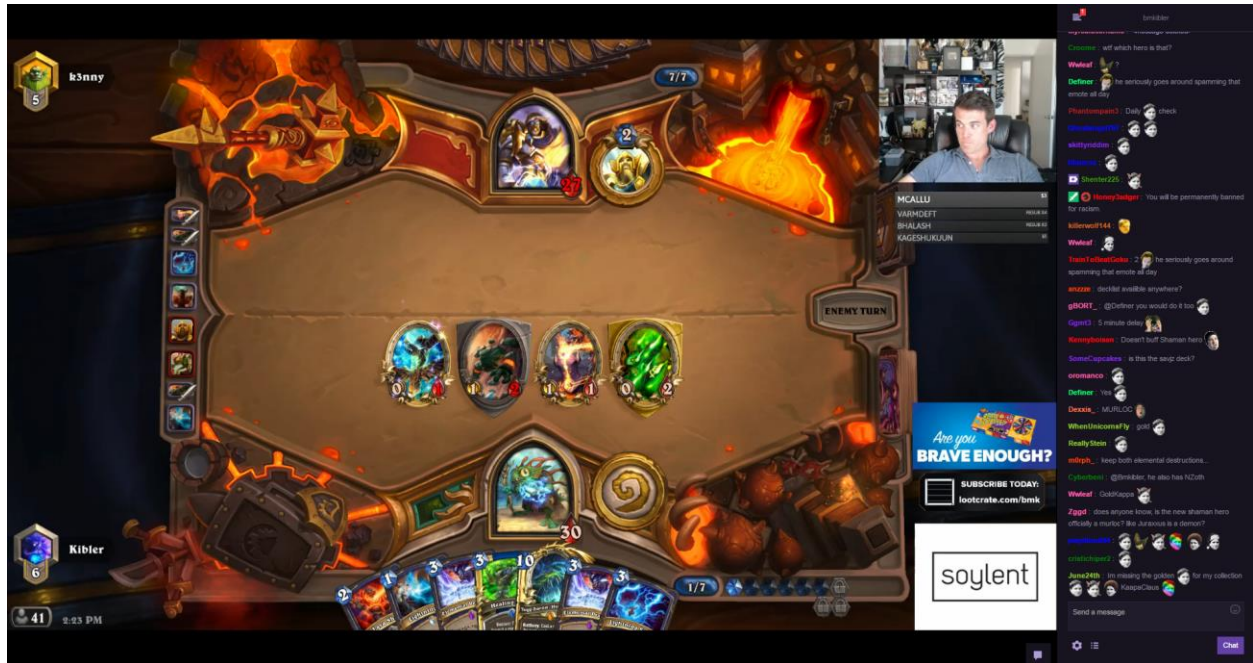Figure 3. Example of chat upon first entering a Twitch.tv channel.

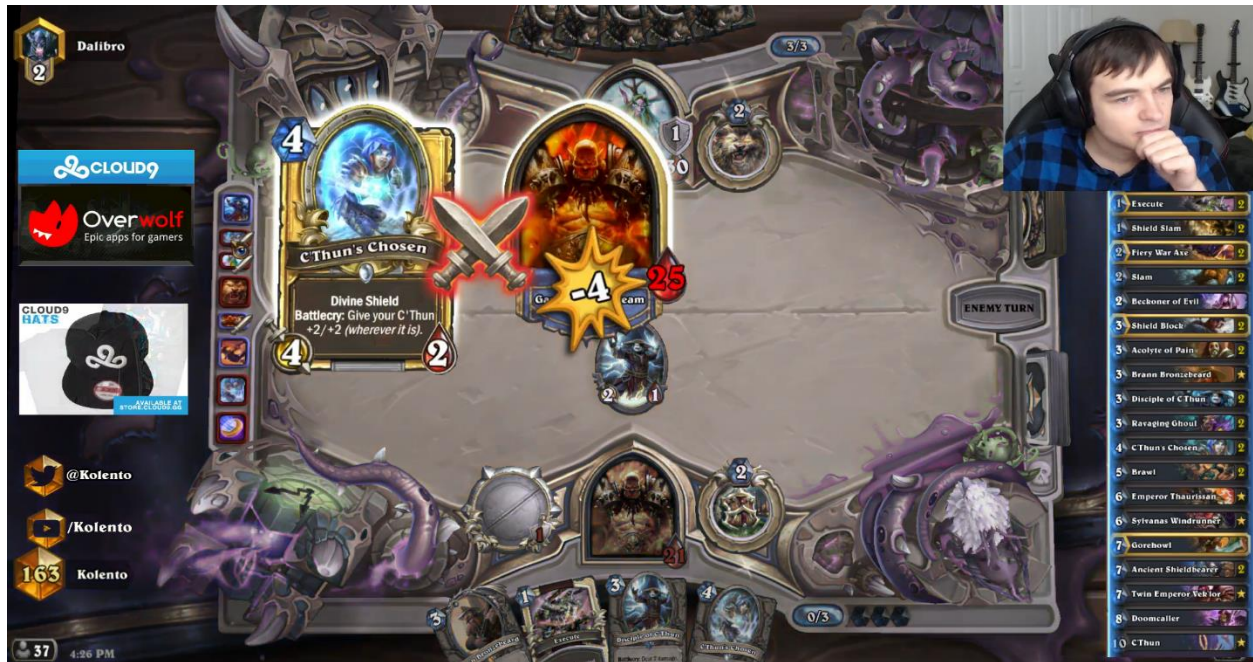Figure 4. Streamer Kolento promoting his professional team's apparel and social media

Figure 5. Streamer IMAQTPIE promotes two of his sponsors when not streaming.

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Table 1: Descriptive information for study variables.

Measure	M (SD)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. SOC	3.4 (1.28)	.64**	.64**	.30**	.45**	.25**	.36**	.29**	.47**	.25**	.17**	.03	-.15**
2. Fandom	3.09 (1.03)	-	.79**	.39**	.37**	.41**	.39**	.43**	.38**	.31**	.18**	.03	-.25**
3. PSR	4.41 (1.12)		-	.46**	.29**	.37**	.34**	.35**	.31**	.35**	.19**	-.01	-.19**
4. Entertainment gratification	4.83 (.69)			-	.19**	.39**	.30**	.27**	.19**	.48**	.21**	-.07	-.11**
5. Information sharing gratification	2.93 (1.00)				-	.19**	.39**	.19**	.50**	.19**	.13**	-.03	.01
6. Escape gratification	2.83 (1.09)					-	.34**	.55**	.26**	.43**	.15**	-.02	-.29**
7. Trend gratification	2.57 (1.15)						-	.37**	.43**	.37**	.16**	-.04	-.19**
8. Companionship Gratification	2.92 (1.49)							-	.38**	.43**	.15**	.06	-.20**
9. Social interaction Gratification	2.01 (1.24)								-	.26**	.13**	.08*	-.03
10. Time Pass Gratification	4.56 (1.11)									-	.12**	-.01	-.26**
11. Minutes watched per week	405.01 (680.38)										-	-.02	.01
12. Sex (0 = male, 1 = female)	1.12 (.39)											-	-.01
13. Age	23.56 (6.08)												-

*p < .05. **p < .01

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Table 2: Summary of mediation models predicting sense of community

	b (SE)	95% CI
Gratifications → PSR		
Relaxing entertainment	.48* (.07)	.34, .62
Expressive information sharing	.11* (.05)	.01, .21
Escapism	.13* (.05)	.03, .22
Cool and new trend	.07 (.04)	-.02, .16
Companionship	.04 (.04)	-.03, .11
Social interaction	.07 (.04)	-.01, .16
Habitual Time Pass	.03 (.05)	-.07, .11
Gratifications → Fandom		
Relaxing entertainment	.33* (.06)	.21, .46
Expressive information sharing	.19* (.04)	.11, .27
Escapism	.09* (.04)	.01, .18
Cool and new trend	.10* (.04)	.02, .18
Companionship	.11* (.03)	.04, .17
Social interaction	.07 (.04)	-.003, .14
Habitual Time Pass	-.05 (.04)	-.14, .03
PSR → SOC	.43* (.06)	.31, .55
Fandom → SOC	.32* (.07)	.18, .45
Gratifications → SOC (direct effects)		
Relaxing entertainment	-.05 (.07)	-.19, .09
Expressive information sharing	.23* (.05)	.13, .32
Escapism	-.02 (.05)	-.12, .07
Cool and new trend	.02 (.04)	-.07, .09
Companionship	-.05 (.04)	-.12, .02
Social interaction	.16* (.04)	.08, .24
Habitual Time Pass	.05 (.05)	-.08, .09
Gratifications → SOC (indirect effects via PSR)		
Relaxing entertainment	.21* (.04)	.13, .30
Expressive information sharing	.05* (.02)	.03, .11
Escapism	.05* (.03)	.007, .11
Cool and new trend	.03 (.02)	-.008, .07
Companionship	.02 (.02)	-.02, .05
Social interaction	.03 (.02)	-.004, .07
Habitual Time Pass	.009 (.02)	-.04, .06
Gratifications → SOC (indirect effects via fandom)		
Relaxing entertainment	.11* (.03)	.05, .19
Expressive information sharing	.06* (.02)	.03, .11
Escapism	.03* (.02)	.004, .07
Cool and new trend	.03* (.01)	.006, .06
Companionship	.03* (.01)	.01, .07
Social interaction	.02 (.01)	-.001, .05
Habitual Time Pass	-.02 (.02)	-.05, .009

Note. PSR = parasocial relationship; SOC = sense of community

*95% CI does not include 0

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University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
Consent to Participate in Online Survey Research

**Study Title: Relationships to Video Game Streamers: Examining
Gratifications, Parasocial Relationships, Fandom, & Community Affiliation Online**
IRB #16.353, approved 5/17/2016

Person Responsible for Research: PI, Dr. Erin Ruppel
Student PI, Michael Blight

Study Description: The purpose of this research study is to examine the motivations of
Twitch.tv viewership and the interactions with other members of online communities.
Approximately 400 subjects will participate in this study. If you agree to participate, you will be
asked to complete an online survey that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The
questions will ask about your Twitch.tv viewership, communication with others online, your
fandom and closeness to your favorite streamer.

Risks / Benefits: Risks to participants are considered minimal. Collection of data and survey
responses using the Internet involves the same risks that a person would encounter in everyday
use of the internet, such as breach of confidentiality. While the researchers have taken every
reasonable step to protect your confidentiality, there is always the possibility of interception or
hacking of the data by third parties that is not under the control of the research team.

There will be no costs for participating. There are no benefits to you other than to further
research. Upon completing the survey, you will be automatically linked to a second survey
which will collect your information that we will provide to your instructor for extra credit
purposes (students) OR lottery for the $25 Amazon gift card (non-student). If you do not qualify
or do not wish to participate, we will provide you with an equitable alternative.

Limits to Confidentiality: Identifying information such as details of your relationship, specific
events experienced, and behaviors online/offline will be collected for research purposes of
analyzing relational behaviors. Data will be retained on the Qualtrics website server for 3 years
and will be deleted after this time. However, data may exist on backups or server logs beyond
the timeframe of this research project. Data transferred from the survey site will be saved in an
encrypted format for 2 years. Only the PI and Co-PI will have access to the data collected by
this study. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal
agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records. The
research team will remove your identifying information when reporting study findings, and all
study results will be reported without identifying information so that no one viewing the results
will ever be able to match you with your responses.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to not
answer any of the questions or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Your
decision will not change any present or future relationship with the University of Wisconsin
Milwaukee. This extra credit opportunity is equivalent to 1 unit of extra credit (activity requiring

< 30 minutes), with the specific number of points to be determined by your instructor. You may opt for an alternative activity rather than completing the survey. You will submit a 1-2 page summary of a chapter of your choosing from your Communication course textbook to Michael G. Blight (mblight@uwm.edu) with the subject line, "Survey Alternative Activity." Your name will be added to the list of students who completed the extra credit opportunity without indication of if you completed the survey or alternative activity.

Who do I contact for questions about the study: For more information about the study or study procedures, contact Dr. Erin Ruppel at ruppele@uwm.edu

Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject? Contact the UWM IRB at 414-229-3173 or irbinfo@uwm.edu

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
By entering this survey, you are indicating that you have read the consent form, are age 18 or older, use Twitch.tv, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Thank you!

This questionnaire is going to ask you about your experiences watching your favorite streamer and interactions you have had with that community. Some questions will have multiple choice answers while others will have an open text box for you to type a response. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked some questions about health and demographic information.

Prompt: Please think about your favorite streamer. It may help to access their page now as you will need more information about them at a later time during this survey.

Specific to Favorite Streamer
Who is the streamer you watch most frequently?
What game does he or she play?
- LOL, CS:GO, DOTA2, Hearthstone, Minecraft, H1Z1, Destiny, World of Tanks, World of Warcraft, FIFA15, Other (insert)

What is your favorite streamer's gender?
- Male
- Female

Are you a subscriber? **Y/N**
Have you donated to the stream before?
- How frequently? How much in total?

Are you a subscriber to other channels? If so, how many other channels?
Which channels do you follow your favorite streamers on?
- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, etc.

26-item (modified Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011) U&G

Directions: Think about the reasons why you watch streams. Indicate how much you agree with each option by marking the appropriate response using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Relaxing entertainment
1. Because it's enjoyable.
2. Because it's entertaining.
3. Because it relaxes me.
4. Because it allows me to unwind.
5. Because it is a pleasant rest.

Expressive information sharing
1. To provide information.
2. To present information about a special interest of mine.
3. To share information that may be of use or interest to others.
4. To provide personal information about myself.
5. To tell others a little bit about myself.

Escapism
1. So I can forget about school, work, or other things.
2. So I can get away from the rest of my family or others.
3. So I can get away from what I'm doing.

Cool and new trend
1. Because everybody else is doing it.
2. Because it is the thing to do.
3. Because it is cool.

Companionship
1. So I won't have to be alone.
2. When there's no one else to talk or be with.
3. Because it makes me feel less lonely.

Social interaction
1. To keep in touch with friends and family.
2. To communicate with distanced friends.

Habitual pass time
1. Because I just like to play around on it.
2. Because it is a habit, just something I do.
3. When I have nothing better to do.
4. Because it passes the time away, particularly when I'm bored.
5. Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time.

Fanship Scale (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010)
1. I have rescheduled my work to accommodate watching my favorite streamer
2. I am emotionally connected to my favorite streamer
3. I spend a considerable amount of money on my favorite streamer
4. I do not devote much energy to my favorite streamer
5. I would devote all my time to my favorite streamer if I could
6. I would be devastated if I were told I could not watch my favorite streamer
7. I strongly identify with my favorite streamer

8. When my favorite streamer is popular I feel great
9. My favorite streamer is a part of me
   Removed Items
1. I want everyone to know I am connected to my interest
2. I want to be friends with people who like my interest

Parasocial Interaction Scale (Hartmann, Stuke, & Daschmann, 2008)
Directions: Respond to the following questions by using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.
1. I think my favorite streamer is like an old friend.
2. My favorite streamer makes me feel as comfortable as when I am with friends.
3. I think about my favorite streamer even when he/she is not online.
4. I miss my favorite streamer if I do not see him/her online for a long time.
5. I feel that I know my favorite streamer very well.
6. I try to imagine what my favorite streamers thinks about a game.
7. The stream shows me what my favorite streamer is like.
8. I find my favorite streamer to be likeable.
9. I mostly agree with the actions of my favorite streamer.
10. If there were a story about my favorite streamer online, I would read or watch it.
11. I would like to meet my favorite streamer in person.
12. I admire my favorite streamer for his/her achievements.
13. I look forward to watching my favorite streamer in his/her next stream.

Sense of Community Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008
Reinforcement of Needs
1. I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community
2. Community members and I value the same things
3. This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.
4. Being a member of this community makes me feel good.
5. When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community.
6. People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.

Membership
1. I can trust people in this community
2. I can recognize most of the members of this community
3. Most community members know me
4. This community has symbols and expressions of memberships such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize
5. **I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community**
6. Being a member of this community is part of my identity

Influence
1. Fitting into this community is important to me.
2. This community can influence other communities.
3. I care about what other community members think of me.

4. I have influence over what this community is like.
5. If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.
6. This community has good leaders.

Shared Emotional Connection
1. It is very important to me to be a part of this community.
2. I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them.
3. I expect to be a part of this community for a long time.
4. Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.
5. I feel hopeful about the future of this community.
6. Members of this community care about each other.

Open-Ended Measures
1. Please describe what it is about the content posted from your favorite media personality that you enjoy.
2. Please describe with whom you talk about your favorite media personality. It can be one person, or a group of people.
3. Please describe how talking about your favorite media personality has impacted your relationship with this person/group of people.
4. Please describe what you talk about concerning your favorite media personality. Are there specific topics or information that you discuss?
5. Please describe why you choose to talk about this/these topic(s).

Demographics
Select your biological sex
- Male
- Female

What is your age?
_____
Select your ethnicity
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Black
- Asian
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Other

Streamer Information
What is your favorite streamer's gender?
- Male
- Female

General Stream-Watching Behaviors

Do you log into an account? Y/N

How often do you watch gaming live-streams?

- Several times a day – Less than once a week

Which websites do you use to watch streams?

- Twitch.tv, Azubu, Gaming, Hitbox, YouTube, Other_____

Which games do you watch? (Select all that apply)

- LOL, CS:GO, DOTA2, Hearthstone, Minecraft, H1Z1, Destiny, World of Tanks, World of Warcraft, FIFA15, Other (insert)

Do you watched streamed events? (e.g., LOL's LCS/LCK, CS:GO's PGL,)

How many different streamers do you watch? (1-10)

How many minutes do you spend **watching** games during the week?

How many minutes do you spend **watching** games during the weekend?

How many minutes per day do you **watch** games on your…

- PC or laptop
- Smartphone
- Tablet
- Console (e.g., Xbox, Playstation)
- Smart TV or TV-extension (e.g., Chromecast, Amazon Fire TV, Roku, etc.)

How many minutes do you spend **playing** games during the week?

How many minutes do you spend **playing** games during the weekend?

Specific Chat Behaviors

How often do you use the chat function for emotes? (Often to Never)

How often do you use the chat function for non-emotes? (Often to Never)

When watching streams, how often do you write a comment in the chat? (Often to Never)

Michael G. Blight

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication   **Expected: August, 2016**
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
Department of Communication
(Dissertation Title: Relationships to Video Game Streamers: Examining Gratifications, Parasocial Relationships, Fandom, & Community Affiliation Online on Twitch.tv)

Master of Science in Communication Studies   **August, 2013**
Illinois State University, Normal, IL
School of Communication
(Thesis Title: *Why Can't They Be Real*? A Quantitative Study of Parasocial Relationships)

Bachelor of Science   **May, 2011**
Illinois State University, Normal, IL
Major: Public Relations   Emphasis: Campaign Design

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Graduate Instructor
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Department of Communication (Milwaukee, WI)

COMM313: Human Communication and Technology	Spring, 2016
COMM313: Human Communication and Technology	Spring, 2016
COMM313: Human Communication and Technology	Fall, 2015
COMM313: Human Communication and Technology	Fall, 2015
COMM313: Human Communication and Technology	Fall, 2014
COMM313: Human Communication and Technology	Fall, 2014
COMM105: Business & Professional Communication	Spring, 2014
COMM105: Business & Professional Communication	Spring, 2014
COMM105: Business & Professional Communication	Spring, 2014
COMM105: Business & Professional Communication	Fall, 2013
COMM105: Business & Professional Communication	Fall, 2013
COMM105: Business & Professional Communication	Fall, 2013

Illinois State University, School of Communication (Normal, IL)

COM110: Communication as Critical Inquiry	Spring, 2013
COM110: Communication as Critical Inquiry	Spring, 2013
COM123: Interpersonal Communication	Fall, 2012
COM110: Communication as Critical Inquiry	Spring, 2012
COM110: Communication as Critical Inquiry	Spring, 2012
COM110: Communication as Critical Inquiry	Fall, 2011

Teaching Assistant
Illinois State University, School of Communication (Normal, IL)

COM160: Introduction to Mass Media	Spring, 2010

RESEARCH
RESEARCH UNDER REVIEW
Ruppel, E. K., **Blight, M.**, Cherney, M., & Fylling, S. (2015). An exploratory investigation of

communication technologies to alleviate communication difficulties and depression in older adults. Submitted to Journal of Aging and Health.

Blight, M., Jagiello, K., & Ruppel, E. K. (2014). "Same stuff different day:" A mixed-method study of support seeking on Facebook. Submitted to Computers in Human Behavior.

Blight, M., & Lambertz, M. (2014). Too assertive to cooperate? A mixed methods analysis of role negotiation in small groups. Submitted to Business and Professional Communication Quarterly.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS
Blight, M., & Kohler, K. V. "Like clockwork:" Multimodal uncertainty reducing behaviors in on-again/off-again relationships. To be submitted to Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (March 31, 2015).

Blight, M., & Kohler, K. V. An exploration of gratifications, parasocial relationships, and community connection in Twitter and Instagram users. To be submitted to Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication (March 31, 2015).

ONGOING RESEARCH PROJECTS
Fonner, K., **Blight, M.,** Fetherston, M., & Lambertz, M. Examining employee work-life experiences in relation to family status.
Blight, M. Employee satisfaction and organizational change at a digital agency.

Blight, M., & Johnson, R. L. Leadership, decision making, and organizational culture.

PRESENTATIONS
Fonner, K. L., **Blight, M.,** Fetherston, M., & Lambertz, M. (May, 2015). Evaluating the inclusiveness of work-life practices from the perspective of single/childless employees. Paper to be presented at the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology, Oslo, Norway.

Ruppel, E. K., **Blight, M.,** Cherney, M., & Fylling, S. (June, 2015). An exploratory investigation of communication technologies as a means to alleviate communicative difficulties and depression in older adults. Paper to be presented at the International Association Relationship Research Conference in New Brunswick, NJ.

Fonner, K. L., **Blight, M.,** Fetherston, M., & Lambertz, M. (April, 2015). 21st century workplace issues: At the convergence of work and life. Paper panel to be presented in the Organizational and Professional Communication Division of the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.

Blight, M., Jagiello, K., Donelan, J., & Smith, T. (April, 2015). "Same stuff different day." A comparison of satisfaction with offline and online social support seeking messages using Facebook status updates. Paper to be presented in the Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Interest Group of the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.

Blight, M., & Kohler, K. V. (April, 2015). "Like clockwork:" Multimodal uncertainty reducing behaviors in on-again/off-again relationships. Paper to be presented in the Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Interest Group of the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.

Blight, M. (April, 2015). Narrative-based game play: Affect, empathy, and social learning. Paper to be

presented in the Instructional Resources Interest Group of the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.

Blight, M. (2014, November). "Why can't we be friends?" An examination of parasocial involvement, self-esteem, and attachment styles. Paper presented in the Mass Communication Division at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL.

Blight, M. (2014, November). Affect, learning style, and perceived empathy of instructors upon receiving graded feedback. Paper presented in the Instructional Development Division at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL.

Allen, M., Bourdhis, J., Burrell, N. A., **Blight, M**., Dahmer, A. D., Mukarram, A., Zhao, T., Adams, Q., Fetherston, M. A., Lambertz, M., Anderson, C., & Gross, C. (2014, November). Examining 100 Communication Programs: Mission Statements, Assessment Plans, and Assessment Evaluations. Poster presentation during the Mass Communication and Communication Education Division at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL.

Blight, M. (2014, April). Graduate Student Mentorship: Elevating undergraduates' transition experience. Panel to be presented at the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association, Minneapolis, MN.

Blight, M. (2013, April). Social media as a means for exploring new possibilities in the basic course. Panel presented at the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association , Kansas City, MO.

Blight, M. (2013, April). Relationships with television characters: A thematic analysis. Poster presented at the annual Illinois State University Graduate Research Symposium, Normal, IL.

Blight, M. (2013, April). Parasocial attachment with television characters: A self-esteem and attach style approach. Poster presented at the annual Illinois State University Graduate Research Symposium, Normal, IL.

Blight, M., Lumberg, S., Self, R., & Munz, S. (2012, November). Transforming the Transformers' community: An analysis of a graduate student organization. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Orlando, FL. Top Paper, Training and Development Division

Blight, M., Lumberg, S., Self, R., & Munz, S. (2012, April). Transforming the Transformers: An analysis of a graduate student organization. Paper presented at the annual Illinois State University Graduate Research Symposium, Normal, IL.

Blight, M., (2011, September. Transforming the community: A graduate student organization. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the Illinois Communication and Theater Association, Normal, IL.