

Mia Consalvo, Marc Lajeunesse, and Andrei Zanescu, **Streaming by the Rest of Us: Microstreaming Videogames on Twitch**, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2025, 257 pp, \$45.00 (paperback).

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Since people began playing video games, others have found enjoyment in watching them be played. In the modern age, large-scale Twitch streamers boast thousands of views, but the majority of streamers reach a far smaller audience. Seminal works on livestreaming games have focused on a variety of streamer types (Brewer et al., 2023; Taylor, 2018). However, **Streaming by the Rest of Us: Microstreaming Videogames on Twitch** is the first work that explicitly sets out to capture these small streams garnering none to dozens of views. By focusing on microstreamers, Mia Consalvo, Marc Lajeunesse, and Andrei Zanescu redefine the parameters of livestreaming and broaden the conversation about who counts as a “streamer.”



The book opens with an examination of the history and evolving meaning of “liveness.” It traces live broadcasting from television to webcams, demonstrating how the phenomenon is redefined as new technologies emerge. Recognizing how live broadcasts are considered more real and authentic than prerecorded programming sets up the book’s examination of authenticity, while focusing on early webcams and streams leads readers into an examination of streaming practices. Additionally, this historical trajectory demonstrates different modes of, and motivations for, streaming.

To account for different types of live production, the authors turn to leisure studies to apply the concepts of causal, serious, and purposive leisure to microstreaming. This application demonstrates how streaming exists somewhere between the realms of work and play depending on the type of streamer and their motivations. They found that some microstreamers stream spontaneously for fun while others build a consistent practice, taking into account self-presentation and audience expectations. Streamers can enact this more serious form of leisure by streaming over an extended period of time, persevering through low viewer numbers and harassment, and personal effort. While personal effort factors into serious streaming, the authors recognize the myth of meritocracy involved in livestreaming in which certain streamers become popular through luck or social clout regardless of effort.

The book then looks at the concept of authenticity as it relates to liveness. The authors suggest that authenticity is not fixed; it is a negotiated process that can be shaped by circumstances such as technological challenges and audience relationships. While not all streamers explicitly set out to appear “real,” they all craft on-stream personas that align with both the streamer’s personality and audience expectations. Early streams are characterized by spontaneity, leading to an enhanced authenticity. Experienced streamers, however,

tend to showcase more structured personas taking the stream itself into account. This increased polish that comes with experienced streaming can erode the spontaneity that originally communicated "realness."

One aspect of this erosion of authenticity is a pressure to adhere to the "Twitch meta." The authors use the concepts of theory crafting and metagaming to examine how streamers navigate the norms and expectations of streaming culture. Streamers, both large and micro, face pressure to adhere to "best practices" for success and refine their approach based on metrics including viewer counts and follower growth. Identities must be negotiated within this system of values and strategies in order to stream successfully and conform to the meta. While the authors recognize that not all streamers follow this system of production, they are still part of the co-creation of what it means to stream.

In addition to the invaluable insights into authenticity and norms, one strength of the book is its mixed-methods approach. In-depth interviews, autoethnography, and text-based analysis work together to provide a comprehensive understanding of this underexamined phenomenon. The emphasis on streamers' voices guide and inform the experiential and text-based analyses, while the autoethnographic section builds on participant responses. Additionally, analyzing streams from other Twitch users reveals interesting connections between the quality and popularity of streams. Combined, these multiple methodologies weave together personal experience, respondent voices, and critical interpretation in a way that forefronts streamers while offering a thorough examination.

Particularly effective is the book's use of autoethnography, which adds a reflexive and experiential perspective to the research. The three authors set out to microstream, and their experiences offer valuable context for the respondents' revelations. The authors experience anxiety, frustration, and fatigue while streaming. One author reported an element of loneliness as they struggled to gain views and facilitate engagement. Conversely, they found satisfaction in forming a connection with a viewer or other players. Another author struggled with technological issues throughout the process, like streaming software not working and streams never going live. As the authors explain, when speaking with microstreamers, they focus on successful streams. This personal experience instead illuminated the barriers that may keep some from streaming at all.

Interestingly, two of the authors describe feeling optimistic about having successful streams despite their inexperience. This aligns with Twitch's ethos of low barriers to entry and potential monetization for all users. The authors demonstrate this in their analysis of Twitch's training modules, which suggest that following the lessons will, eventually, lead to monetary gain. The autoethnographic portion of this research then informs both the study's interviews and text-based analysis.

Regarding the respondents, the authors recognize that much of the work done on streaming has centered straight white male identities. They, instead, focus on marginalized streamers who do not fit into this normative default. This focus offers new and compelling perspectives on streaming. In their responses, subjects detail harassment and trolling they have faced based on their identities. These microstreamers face racism, sexism, and ableism during their streams, and the book uses their own words to detail these instances.

While the book recognizes the unique experiences of these streamers, deeper exploration of the political potentials of marginalized microstreaming could have fit well in this study. The authors successfully identify how their respondents' identities inform their on-stream performances but stop short of considering microstreaming as a site of resistance to dominant streaming norms. Small-scale streaming can speak back to popular conceptions about who streamers are, the kinds of things they "should" and "should not" do, and the role of community in these spaces. As seen throughout the book, several of the respondents see their streaming community as a space of mutual care and respect, and these small-scale streams seem particularly well-suited for this—potentially alternative—way of relating to viewers.

This book is well suited for scholars and students interested in game studies, livestreaming, and/or marginalized content creators. Its interdisciplinary approach, which includes media studies and cultural studies, appeals to both course instruction and research. Additionally, its deftness in implementing and integrating a mixed-methods approach makes it a valuable model for other scholars interested in employing such methods.

The book can also be useful for industry professionals in informing them how to make inclusive spaces, both virtually and at conventions, that are welcoming, supportive, and free from toxicity. It legitimizes the type of streaming that the majority of Twitch users do and therefore justifies creating safe and affirming spaces for this population. The authors demonstrate the need for these spaces by sharing the respondents' experiences with inequality and harassment on the platform.

Overall, *Streaming by the Rest of Us* offers integral insight into the underexamined phenomenon of small-scale streamers. From examinations of microstreamers to streaming practices and streaming experiences, the work provides a complete and skillful analysis that forefronts participant voices while remaining reflexive. Through both an interdisciplinary and mixed-methods approach, the work is appropriate for a variety of audiences and will prove useful for instruction, research, and informing industry practices. Due to its illumination of an important phenomenon through skillful application of multiple approaches, this book will no doubt be counted as a seminal work within conversations about livestreaming.

References

- Brewer, J., Ruberg, B., Cullen, A. L. L., & Persaud, C. (Eds.). (2023). *Real life in real time: Live streaming culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Taylor, T. L. (2018). *Watch me play: Twitch and the rise of game live streaming*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.