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Modders : changing the game through user-generated content and online communities

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MODDERS: CHANGING THE GAME THROUGH USER-GENERATED CONTENT

AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES

by

Kyle Andrew Moody

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in Mass Communications
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To my wife Maricruz. Te amo. Long may we run.
To my mother, father, sister, aunt, and grandmother:
Thank you for all the wonderful love and support.

ABSTRACT

The influx of new digital media technologies and platforms have made it possible for consumers of video games to more easily create and distribute their own works. This breaks away from the traditional production of video games by established, professional creators. Consequently, there has been a rise in the immaterial labor of digital media creators, as well as a formation of online communities of disparately connected users through commonly held interests. Within the medium of video games, there is a convergence between user and producer of content, a tension between control and innovation of media content and form, online communities and immaterial labor. This is most clearly seen in the practice of modding, here defined as using legally authorized software to modify video game content.

Modding for computer games has been occurring since the early 1990s, and has grown considerably due to the expansion of the internet's capabilities for connecting people and distributing large bands of data. In 2012, *Skyrim* developers, Bethesda Softworks, released a free software development tool called the Creation Kit. The Creation Kit allowed computer users to modify the game content, at which point the user could publically release their mods through the authorized Steam Workshop Channel. The Creation Kit was distributed via Steam, an electronic digital games store operated by Valve Corporation, Inc. Because Bethesda required users to play *Skyrim* through Steam, the Steam Workshop Channel was intended to be the primary distribution and gathering location of the modding community for *Skyrim*. However, most existing modders had already used many previously established third-party modding databases and websites for distribution, which meant that the Steam Workshop Channel was a new and forced entry into the modding community.

Using a combination of ethnographic methods (participant observation and interviews) along with textual analysis of message board data, this research was

completed between September 2013 and January 2014. The dissertation explores the community dynamics of the modders on the Steam Workshop Channel for *Skyrim* to examine the identity politics of the community, as well as navigate the tension between innovation and control within the community. It also explores how a digital media producer attempts to control a space of fan-made production, and what that means for the existing community. I observed and participated in conversations on modding community dynamics within specific forums on the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim*. I also gathered textual data from a diverse sample of conversations located on discussion boards and analyzed a diverse set of mods ranging in user-defined ratings (high-rated to low-rated) to highlight the conversational dynamics and implicit and explicit structuring of the community.

I gathered materials from over 403 relevant conversation threads on the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim*. I also conducted telephone, web and email interviews with a purposive sample group of 15 modders based on their ranking in the community in order to explore their personal motivations for participating in the group and their perceptions of norms, rituals and values in the group.

Results indicate that modding communities are hierarchized by historically locating the user within the practice, as well as through extensive technical knowledge and frequency of interactions. Heavy users and mod creators separate themselves from "non-modders" or mod users through these practices, defining identities through discourse and the values of creation. The Steam Workshop Channel often acted like a collision between mod creators and non-modder users. Ideologies sometimes dissuaded heavier users from fully embracing the Steam Workshop. This study illustrates how the problems with Bethesda and Valve were perceived by existing modders, and suggests that companies need to pay closer attention to historically located communities of users as they respond to the actions, policies, membership, and moderation of professional media companies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE – THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE, ONLINE

COMMUNITIES, MEDIA WORK AND CONVERGENCE

<u>Introduction</u>

New advancements made in digital and social technology have started to change the roles of consumers in media production and industries. Participation by amateur individuals in media content creation is blurring the role of the "gatekeeper" of information and redistributing power. Thanks to the participatory culture afforded by new media and technology, many users of digital media create content without expecting any explicit financial or material reward. According to previous research on voluntary free participation in media work, these users often perform such actions for personal reasons. Consequently, media companies gain forms of informational and economic power through this immaterial labor. Many social media networks (such as Facebook and Tumblr) have found success based on these principles of immaterial audience creation and convergence.

Within the media industry of video games, the concepts of immaterial labor, participatory content creation and online communities can be found in "modders," here defined as *users of software and video games who modify game content*. This modification is also known as modding, and it is done by using a software development kit (SDK). Modding does not occur through illegal practices since many SDKs are authorized by professional gaming developers. These modders contribute to product branding without additional investment from the publisher, and they extend the shelf life of games and increase customer loyalty. Mods represent a potentially valuable source of low-risk innovation and experimentation within the professional games industry. Modding also holds potential as a distinctly recreational, collective, and sometimes anti-capitalist pursuit. Further exploration of the modding community would offer greater insight into the reasons for modding, along with a greater exploration of the power dynamic between modders and developers. Principles of modding inform the use and implementation of social media as users create, distribute, and remix content across a variety of

platforms. Modders perform immaterial labor with other commercial parties usually benefiting from these practices.

Previous research on modding has examined its practices through informal surveys, questionnaires, and secondhand information passed to researchers. Almost none of these studies have utilized ethnographic field methods for modder research. Therefore, while research has examined the copyright issues, awareness of perceived role inside and outside the industry, and potential for modding to enhance media convergence of companies, no study has examined the ways that these communities organize themselves.

The importance of the interactions and outputs of modders is not limited solely to the video game industry (e.g. Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). Modding communities represent an example of the changing nature of media work for many industry professionals and non-professional media users. There is a transition to more participatory forms of cultural industry production, thus suggesting and defining forces increasingly at play within other systems that incorporate user content. Yet those areas and their real-world applications are, for the most part, unknown. Therefore, my research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Do groups of "modders" of video games form communities? If so, how does the community define itself through discourses, practices, languages, styles, codes, rituals,and values?

RQ2: How is a community of modders structured? What are the controls, constraints, boundaries, and limits of the community? What are the values these members define as required of leaders and content creators?

RQ3: Is there tension between innovation and control in a modding community? If yes, how is it negotiated?

To explore these questions, I examined select groups of modders for the popular role-playing game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. These modders were located on the popular mod distribution and news channel Steam Workshop. In 2012, *Skyrim* developers Bethesda Softworks released a free software development tool called the Creation Kit to computer players. The

Creation Kit allowed users to modify the game content, at which point the user could publically release their mods through an authorized Steam Workshop channel.

By allowing and encouraging modders to share their creations via the Steam Workshop and other distributors, Bethesda has created a way for these modders to form a collective of sorts through user-generated content and dissemination. In addition, news sites such as *Skyrim* Nexus offer "lead users" who collectively identify and exploit opportunities to improve the way *Skyrim* works using their own practices. These activities are important drivers of particular communities of *Skyrim* modders, and significant in the co-creation of a specific version of *Skyrim*'s emergent modding culture because it creates a separation between users based on perceived skill levels.

I conducted research on groups of users of these sites by using ethnographic methods of participant observation and telephone/email/web interviews. Between September 2013 and January 2014, I observed and participated in conversations on modding community dynamics in specific forums on the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim*. I gathered textual data from a diverse sample of conversations located on discussion boards and a diverse set of mods ranging in user-defined ratings (high-rated to low-rated) to highlight the conversational dynamics and implicit and explicit structuring of the community. The data from discussion boards and comments on uploaded mods was captured, transcribed, filtered, selected, and studied using textual analysis software to highlight points of community dynamics, rituals, norms and values in this modding community.

The information I found in my studies indicates that the changes that Bethesda and Valve attempted in the modding community for *Skyrim* was one that defied the expectations of myself and the professional community. The gatekeeping roles and control of the community became a point of contention between modders and the moderators, as well as with non-modder users. While this is a case study of a community over a small period of time, its lessons hold great potential for understanding how the values of a fan community can impact the intentions of a professional media development studio and distributor. In addition, it suggests that a forced

collection of users will result in a more contentious environment, which creates potential for greater negativity among the user base.

<div align="center">Media Production of Culture</div>

In order to better understand why amateur individuals engage in unpaid forms of media work previously done by traditional or "professional" media producers, this study provides an overview of the history of media production of culture studies.

As traditional media production has been shifting to the digital realm, media consumers have started to blur the boundaries between "producer" and "user" roles via the participatory culture afforded by digital media texts and technologies. This blurring has created a tension between open participation and production by consumers, and professional control by traditional media producers. Where traditional media publishers once directly controlled the development and production of media content, (such as newspaper publishers, book publishing houses, television networks and studios, and film studios and distributors), the participatory culture of digital media has allowed amateur users to create and disseminate content with less interference or oversight from media organizations. This tension has forced several media industries to reevaluate how they see consumers of their products, as well as the role of the consumer in the production and ongoing development of their content.

By common definition, "The production of culture perspective focuses on how the symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved" (Peterson & Anand, 2004). This production of culture framework has been applied to various media industries, from textbooks to news organizations to art to digital media production. Mass media organizations have undergone changes over time. Sociologists and mass communication researchers have studied the ways that production occurs and changes for larger groups and individuals (Hirsch, 1972; Tuchman, 1972; 1978; Peterson & Berger, 1975; DiMaggio & Hirsch, 1976; Rosenblum, 1978; Turow, 1978; Baxandall, 1988; Perlmutter, 1991, 1997, 2000; Bustamante, 2004; Deuze, 2007; Turow, 2010).

These include many different types of culture industries, which is a term used to define "profit-seeking firms producing cultural products for national [we could add 'international'] distribution" (Hirsch, 1972). These firms operate within a "cultural industry system, comprised of all organizations engaged in the process of filtering new products and ideas as they flow from 'creative' personnel in the technical subsystem to the managerial, institutional and societal levels of organization" (Hirsch, 1972).

Several important researchers have studied the communicative social relationships and institutional norms of media organizations, cultural industries and systems, and creative workers to help us understand how the process of production is affected by various dimensions both in and out of the producer's control (Hirsch, 1972; Tuchman, 1972; 1978; Peterson & Berger, 1975; DiMaggio & Hirsch, 1976; Rosenblum, 1978; Turow, 1978; Baxandall, 1988; Perlmutter, 1991, 1997, 2000; Bustamante, 2004; Deuze, 2007; Turow, 2010). There are several types of roles that almost all individual workers can play in a mass media production organization (Turow, 1984). Among these include the creator or artist, the selector (either direct or indirect), and the administration (Turow, 1984; Perlmutter, 1991, 1997).

The study of the individual and their role in media production is common in all such research. The various functions and efficiencies of media workers informs how cultures of media producers operate (Tuchman, 1972; 1973; Peterson & Berger, 1975; DiMaggio & Hirsch, 1976; Turow, 1978; 1984; Perlmutter, 1991, 1997; Weaver, 1998; Curran, 2000; Tunstall, 2001; Deuze, 2007). The production of culture was explored throughout these studies to understand how each institution and organization created and subsequently maintained various norms and standards. Ultimately, this helps us to understand how the organization and institutions of mass media enact normative and formal codes and dimensions upon their products. Often the results include a tension between specific facets of production, which can be delineated as the overlapping sectors of creative and economic forces within the organization of culture industries (e.g. Becker, 1982).

DiMaggio and Hirsch take this further by defining the dilemma facing organizations as one of new ideas versus oversight. "Cultural production systems are characterized by a tension of innovation and control" (1976; 141). This dilemma is often discussed as a problem that is met with the development of routines to anticipate and effectively capitalize on the productive value of an encountered situation, particularly within the news industry (e.g. Tuchman, 1972; 1978; Gitlin, 1980; Turow, 1984).

There are five areas that are integral to understanding organizations in terms of how the professionals in cultural/creative media industries use, evolve, and provide meaning to their work: (a) technology, (b) laws and regulation, (c) industrial and organizational structure, (d) occupational careers, and (e) markets (Peterson & Anand, 2004; Deuze, 2007; Martin & Deuze, 2009). The technological domain is especially problematic since it affects all of the other domains in the twenty-first century. There is a tendency among older analog media companies to move into new digital domains by only viewing the potential that the new medium can provide as a market, without weighing the creative advantages of retooling production and audience appeal to the particulars of the new medium (Bustamante, 2004). This newer form of digital media has blurred the boundaries between the definitions of "producer" and "user" in the modern media industries, and is referred to as "media work" (Deuze, 2007; Martin & Deuze, 2009).

<u>Media Work and User-Generated Content</u>

Media work is a relatively new concept regarding the production of culture within the twenty-first century. Within media companies there are doubts and struggles to adapt to the new patterns of information diffusion. What was once a tightly controlled creative output has now been shifted to a looser managerial practice (Hesmondalgh, 2002). Traditional media production studies typically involve researchers physically entering the site of content creation and observing and interviewing the workers, or even becoming participant-ethnographers in the workplace. Online-interactive media communities, thus, have been seen as a new dimension for research, where the "media workers" are also the audience for the created content. This means

research on new media industries requires a bridge between traditional production of culture studies and a study of convergence, user-generated content, and the tensions of professionalization.

Studies involving the new media production of culture perspective have looked at several reasons for individual and community involvement regarding media production (e.g. Levine, 2001; Newcomb & Lotz, 2002; Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Banks & Potts, 2010; van Dijck, 2009; Booth, 2010; Kerr, 2006; Kline, Dyer-Witheford, & De Peuter, 2003; Sivhonen, 2011). From soap operas (Levine, 2001) to video games (Kerr, 2006) to radio and newspapers (Turow, 1977-78), the cultural industries have been incorporating individuals and communities in unique ways. Certain researchers speculate that individual autonomy has indeed shifted away from the greater levels once prevalent within the industry (Curran, 2000; McFall, 2002), and that the very nature of media work involving the production of culture is based in semantics and practicalities regarding audiences and involved professionals (McFall, 2002; Deuze, 2007).

Perlmutter (2004) expanded this concept to the "interactor," arguing that distinguishing characteristics of each role in mass media production (that is sender and receiver, or content creator and audience) were beginning to blur due to the expanding abilities of communicators to interact with traditional producers of mass media content. Jenkins (2006) discusses this same concept as indicative of a convergence culture, where consumers, producers, media and innovators converge at the site of production in the cultural industries, thus blurring the distinctions between producer and user roles.

This convergence of productive consumers was linked to changing roles of business and was theorized as "The New Organization" (Drucker, 1994, 1998; Fulk and DeSanctis, 1995; Rice and Gattiker, 2001). In such a new order, information communication technologies (ICTs) like the internet force organizations to restructure their business model to focus on information, which is the currency of modern times.

In the New Organization, the speed of communication is increased, connectivity is vastly expanded, the desire for innovation is enhanced, organizations are forced to be more

entrepreneurial and less hierarchical, and work is done by self-disciplined specialists working across traditional departmental lines in various fragmented networks." (Milner, 2009)

> In this realm, the "knowledge worker" becomes the central operative of businesses due to their intelligence and understanding, not the traditional employer-prized values of dexterity or loyalty. (Drucker, 1994, 1998) Organizations based around information as a commodity would come to prize member knowledge and skills, necessitating preservation and further development for success (McPhee & Poole, 2001: 516) Consequently, this knowledge and skill could also been seen among prolific fan laborers for various media industries and brands, albeit with less traditional forms of renumeration if any was given.

This ideology was further explored when the concept of the growing "gift economy" for these knowledge workers was linked to productive consumption (Terranova, 2000). "In this era, laborers are known to give up financial compensation in exchange for pleasurable productivity, which is characterized as open, fluid, collaborative, and leading to non-financial rewards" (Milner, 2009). Hardt and Negri's (2004) claimed that the line between work and leisure was being erased to make a new form of "immaterial labor," and financial compensation would no longer be the sole goal of productivity, due in part to the increased connectivity and community afforded by ICTs. The concept of immaterial labor has been linked to the motivations and behaviors of fan laborers (e.g. Jenkins, 2008; Milner, 2009), even though the structures and rewards of immaterial labor are seen as too broad and utopian to apply to the majority of traditional workers (see Camfield, 2007). Indeed, fan cultures, knowledge communities and immaterial laborers are rewarded through the key commodity of information, and social capital is earned from the presentation and interpretation of that information.

Digital media and the burgeoning participatory culture it fosters has also offered the enhanced possibility of connecting with persons sharing similar interests without needing to be in the same area or place. These shared interests and electronic interactions facilitate the creation of online communities. Online communities gather people with specific, focused needs and interests around an organization or organizational practice. Typically these are found in varying types of commercial interests, including brands, services, or products, or a common field of interest (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob, 2006). Online communities involve relationships between

consumers and the service company, the brand, the service, other users, or the community maintainer (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002; Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008). These social, economic, and commercial relationships form the backbone of many online communities and interactions, with recent trends indicating that consumers form more closely-held bonds with commercial organizations (Heinonen, 2011).

<div align="center">Convergence</div>

Much of the current literature focused on new media cultural production studies and media work has emphasized how the blurring roles of consumer and producer emerge in a type of "free labor" economy of production. The relationship between professionals and amateurs, or producers and users, or a hybrid labeling of "produsage" (Bruns, 2008; Bird, 2011) has become a point of debate among professional and amateur organizations today. Increasingly, this gap between workers and consumers is a contested space for media creators that filter and distribute information. The professional identity, authority, and expertise of "legitimate" media workers are linked to their pivotal role in directing those media production and dissemination practices. Consequently, digital technologies and the digital/participatory cultures they afford (Deuze, 2006; Jenkins, 2008) are centered around end-user participation, challenging the established reasons for professional control over such content creation, filtering, and distribution. Jenkins (2008) described this gap between traditional media producers and amateur consumer/creators as the place where "convergence" occurs.

The larger tension in shifting professional involvement and convergence comes from a multitude of factors inherent to the change in professional discourse. If digital technologies and cultures have facilitated participation at the cost of traditional publishing control, how does this development strain the professional character of media industries like journalism, publishing, television, and especially video games? "If professions are defined by a certain degree of control over an information domain, what happens to professional jurisdiction in the journalism space, and with what potential consequences?" (Lewis, 2012). For instance, the noted tension between

professional control and open user involvement has received growing attention in journalism studies literature (for a few examples, see Deuze, 2008; Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010; Neuberger & Nuernbergk, 2010; Singer et al., 2011; Williams, Wardle, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). This tension occurs through examinations of journalistic role perceptions (O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008), the blogging–journalism intersection (Lowrey, 2006; Singer, 2007), and changes in news cultures (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008).

Other creative industries are faced with similar challenges. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) interviewed workers in three different cultural industries: television, magazine publishing, and the recording industry. The experiences of workers in these more fashionable jobs were characterized as highly ambivalent, with a flexible work schedule being met with less starting pay and a lowered sense of security. Consequently, some scholarship has associated modern creative industrial policies with negative terms. For example, one academic (Arvidsson, 2007) uses the phrase "creative proletariat" to refer to the underground cultural producers that some creative professionals draw upon as part of their work (Hesmondalgh, 2010).

Seth Lewis (2012) explores this transformation of the creative industries into convergent areas by using the case of journalism and its professional shifts towards negotiating open participation in the news process. Lewis sees journalism – and the sociology of professions, especially with an emphasis on boundary maintenance – as *boundary work*, *profession*, and *ideology*, with each contributing to the formation of journalism's professional logic of control over content. Yet there exists an ideological incompatibility with the open participation that digital media fosters, and journalists have struggled to negotiate this matter. They are caught in the professional impulse toward one-way publishing control even as media industries become a multi-way network. Lewis concludes on a note of hope, with emerging research suggesting a possible goal of adaptability and openness—"an ethic of participation"—as a way to defuse the tension (2012).

Research on Online Communities

      "Culture" is defined as the web that connects the beliefs, rituals, patterns, rules, and actions of a group, institution, organization, or society (Geertz, 1973). In other words, if all of the elements of culture are disparate elements, culture is the unifying force connecting them. Geertz (1973) also discussed culture as an articulation of the inherited conceptions of reality through symbols, perceptions, and rituals that inspire actions and inform attitudes of individuals and groups.

      In the 21st century, ongoing technological, social, economic, political, and cultural forces have contributed to the rise of information communication technologies (ICTs) and a reliance on information capital within social establishments. Noted media theorist Marshall McLuhan has been celebrated by several scholars for his supposed accuracy in determining how new communication media would affect social and cultural patterns of living. The internet is one such communication medium that McLuhan could assess as having a profound impact on the fabric of global existence. Within the internet, a vast range of routines and patterns have been manipulated, altered, and extended through the proliferation and speed of information. As McLuhan predicted, the internet as a communication medium has allowed media users and workers to extend their conceptual selves into its vast expanse. Consequently, this extension can be seen in online communities of users and organizations. While an extension of the offline community in society, online communities provide new opportunities for individuals and organizations to interact and construct themselves through open media channels.

      But what is a strong online community? This is a question that continues to be examined as the internet shifts communication patterns and users. Jan van Dijk (2005) examined how the *mass society* – which focused on large groups of individuals who shared a common geographic and temporal space – was shifted into the *network society* of the modern era, which is disparate and far-reaching, yet connected through spaces other than geography and time. This networking occurs through the influx of ICTs and the mediation of society by shifting communication patterns. When the mass grouping of society became less reliable as an organizing principle for

change and sustenance, van Dijk (2005) observed how the individual became the main unit of organization of these groups. Population groupings in physical areas became less important than how individuals formed networks of communication, social groupings, and ideologies. Thus, van Dijk's (2005) hypothesis of network theory posits that these networks of users are created through a combination of social and media influences.

This helps position the group of users of online media as a potential community. But what constitutes such communities? What makes them strong enough to be considered a community? Early network theories examined how online media audiences should be differentiated from offline groups. Many have explained institutional definitions of communities, and hypothesized various means of determining this strength. Prototypical research on imagined communities of media producers and consumers (Calhoun, 1991) gave way to calls for more open understandings of how network communities of users operate (Whittaker, Isaacs, & O'Day, 1997) by a more textually-rich blend of ethnographic methods and practices (Thomsen, Straubhaur, & Bolyard, 1998) and by rethinking how media audiences could be constituted in opposition to traditional forms of audience research (Alasuutari, 1999). These changes led to the expansion of network theory (van Dijk, 2005) along with a more formalized approach to web theory and research (Burnett & Marshall, 2003).

NPR broadcasting personality David Weinberger wrote an accessible introduction to these issues of disparate groups of users in *Small Pieces Loosely Joined: A Unified Theory of the Web* (2002). Weinberger's work on unified web theory was illustrated when he showed how a group of former information technology employees came together to check on each other after the terrorist attacks on American soil occurred on September 11, 2001. While they worked through their separate individual questions and anger about the attacks, Weinberger pointed out that their shared past employment was not what drove them to remain in contact. Instead, these users chose to remain on a forum because of their shared interests in technology and shifting technological movements. Weinberger pointed out how these groups were made stronger by a mutual interest in a subject and practice (2002), even though they were only loosely related

because of their employment (which took different occupations and tasks) and their location (spread across the country). As he termed it, the small pieces were only loosely joined as media users; their discussion and unity through their interests was what created the strong internet organizational ties.

These interests must be elucidated by users in order to fit within the community and adapt to it. Carey (1985) claims this occurrence is a ritual, where communication is used to remake and reinforce the actual existence and practice of the world in which we live. Therefore, an online culture is not necessarily different from a physical culture as has been discussed. Nowhere in Geertz's (1973) definition does it state that physicality is required for a culture to exist. Furthermore, culture is necessarily a conceptual linkage between disparate elements, with a narrative reality assigned to these various elements in order to create meaning and order.

In his examination of media workers, Mark Deuze (2006, 2007) isolated such rituals into three components. They are *participation* (actively choosing to interact within a group of users), *remediation* (reinterpreting the meaning of interaction and media texts through subjective personal lenses and intertextual forms of creation), and *bricolage* (linking the interaction, discourse, and mediation of texts and artifacts to previously established artifacts, dislodging the need for linear patterns of communication). These components operate through discourse, which can take a variety of forms (i.e. online text conversations, or embedding video and audio, hyperlinking for *bricolage*). Discourse by users is necessary to illustrate the explicit and/or implicit patterns of ritual and digital cultural components in online communities.

The definition of a strong online community emerges as a creolization and extension of these ideas. Since one uniform definition has not yet been created and shared, I am offering my own for the purpose of this dissertation: *A strong online community is one that is formed by groups of users with shared personal interests that are elucidated by open dialogue and focused discourse. These communities rely on the discursive practices of users via ritual, including participation, remediation, and bricolage.*

This shared interest and discourse is the central difference between online communities and offline communities. While users may not have as much agency within their geographic location and surrounding physical community, these online users can actively choose to join these communities and interact based on personal interests. The rituals and practices of offline communities differ as well, with many existing forms of social construction and negotiation having evolved from several generations of historical precedent (Carey, 1985). Using McLuhan as a basis for this comparison, the internet and its effect on communication practices should make the medium only an extension of our offline selves. Instead, the components of participation, remediation, and bricolage allow users to reform and create rituals, language patterns, and practices/routines that are specific to their online communities (Deuze, 2006).

Online communities rely on these basic principles in their most basic form, with information capital as their sole reward. These forms of "digi-gratis" practices will be discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. Offline communities are reliant on multiple forms of exchange for labor and information, and these communities maintain the existing practices of larger social and institutional groups. Strong offline communities reinforce these practices in order to thrive, while online communities based on psychographic and mutual interests may thrive as agents of resistance to offline powers (Burgess & Green, 2008). Furthermore, many online communities share personal interests and negotiate these communities because their offline communities and lives are unfulfilling. Online communities are sometimes seen as a threat to that balance and participation in offline communalities. In Bugeja's (2005) work, he posits that several members of offline communities have lost the security and social institutionalization provided by offline communities as economic forces affect specific areas. Since more workers are encouraged to become more like freelance workers with unstable and shifting career patterns, Bugeja posits that there exists an innate need to gain the security and comfort of a community of others in our society. Online communities based on shared interests and ideologies function as a way for users to negotiate those needs, with varying levels of success (Deuze, 2006; Fuchs, 2008).

Most online communities are formed (and informed) by the inherent personal interests of users. For example, when Cherny (1995) examined online multi-user domains (MUDs) dedicated to sexuality and behavior, this community was one that could not have existed in its then-present form in the temporal realm. All the users were located in various geographic and temporal spaces, united by their use of an information portal. Their personal motivation and interest in sexuality had brought them together within the MUD, where they conversed and recreated aspects of themselves through discourse on sexuality. This discourse was the motivating resource that created the online community. Since users could be brought together by their interests, the concepts of discourse and participation could be used to state how they were alike and individually different in this community. For example, the users could discuss their sexual preferences and how their individual needs could be explicated, while at the same time examining how their experiences with sexual discrimination set them apart from others (Cherny, 1995).

But differences do exist. Online communities are often seen as distanced, digital realms where users inhabit a second body (Taylor, 1999). These communities and cultures are not located within the physical realm of traditional cultural groups, but rather in the information superhighway of the networked society (van Dijk, 2005). Traditional culture's web is located in the physical, temporal, social, and geographic boundaries and spheres of the real, while digital cultures can eschew those physical characteristics.

The existing differences between users are flattened out by the network mediation present on the internet. While offline communities are constituted and negotiated via cultural, social, and local norms and histories, online communities can (potentially) avoid these factors in their discourse. Within the utopian logic of Jenkins' (2006) discussions of convergence culture, the user has the potential to drastically affect others and have a wide impact without a need to leave their existing boundaries. However, as further ethnomethodological studies of internet users have shown, the issues of access and engagement are informed by offline forces and existing cultural,

economic, social, and geographic factors. Future research on online communities must account for these outside influences on online communities.

<div align="center">Video Games and Gaming Studies</div>

Game studies has emerged as a theoretical field with a sizable plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches, along with its own emergent vocabulary. The culture of gaming and its various sectors is a growing community where ideas can be spread and disseminated among more diverse individuals by means of online communication and specialized niche groups. Once stereotyped as a youth-oriented activity, games are now played by a diverse majority of Americans (Ipsos-Insight, 2005), with 32 percent of players older than 35 (Engle, 2001). Thanks to the rise of mobile media and smart devices with games available for download, the continued success of modern games has made it the highest-grossing entertainment medium of our present culture, with the global video game market expected to reach market revenue of $111 billion by 2015 (Molina, 2013).

The emergence of gaming studies in academia is a consequence of the rise of video games to cultural prominence. Studies of video gaming have examined their psychological and social impacts on violence (e.g. Dietz, 1998; Heintz-Knowles, Henderson, Glaubke, Miller, Parker, & Espejo, 2001; Schierbeck and Carstens, 2000) and gender (e.g. Braun & Giroux, 1989; Dietz, 1998; Janz & Martis, 2007); their economic framework (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, & de Peuter, 2003; Dyer-Witheford & Sharman, 2005); their cultivation effects (Mierlo & Bulck, 2004; Williams, 2006; Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009); and their production and technological changes (Williams et. al, 2009). However, each of these studies examines gaming through theoretical lenses that rely on outside disciplines to populate their research perspectives. While gaming utilizes a plurality of academic voices, often these voices can set their own research agenda without considering the implications of using games and how their findings may shift due to the unique kinesthetic nature of game play (see Hayles, 2004).

Video Games and Online Communities

Much research has been done on so-called "massively multiplayer online" games (MMOGs) that focus on creating gigantic areas and encourage players to form groups or teams to proceed; games such as *Everquest* and *World of Warcraft* are noted among ethnographic studies (Taylor, 2006) since they allow for user creation of avatars that can reflect player personalities, as well as the environment where these interactions take place. MMOGs allow for researchers to examine the emergence and maintenance of community behavior and expectations, along with ways that users may use group interactions to negotiate or subvert seemingly impenetrable code by developers (Corliss, 2011).

Researchers study these "MMOGs" and their communities of users since these games make the process of legitimizing games study as social scientific venture easier. This ease is due to MMOG gameplay constituted by explicit and large-scale social interaction that is much more accessible to social scientists (Corliss, 2011). MMOGs like *Second Life* represent "virtual worlds" that form discrete cultures and subcultures that can be analyzed using the tools of social science and cultural anthropology, such as ethnographic methods and discourse analysis (Boellstorf, 2008). But it is important to acknowledge that all games can be examined as sociocultural phenomena. There is a demand for a game studies that can address the broad forms of varying games and evolving sociocultural areas (Corliss, 2011).

Many online ethnographies have been performed on users who interact within these virtual worlds (Taylor, 1999; 2006; Yee, 2006; Balkin & Noveck, 2006). Several studies have found that these user communities are based on hierarchies, social norms, and practices that are similar to the physical, real world. However, the identity construction processes of users requires a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of personal, social, cultural, economic, and political forces affecting users (i.e. Yee, 2006; Taylor, 2006; Rowlands, 2012).

Subcultures have emerged within the existing culture of video game players. These subcultures are not the broadest group of their home culture; instead, they are offshoots of the original community, places where users with specific needs, interests or desires can express them

and connect with others, much like Dick Hebdige (1979) discussed in his seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Hebdige's work described how individual subcultures could rise up to challenge prevailing ideologies, hegemonic values, and social structures, forming through a common resistance. Here, these genres of video games and communities of users emerged as subcultures in video games, challenging norms and expectations before becoming assimilated into the mainstream.

<p style="text-align:center">Video Games and Culture</p>

One issue of gaming studies focuses on the problem of authorship in gaming, which emerges through interactivity and creates a distinction between games and other media texts. Video games allow users to interact with the game via an interface, as opposed to traditional media production where the user has no direct influence over the course of the narrative or action of the product. This discussion of interactivity and user engagement is at the heart of gaming studies and ludology because, as Jonathan Corliss (2011) puts it:

> (P)layers are embedded within virtual playscapes, implicated in the worldview of particular game spaces and incentivized to enact value judgments from 'Where should I jump?' to 'What should I exterminate?' Games foreground our decision making while disciplining us toward a particular course of action; through our interactions, we become part of the game, accumulating a degree of authorship always mediated by the constant evaluation of (reward or penalty for) our actions within the game world; these interactions are intensified by a distinct physicality through which we come to embody our digital play and our game learning. (2011)

The unique feature of interactivity within games allows users to extend agency into the text, sometimes in ways outside of the prescribed form of play. These ways include – but are certainly not limited to – actively shutting down the game world to replicate or focus on in-game tasks with real social impetus (Golub, 2010); "emergent authorship," or placing users in a shared role of coproduction of game narratives and meanings (see e.g., Gee, 2006; Pearce, 2006; Simon, 2006; Steinkuehler, 2006); and synergistic collaborations with media companies to form narratives that are hyper-realized through convergence (Jenkins, 2008; Brookey & Booth, 2006).

Immaterial Labor in Video Games

The increasingly blurry boundary between gaming developers and audiences is an area that represents a great need for understanding. Electronic fan communities involve persons who play video games and post on gaming message/discussion boards. They have not been studied sufficiently by academics. This is unusual since games are continuing to find new audiences and become the "ideal commodities" of global information capitalism (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, & de Peuter, 2003; Dyer-Witheford & Sharman, 2005).

The literature on games as sites of production and meaning is scant, compared with studies of game content and effects, and also compared to other media industries. There has been almost no critical exploration of audience production and response from the perspective of production of culture studies. Some literature does explain how many popular games are commercially owned and operated, responding to advertiser critiques and similar corporate interests (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2003; Montgomery, 2000; Shade, Porter & Sanchez, 2005).

Often the video game player will go so far as to become a beta tester for a company, providing free testing of a game for early access to the product (Johnson, 2010). Here, people truly provide "free labor" to provide feedback on the product, and their contribution is only rewarded through the chance to play the game before its intended release date as a way of affecting how the game will be played in some small capacity (Johnson, 2010).

Several studies have explored the idea of the interactive gamer as an "immaterial laborer" through the lens of political economy. By examining user-generated content, some researchers suggested that such content may increase a game's sales and product longevity, which in turn suggests that the interactivities enabled by gaming might be appropriated in the service of capital and economic interests outside of the unique user (Miller, 2006; Corliss, 2011). For example, when a group of fans with the *Fallout* series formed online after Bethesda Game Studios took over development of the franchise for *Fallout 3*, many users created content and offered narrative and design suggestions as a form of "directing" the content or keeping the game as

faithful as possible to the source material (Milner, 2009). This fan investment indicates an awareness and possible acceptance of the power and control imbalance between developers and consumers, yet it also allows for gamers to have their own voice within the production process.

Furthermore, these studies on fan investment expand previous research on new media design by emphasizing the blurring role of work and play in gaming development culture (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, 2002). Game developers "incentivize, channel, and incorporate a variety of forms of revenue-generating, free labor from game players, hobbyist programmers, and even developers themselves" (see e.g., de Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2005; Corliss, 2011). Yee (2006) suggested that games such as *World of Warcraft* were training users to be better workers while simultaneously burning out gamers from their enjoyment of the game. This was defined as a "playbour" (Kücklich, 2005), which is used to sustain a digital games industry that requires perpetual creative innovation. Finally, Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter (2003) suggest that these qualities help make interactive digital games "the ideal commodity of a post-Fordist . . . capitalism."

<div align="center">Modders and Modding</div>

Nowhere is the blurring of boundaries more pronounced than in the case of "modders," or users of software and video games who modify video games by using a software development kit that is authorized by professional gaming developers. Modifications or "mods" are defined as *fan-made changes to a video game with a range of complexity from simple adjustments in game play or variables to "total conversions" where an entire game is redesigned* (Postigo, 2003, 2007; Sotamaa, 2004). "Modders" is the colloquial term for those fans who make and disseminate mods.

Modding is a relatively new phenomenon in gaming, and it became a component of the PC gaming platform in the early distribution of popular first-person shooters like *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* (Au, 2002; Kushner, 2003). Modifying a game's content allows the modder to reuse games as cultural products, thus incorporating changes made to a game into a preexisting content

form in order to achieve a type of creative ownership and meaning over their interactive experience (Postigo, 2007). This creative ownership often becomes a sort of apprenticeship into the industry, as many modders engage in game design as amateurs in order to develop a portfolio for a potential future career in game creation. However, this is a practice that is motivated by word of mouth rather than empirical evidence to its truth (Postigo, 2010).

But modding has the potential to expand beyond the traditional realm of fellow modders. When users developed the popular mod "Counter-Strike" with the SDK provided in Valve Software's 1998 FPS *Half-Life*, Valve contracted the modders and commercialized the mod, selling it at major retailers while the original mod was still available online. The popularity of *Counter-Strike* in all its forms represents an openness to user-generated content and a willingness to support fan-made projects (Postigo, 2007). However, very few mods ever reach the level of success of *Counter-Strike*, with many mods produced solely for the perusal or use of a select few individuals (Postigo, 2007).

Modders are the strongest representation of free labor in games, and it has garnered the most attention in the work and video games literature (e.g., Banks, 2005; Nieborg & van der Graaf, 2008; Postigo, 2003, 2007, 2008; Sotamaa, 2005, 2007a, 2007b) because certain mods boost the value of particular video games (Kücklich, 2005). In particular, mods contribute to product branding without additional investment from the publisher, and they extend the shelf life of games and increase customer loyalty—players continue to purchase and play games for longer when the games are sustained by a prolific mod community constantly generating new content.

Consequently, mods represent a valuable source of low-risk innovation and experimentation within the games industry. They potentially supply the industry with an alternate recruitment pool, and some modders cite this possible shift into paid, stable development as a motive for contributing their unpaid labor. For others, the opposite is true. Modding also holds potential as a distinctly recreational, collective, and sometimes anti-capitalist pursuit (Kücklich, 2005).

Current academic research on modders is consistent with other games studies research on interactivity, emergent gameplay, and questions of authorship over content. Copyright was a large point of discussion for users. Several users of authorized SDKs found themselves forced to halt the production of mods based on copyrighted material. The tension between innovation and control found itself in the debate over whether modders recreating popular entertainment properties such as *G.I. Joe* and *Duke Nukem 3D* in the software of competing companies would be beneficial for any party involved, and ultimately the decision was made to remove the content (Postigo, 2007).

The participatory culture of modding thus places the subculture in a unique position within the gaming industry: Modders are both inside and outside of it (Postigo, 2010). Most mods are not received by mass audiences. However, fans of gaming content recognize the role of modders in adding value to a game through their contributions. These gamers do not blindly create content, nor do they unwillingly engage in the production of goods that benefit the developer and publisher of gaming content. Instead, they willingly engage in modding as a form of learning skills and interacting with fellow fans (Postigo, 2003, 2007, 2010).

One limitation to the existing research on modders has been the small sample size of the subjects, along with the use of survey data and electronic discourse collection and analysis. The professionalization of modders and modding practices was suggested through discourse and survey data gathered in existing research. However, the idea of professionalization was explored as a frame of boundary work. Postigo (2010) suggests that companies releasing proprietary SDKs make users fans of game design tools rather than the games themselves, thus creating and fostering a group of exploratory and innovative designers. This is a primary idea explored in my dissertation, to expand modding knowledge in academic and professional research. This dissertation also helps to address the changing media definitions of digital work, boundary work, legitimation and professional differentiation.

Another important factor in modding studies is that modders are not representative of the entire gaming community. Modders currently represent only a very small portion of the game-

playing community. Most video game consumers/fans/players do not have the resources necessary for this form of participation, such as access to the programming skills, hardware, or available time to construct modified game instruments (Corliss, 2011). However, as the realm of digital media increases the availability of easier instructions and visual aids for construction, modding may become more accessible. Witness the availability of Bethesda-authorized tutorials for use of the Creation Kit in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* on both the Steam Workshop and *Skyrim* Nexus sites. These videos are pitched to users of varying skill levels, ranging from beginners to advanced designers.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This dissertation examines how a specific group of modders for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* can contribute to the academic body of literature, specifically media production of culture, media work, convergence, community and cultural assembly, and video game production. In the next chapter, I articulate how modding and online communities contribute to larger bodies of academic research in the areas of media production of culture, games as cultural studies, and connections between media producers and consumers.

CHAPTER TWO – CONTEXT AND LITERATURE

Introduction

In 2012, global revenues for the video game industry were an estimated $67 billion for console and portable hardware and software, as well as games for mobile devices (more commonly, tablet computers and smartphones) (Gaudiosi, 2012). Sales of "virtual goods" within games generated an additional $14.8 billion in 2012. Consequently, there have been more opportunities for amateur and fan audiences to have an impact on the larger gaming industry, specifically in relation to the practice of modding.

These totals are higher than global music revenues ($16.5 billion in 2011), popular consumer book sales ($69.4 billion in 2011), and close to film revenues ($85 billion in 2011) (Gaudiosi, 2012). To put this in perspective with one gaming console, over its twelve-year lifecycle, the PlayStation 2 console sold over 150 million units worldwide, with over 1.52 billion units of software sold to consumers (Yin-Poole, 2011). So there is certainly an emergent industry within the realm of video games.

But how are games produced in the traditional model of production? In her work on digital game culture, Aphra Kerr (2006) noted the similarities between game production and film production. Both industries are reliant on high-risk and high-cost productions, with much of the expense for gaming development made up front by investors, developers, and publishers. Nominally, a game developer will have a relationship with a publisher to invest in the cost of development and distribution, with the publisher earning much of the revenue generated by the publication of a game. This is much like a film distributor taking the money from a film production studio.

Foreshadowing some of the issues covered in the next chapter on modding: Due to the high cost of development, distribution and publishing, games publishers are less likely to take risks on innovation and new modes of storytelling and play. Therefore, game developers and publishers needed to find ways of operating as a business while generating creative product and

encouraging creative processes. Kerr explored the lack of stability within most game companies, citing the publicized news story of "EA_Spouse" (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2006) as one such example of exploitation of workers and programmers. In her blog post directed to the executives at a games publisher, Electronic Arts Los Angeles, the spouse of a developer listed several factors (EA_Spouse, 2004) that have since been verified (and reportedly addressed) by game scholars (e.g. Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2006; Kerr, 2006). These included poor project management, an inability for developers to meet deadlines, and a contract system that superficially promoted a fun environment while actually dictating 80-hour work weeks during crunch periods of development. These factors caused the turnover rate among game developers to be alarmingly high. In fact, many game developers do not foresee a stable future in their current position, and some choose to leave the field early as a result.

Companies are looking for find a way to alleviate these concerns and address economic concerns as well. Sometimes this involves changing their physical location of development. Dyer-Witheford and Sharman (2005) found that the lessened demand on resources and tax breaks for game developers was an attractive benefit to producing games in Canada. Furthermore, many of these labor inequalities continued to exist at the major game company's location, with many workers claiming that though this was expected per industry standards, it was not cited as a stable workplace environment. Therefore, while the economic argument of games may emphasize their continued growth and popularity, the production of games is a difficult economic reality that is very different from this rhetoric.

The changes in the video game industry are like changes Bagdikian (2004) and McChesney (1999) point out in their work on older media industries. There are fewer publishers than before, and these existing conglomerations oversee much of the mainstream publications and creations of digital games. This not only limits the control of much of the mainstream gaming production, but it also allows for increased homogeneity of production. One need only look at the replication of proven formulas of game design within popular gaming to see that the

production of digital games by popular companies reflects the traditional production of culture scholarship.

This has allowed for innovation to appear mainly in fringe markets. Smaller developers with less investment capital can now independently produce and distribute their work through electronic media communication like the internet, effectively cutting off the need for an outside publisher. Martin and Deuze (2009) explore how the product testing of smaller developers leads to impassioned discourse among these independent developers and their groups of fans. These smaller companies can now work with gamers to ensure that their product meets their intended niche, thus no longer having to sacrifice the quality of their production to fit storytelling conventions or design formulas.

But in order to understand how video games are linked to cultures of production, dissemination and distribution among developers and fans, it is important to understand how cultures are produced, especially within the online world. This next segment will illustrate the creation of cultures both online and offline.

Online Cultures and Communities

Clifford Geertz (1973) explains that writing about culture is best through "thick description," an ethnographic practice of presenting cultural forms by describing the actions, behaviors, rituals, practices, and important events in the maximum amount of detail to insure that the group is accurately represented. The author must present the group in acute detail in order to allow the reader to gain insight into an outside culture or group. This is because the field of cultural studies benefits within ethnographic practices.

One basic definition of "culture" is based on a multiplicity of anthropological and ethnographic dimensions. Geertz (1973) and other ethnographers and anthropologists have postulated that culture is defined as the web that connects the beliefs, rituals, patterns, rules, and actions of a group, institution, organization, or society. Culture is the unifying force connecting all of these disparate elements.

Cultural studies in communication is based on greater understandings of modalities within society. For example, the late communication scholar and sociologist Stuart Hall (1997) noted that cultural studies examined how our communication models represent issues of power and discourse among groups of varying race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Cultural studies allows researchers to properly place hierarchies and power dynamics, while ethnography allows for greater description of these practices. This study uses ethnographic methods for part of its data collection, and these practices shall be examined in further detail in Chapter 3.

This practice of detailing activities and rituals within our modern era can be ascribed to online communities as well, particularly since information has become the currency upon which society operates. This currency is especially potent in online communities and cultures. New types of communities, formed through the introduction of widespread online capabilities, have led researchers to see the importance of studying online communities (e.g. Baym, 1995, 1999; Jones, 1995; Rheingold, 1993) and how these communities function through online communication (e.g. Kollock and Smith, 1996; Wellman et al., 1996).

An online culture is not necessarily different from a physical culture as we have discussed. Nowhere in either definition by Geertz or others does it state that physicality is required for a culture to exist. Furthermore, culture is necessarily a conceptual linkage between disparate elements, a narrative reality assigned to these various elements in order to create meaning and order. Therefore, in the broadest definition of traditional culture, online communities and cultures are no different than offline communities and cultures, and we can state that these cultures do exist since they too contain rituals, patterns, behaviors of individuals and groups, and rules both explicit and implicit.

Some differences do exist. However, online communities are often seen as distanced, digital realms where users inhabit a second body (Taylor, 1999). These communities and cultures are not located within the close physical realm like traditional cultural groups, but rather on the information superhighway of the networked society (van Dijk, 2005). Traditional culture's web

is located in the physical, temporal, social, and geographic boundaries and spheres of the real, while digital cultures can eschew those physical characteristics.

Most online communities are formed (and informed) by the inherent personal interests of users. The discourse between users was the motivating resource that created the online community. Since users could be brought alike by their interests, discourse and participation could be used to state how they were alike and individually different in this community. Based on Deuze's (2007) investigation of digital cultures of information communities and their formation, participation in an online community is based on how often a user communicates or performs an action within the community, and this level of participation determined a user's place within the community. Remediation refers to how users interpret various textual, cultural, and social meanings of information and action in online communities, thus constructing their own meaning within the reality of the network. Finally, bricolage refers to the reassembly and creation of social norms, combining seemingly disparate elements into a "remix" of ideological, parasocial identities and practices. This "collage" effect shapes online communities by allowing for the more rapid evolution of the community based on information capital and knowledge.

As technology improved over time, gaming communities emerged within massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). Castronova (2005) referred to these as "virtual worlds" where users could interact and recreate themselves through avatars and actions. Many online ethnographies have been performed on users who interact within these virtual worlds (Taylor, 1999; 2006; Yee, 2006; Balkin & Noveck, 2006). This research has found that these communities are based on hierarchies, social norms, and practices that are similar to the physical, real world. However, the identity construction processes of users requires a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of personal, social, cultural, economic, and political forces affecting users (i.e. Yee, 2006; Taylor, 2006; Rowlands, 2011).

Furthermore, these communities or online cultures can also have subgroups/subcultures, much like traditional communities. Williams, Kennedy and Moore (2011) performed a mixed-methods survey and ethnographic study of role-players within massively-multiplayer online

games (MMOs, sometimes known as MMOGs). Within this online community, the researchers located users who became their online counterparts in reality. In a way, they were playing a different kind of game than the majority of users (Williams et. al, 2011). Such subcultures exist within gaming communities of all types, and must be explored to gain a greater understanding of the community operations and interactions.

Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui (2009) proclaimed that most, if not all, online communities are formed by topics of interest. Therefore, these communities will likely be internally motivated to present this data and discuss these works on discussion boards, fan sites, comment sections, or other forms of electronic communication. They may also post discursive communication messages through online audio or video messages. Therefore, if participation is what drives online communities, then a participant-observer must create data by asking questions or becoming involved in the cultural web of online communities.

Games as Cultural Studies

The idea that online communities are part of a larger cultural sphere is rooted in early examples of cultural studies research. As Stuart Hall (1980) suggests, popular culture is neither wholly corrupt nor authentic. Instead, popular reception features both "progressive elements and stone age elements." Early approaches to games as cultural studies also mostly bypass the significance of online networks that often originate in playing the game with others and in the course of time develop into long-lasting and intense relationships. In order to understand how online communities – and eventually, groups of modders – represent extensions of these ideas, it is important to see how gaming has been represented in the texts of cultural studies.

Vocal yet narrow debates between ludological and narratological perspectives dominated the field when game studies began its academic ascent in the early 2000s. Extending some of the work done on "New Media" (see e.g., Manovich, 2001; Rieser & Zapp, 2002; Wardrip-Fruin & Montfort, 2003), narratology focuses on the textual and intertextual qualities of video games, often framing them as digital or interactive narratives and drawing theory from a lineage of

literature and cinema studies, which forms substantial research agendas within gaming scholarship (Corliss, 2011).

Conversely, self-proclaimed "ludologists" see this trend as inhibiting the development of an adequate theoretical approach to the study of video games. Video games must be treated on their own terms, with their own theories and methods, if games are a unique technocultural phenomenon. Ludologists often connect their work with a much narrower academic lineage on the study of games and play (Callois, 1958, 1962; Huizinga, 1956) and emphasize those aspects of games that separate them from other forms of media (Aarseth, 1997, 2004). In this respect, ludologists see much external theory as insufficient to the needs of gaming studies, and believe "much of current game theory to be founded on a series of ill-advised analogies between computer games and the individual theorists' fields of study—rather than a specific analysis of the 'gaming situation' itself" (Wardrip-Fruin & Harrigan, 2004; Corliss, 2011).

The problem of authorship arrives when the very act of creation occurs within an existing framework of a video game text that had already been created by professional developers. This is particularly problematic to several researchers because the practice of modding is reliant on the convergence of players and producers into overlapping roles, which is also dependent on ludic experience with the game. To understand how this practice of modding differs from the previously covered aspects of video gaming, it is important to provide a brief history of the practice and its perspective in research.

<u>A History of "Modding"</u>

Among computer games, "mod" is originally short for "modify" or "modification" and is a standard shorthand for player-made alterations and additions to preexisting games. Jenkins would refer to the utopian ideal of convergence in gaming as one exemplified by modders and the work they do on their games of choice (2006). Through modding, computer code that represents images and game play is stripped of context and redesigned by the player or group of players, passed through communities of fan developers who may create/appropriate and

incorporate other bits of their cultural experience into the new game environments they create and eventually thrust it out into the internet where it may be downloaded by thousands who will then play the new code, layered onto the old (Postigo, 2004). The altered computer code and the layered codes of meaning of a mod are "turned into an event" for group participation (Fiske, 1992). Convergence occurs through the joining of images, culture, media industries, and the roles of consumers/creators (Jenkins, 2006). There are relationships between all parties participating in the construction and reconstruction of the game, and those groups are linked by the common interest in the meaning of games as cultural products and their value as commodities (Postigo, 2004).

Mostly using a PC platform to code, test and distribute these mods, modders have been involved in the breakdown of user and producer roles since the early 1990s, most prominently in popular PC first-person shooter (FPS) games like *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D* (Au, 2002; Kushner, 2003). This is because video games can easily lead to "transformative play" where players "modify the game so that it is different for others" (Postigo, 2008). While FPS mods and their production are suggested to have a stronger link to the gaming industry and thus are more "institutionalized" (Nieborg & Graaf, 2008), researchers have previously shown how a variety of genres of games were designed to allow users to involve themselves in a post-production process. This includes game genres such as real time strategy (RTS) and role playing games (Jones, 2006; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) and human behavior simulation titles such as *The Sims* (Jenkins, 2006).

Although mods have become a popular example both in new media literature (Jenkins, 2006; Postigo, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2010; Sotamaa, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2010) and game design writings (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003), so far the actual meanings modders themselves attach to their actions and practices remain heavily underresearched. In his research on the Czech-developed first-person shooter game *Operation: Flashpoint* and the modding scene created around it, Olli Sotamaa (2010) found that there is no such thing as an average computer game modder. His research suggested that the distinctions could be drawn based on several factors,

including "the objective of projects (missions, add-ons, mods), modder motivations (playing, hacking, researching, self-expression, cooperation), and notions on the ownership and potential commercialization of their work." (Sotamaa, 2010)

Early academic accounts on player-created mods highlight the potential artistic dimensions of "game patches." Early mods have been both considered "hacker art" and suggested to follow political photomontages and scratch video as a manifestation of "tactical media" (Huhtamo, 1999; Schleiner, 1999). These researchers position mods as antithetical to corporate media products and suggest they are a new way of revealing the means and questioning the truths of mainstream media. This historical context is significant for a phenomenon so enthusiastically celebrated as something completely new and revolutionary during the late 1990s.

The deep investment of the creative relationship modders and other fans have with their preferred games can emotionally spark confrontations between copyright owners, modders and their supporters. If working in synch, fan/modder groups and the game industry can produce novel material and provide incentives to create within a strong participatory community whose products are likely to benefit both groups (Postigo, 2003). However, when these forces are working against each other's interests, corporate entities may preclude creativity and participation by forcing users to adhere to rigid click-through agreements and copyright law statues. Postigo (2003) described how fan creators of mods for popular PC FPS titles *Quake* and *Battlefield 1942* would have to navigate the complex relationships between game companies, third person owners of content, and themselves. "At times, modders find themselves frustrated because of their inability to creatively work with the content they love. Furthermore their supporters and game fans in general are angered because they cannot access innovative mods" (Postigo, 2008). Research has shown that there are multiple types of benefits associated with the practices of modding, including social, economic, and creative freedoms (Au, 2002; Kücklich, 2005; Postigo, 2003, 2008).

Researchers have also found that this ties into the changing concept of "media work" that convergence of systems and users through new information systems make possible (Deuze, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Postigo, 2003; Bird, 2011). The political economy of modding and similar practices has been linked to potential exploitation methods and has been described by some as "free labor" (Terranova, 2000, 2004), "invisible labor" (Downey, 2001; Postigo, 2003) or "playbour" (Kücklich, 2005). This linkage to media work also emerges from the specific nature of video games as interactive media focused around the concept of "fun." Kline, De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2003) showed how the organization of work by professionals across various creative industries – and the game industry in particular – is often described as playful and fun, considered "work as play." This creative industry mantra that media work is wholly unique when compared to the traditional conception of work is often used to legitimize the long hours and dedication so vital to maintain production and meet key deadlines (Elefante & Deuze, 2012). Yet it links back to the concepts of immaterial labor as a form of neocapitalist exploitation in a way that disenfranchises the laborer while benefitting the businesses who capitalize off the work being done by the consumer/producer individual or group.

Indeed, Dovey and Kennedy (2006) claim that informal working environments and fragile structures of media work often draw workers from fan communities, and this fan culture is seen as a linkage through the workplace. These informal, unstable industries often involve funded creative projects that do not contain any working structure, or some kind of process benchmarking progress. This disconnect is put in even greater relief when the instability in game preparation is also matched with a lack of significant reward or credit.

<u>Online Connections Between Developers and Players</u>

Among video games, the potential of interaction and control over bits of information offers deep experiences for users. Convergence was brought up earlier as a potential goal and existing phenomenon of connection between developers and players (e.g. Jenkins, 2006).

This online connection between developers and players may also lead to problematic relationships. Kow and Nardi (2010) interviewed modders of Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) to explore the difference in opinions of modders and Blizzard regarding mod ownership and intellectual property (IP). While Blizzard publicly maintains a restrictive, controlling view of mods and IP, the modding communities typically operate around the idea of open sharing. One *WoW* modder claimed their work could be considered "sort of a labor of love," which is common among the few modders that have been interviewed through the academy.

Indeed, though many game companies openly support modders, other publishers or developers are often criticized about moving against modding and modders (Kow & Nardi, 2010; Milner, 2009; Poor, 2013). These companies engage in several practices, including greater attempts at control of IP, forbidding modding through complicated end user license agreements (EULAs) or through third party copyright control, and/or by portraying the activity of modding games as an illegal and illegitimate act. For example, when popular first-person shooter franchise entry *Battlefield 3* was released without modding support or capabilities, fans called its developers mercenary and ignorant of the modding community's benefits for players (Keyes, 2012).

Why is there an active contingent of video game developers and publishers that oppose the practice of modding? This opposition is linked back to the extreme caution and suspicion several companies have about participatory media creation and fan labor on copyrighted IP in general. The tension over control and innovation between the two parties surrounding fan contribution in the active audience age was explained by Henry Jenkins:

> "The media industry is increasingly dependent on active and committed consumers to spread the word about valued properties in an overcrowded media marketplace, and in some cases they are seeking ways to channel the creative output of media fans to lower their production costs. At the same time, they are terrified of what happens if this consumer power gets out of control." (2006: 134)

Mods are not necessarily profitable from the industry's perspective. Instances of intellectual property violations (Postigo, 2008), industry backlash when modders uncovered

disguised game code (Bangeman, 2005), and the possibility that free high-quality mods will eliminate the need for released-for-profit expansions of game content (Meer, 2012) all contribute to this perspective.

But mods do produce significant economic value in most cases. After the mod toolkit for *Portal 2* was released, the number of players increased by more than 20 times (Linn, 2012). Some famous mods do more than just strengthen the sales of the original games. Player-created mods like *Defense of the Ancients* and *Counterstrike* were designed around innovative gameplay formats not released by the developers of the original games, and these ushered in entirely new genres of profitable games for the industry (LeJacq, 2012; Hong & Chen, 2013). Mods also produce a "long-tail" sales event (Goodfellow, 2006). For example, *DayZ,* then a new mod for *ARMA 2*, was linked to the original game's sales of 300,000 copies within a seven-week period three years after its initial commercial release (Usher, 2012).

The rising production costs of major video game development have made modding and its low-cost innovations an even more valuable industry practice (Banks & Humphreys, 2008). That's because modding communities lower production costs by producing free game content, fixing bugs in code, and adding patches originally supplied by developers. When Will Wright, the lead designer of *SimCity, The Sims,* and *Spore*, was asked by an interviewer about how co-creators and modders lower production costs for developers, he claimed: "That's not a side benefit. That's a primary benefit" (Terdiman, 2005).

These benefits and practices have grown to a form of industry standard. The original edition of *Skyrim* was released with an admittedly problematic interface, but it was the game modding community that was encouraged to solve the problem instead of original developer Bethesda Game Studios (Kuchera, 2011). As immaterial labor of modders for game bug solutions becomes more common, game developers and publishers can lower their production costs and development time to release new games sooner and with less polish (Kücklich, 2005). Furthermore, modders are not officially involved with the process. Instead, their work is

voluntary labor. When modders patch broken games or update graphics, they receive no money for this task.

As modding has become a much more popular practice, companies have looked for ways to contain all of the mods created and distributed across various online websites and channels. Websites dedicated to specific games, genres and brands have emerged, all utilizing infrastructures based on databases and algorithms to be able to host many game mods that often necessitate gigantic file sizes. These also contain sub-sections that allow users to interact with mods and modders to provide feedback.

These various websites are often dedicated to specific games, genres and brands. For example, Nexus hosts *Dragon Age, Fallout 3*, and *Oblivion* mods, while Bioware Social Network is the host for *Dragon Age* mods; ModDB, one of the largest game-mod hosts, is best known for its *Half-Life 2* user creations; and Neverwinter Nights Vault which hosts mods for the *Neverwinter Nights* franchise (Hong & Chen, 2013). While user numbers for the Steam Community Workshop for all of its titles are not currently available, it was recently announced that the electronic distribution and purchasing platform of Steam had over 65 million active user accounts (McCormick, 2013).

These websites discussed above represent some of the internet's most popular and successful modding websites. In 2012, ModDB, held over 3,000 released mods, and when combined with unfinished creations, over 7,000 user-created content packets. The Nexus website is even larger, housing over 40,000 mods created by its two million members (Hong & Chen, 2013)

This practice of gathering mods has also had unique effects on the modding community. In Hong & Chen's (2013) examination of mod distribution websites, it was determined that the vast potential for agency and power available from the internet was only limited by the currently available data mining techniques. The materiality of the websites studied by the researchers were shown to be a "system of labor extraction, where schemes of evaluation form routinized practices of understanding modding work" (Hong & Chen, 2013). Indeed, several modding

distribution sites are "loaded with software and code which shape user knowledge and intervene with agencies, influencing the ways individuals understand, download and produce mods" (Hong & Chen, 2013).

Quite simply, on some level these distribution platforms affect how users rank and value mods. These distributive websites function as technologies of subjectivities (Miller & Rose, 2008), or vessels used by modders to "know" themselves and to modulate their conduct to achieve desired self-representations (Hong & Chen, 2013). The individualized productions are forms of discipline and control via self-management of time and resources (du Gay, 1995), not necessarily linked to financial rewards, but instead to values and social capital.

Oftentimes the invisible controls through the code are linked to algorithms outside of user access (Beer, 2009) or the "technological unconscious" (Thrift, 2005). "Software scripts" in code typically automate the tasks of "policing content, correcting vandalism, generating content and gathering data from official government sources to be reproduced on the wiki pages" for sites like Wikipedia (Hong & Chen, 2013). While Wikipedia prides itself on its unique collaborative presentation, the unseen software scripts found within the website's code operate in a non-discursive, automated fashion (Hong & Chen, 2013). Platforms like YouTube also utilize complex algorithms that are impossible to avoid in order to better process and navigate the search tendencies of users, making every encounter with the site an unspoken solicitation of information for further user processing (Van Dijck, 2009; Goldberg, 2011).

Distributive sites for mods typically utilize this software because it would likely be impossible to operate without it, much like many other sites that are popular for a majority of users. As ICTs evolved, voice access and capture by digital databases presented too much data and too few tools for data miners to be able to comprehend (Andrejevic, 2011). The solution to an excess of data for many sites and algorithms was to let one set of data speak for another, similar to communicative capitalism (Dean, 2010).

In most modding websites, this excess data solution is implemented via an intuitive and unseen infrastructure, which is "used to monitor and co-opt the various practices of the player-

audience, their clicks, downloads, and typed comments, into the website's meaning-making process" (Van Dijck, 2009; Hong & Chen, 2013). The form of meaning-making often takes shape through the curating of player-audience actions. For example, the number of clicks on a specific mod or a user's profile is meant to indicate the level of interest the person or creation maintains via the implied role of the audience. The visitor to mod distribution sites is also conceptualized as an individual who engages in play, therefore making them more knowledgeable about a mod's functionality (Hong & Chen, 2013). This duality creates the variety of practices and forms that enables "feedback;" "from the passive sources of viewing and download traffic to the most active source, lengthy player reviews" (Hong & Chen, 2013).

Yet while qualitative measures and forms of criticism exist for users, the cleaner forms of quantitative feedback mechanisms are typically most prized among hosts, players and audiences; these mechanisms take the form of simple review rankings, often on a scale. If a user likes a mod on the Bioware Social Network, they can click a plus sign situated next to the mod title. In Nexus, users have thumbs-up and down options for ranking titles.

The desire to achieve a certain level of rank is not the only reason for media co-creators to engage in immaterial production. Hong & Chen (2013) also interviewed several modders to learn motivations for their volunteer labor. Their analysis of modders on distributive websites found that the studied sites often facilitate the production of "ideal co-creators" (Hong & Chen, 2013).

> "The breakdown of abilities and potential into ranks and ratings multiply the number of areas which modders have to manage. Reputation, the standards of the community, and the excellence of other mods all drive affective and laboring intensities. Modders are then expected to manage this labor responsibly so as to avoid burnout." (Hong & Chen, 2013)

Their findings indicated that a multiplicity of motivations and outcomes exists for modder contributions. Three months after their interviews were concluded, one interviewee told the researchers that he had received a job offer from a video game company due to his mods (Hong & Chen, 2013). Not all modders interviewed had the same economic fortunes. As game modding practices have evolved thanks to the prevalence of ICTs, the communities have

gradually shifted an amateur practice into something closer to professionalization. Due to the intensive laboring procedures of modders, the side effects of long hours required to create and polish a mod, and the increase in reports of anxious emotional states and burnout, modding as a hobby or practice can also affect the well-being of active participants (Hong & Chen, 2013).

This understanding of how media work is connected to an overhaul of traditional structure for professional and volunteer workers is critical to assessing the worth of contemporary work and its cultural influences and outcomes (Hong & Chen, 2013). Investigations into motivations and power of online communities and workers may uncover knowledge of practices that are intense in nature. Beer (2009) described the phenomenon of distributive website ranking and allocation of capital as "power through the algorithm," and these are located in normally invisible media processes that can routinize and produce techniques of intensity. While modding takes the idea of a democratic distribution of power and potential, the providers of the modding toolkits and the distribution networks used to share mods often force co-creators to routinize their production to be able to contribute similarly meaningful content to the community.

Conclusion

Modding as a practice in the video game industry has emerged from a variety of technological, cultural and social shifts. Thanks to the rise of ICTs, changes in video game production, the creation of online communities, and the formation of distribution sites for user co-creations, modding has taken a unique position in the digital media sphere. But what are the specific values users use in their production? And how can researchers use ethnographic methods and participant observation to better understand the modder as a specific entity and as a media worker?

In Chapter 3 I explain my method of interviewing with modders and my textual analysis of modder discourse. Through ethnographic methods utilized on a discursive electronic platform,

I want to locate similar motivations within users to further understand how these communities are using electronic platforms to shape and form the rituals and values of their online cultures.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Since this study used the tenets of ethnographic methods, i.e. participant observation, interviews and textual analysis of data, it is important to understand how such a study was conducted. Here, I explain how the information was collected and what it means regarding our understanding of modding communities and online groups.

The reason that the Steam Community Workshop was chosen for a study of modders of *Skyrim* and how they interact was because of the closer relationship that Bethesda wanted to have with fans of the game. Though Valve, the owners of Steam, operate the Workshop, Bethesda wanted to further support the existing modding community by making sure that they were working with Steam to create a community for the modders. Since Steam is a required software tool for playing *Skyrim* on the PC, Bethesda likely wanted to have all of the modders upload their content to one destination.

I chose *Skyrim*'s Steam Community Workshop because I wanted to explore how modders used an official community forum that was meant to oversee and moderate content that had historically been created and disseminated by fans over the history of the practice. Furthermore, I wanted to see how a commercial interest overseeing the communities of user-generated content would affect the content being created. I believed that this would illustrate a case study of how digital publishers and content creators engage with existing digital consumers/producers and fan producers as the technology changes allowing for a greater frequency of interactions. In essence, how does the tension between innovation and control of the community emerge in the communication and interactions of modders, users and commercial entities?

This chapter covers the following: participant observation; field notes; the structure of observation of work practices and processes; triangulating participant observation; description, analysis, and interpretation; and finally, examining video games and participation through interactions of gamers and modders.

An important question must first be answered here: How can one discipline – in this case, ethnography – be a helpful methodology to another, journalistic accounts of contemporary online behaviors? Ethnography is an academic and anthropological practice that involves a researcher fully entering into a culture or group in order to understand it. While it has changed phrasing over time, the current description of ethnography is "An anthropological approach to the research of culture based upon participant-observational techniques: ethnography's goals are a detailed and nuanced understanding of a cultural phenomenon, and a representation that conveys the lived experience of culture members, as well as the meaning system, and other social structures underpinning the culture or community" (Kozinets, 2010: 190).

Within the disciplinary activities of ethnography, a researcher can locate and describe the cultural patterns, behaviors, actions, rules, and rituals. This is not an easy task, especially because "culture" is constantly changing. Ethnographic methods of observing culture often require more specific forms of entering a cultural group and then writing about it. As mentioned earlier, Geertz (1973) describes it as writing through "thick description," an ethnographic practice of presenting cultural forms by describing the actions, behaviors, rituals, practices, and important events in the maximum amount of detail to insure that the group is accurately represented through writing. In order to allow the reader to gain insight into an outside culture or group, the author must present the group in acute detail. Ethnographic methods have been used by previous scholars to provide illumination and deeper understandings of these subjects.

Anthropology has often been linked to ethnographic disciplinary practices, as anthropologists are attempting to describe the "other." So why use ethnographic methods to understand online communities, particularly such a specialized community? Most ethnographic researchers still largely use the anthropological lens to study "real" communities, with a select group of researchers focusing their efforts on online populations (for example, Cherny, 1999; Hampton & Wellman, 1999, 2001; Hine, 2000; Kendall, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Leung, 2005; Lysloff, 2003).

There exists an abundance of reasons for this shift in methodology, namely the changing data forms. As with any research, the online ethnographic researcher has to obtain data. The data can be obtained from two main types of sources: online and offline. They can include *texts* (online postings and text-based elements, including threads, hyperlinks and messages), interpersonal interviews conducted through text, audio or video form, ethnographic field notes, *images* (like pictures from websites or photos of spaces that are related to users' experience of the internet), and *sound* (online clips and podcasts). The very broad concept of data refers to all the information gathered through qualitative research procedures. In other words, *online data* are gathered using "virtual methodologies," or methodologies implemented by and through the internet (Orgad, 2009).

In order to conduct ethnographic research in modern society, ethnographers must incorporate the internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) into their research. Many facets of modern life are affected by the influx of new technology, such as the nature of specific social worlds and subcultures, the construction of identity, the beliefs, values, and world views underlying human action and social life, and the experience of everyday life (Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, 2009).

How must ethnography be conducted when people are not interacting face-to-face, but rather through online discussion boards or through sampling mods by game creators,? There has been a debate regarding the difference between ethnographic studies of virtual communities and communities that exist in the physical, real world (Hine, 2000; Lysloff, 2003). Forte (2004) claimed that "both involve the detached study of a 'site' that pre-exists the ethnographer and which the ethnographer comes to 'visit' as an 'outsider.'" When Lysloff (2003) studied an online music community, she stated that there was a difference between "viewing images and listening to sounds and music, of reading and writing texts" and her previous ethnographic experiences in Java, which involved physical and social immersion in the community's daily life. Garcia et. al (2009) posit that only one social world which contains both traditional and technologically advanced modes of communication and sites of social activity (e.g., Ruhleder, 2000; Lyman and

Wakeford, 1999) exists. "'Virtual reality' is not a reality separate from other aspects of human action and experience, but rather a part of it" (Garcia et al, 2009). It is also recommended that ethnographers use their research topics to define the field or setting of their research (Garcia et al., 2009).

But should researchers only focus on the online medium as a form of communication? Possibly, but only based on the specific topic being studied. The primary form of contact and communication here is the online setting, although this type of research is most appropriate in settings where members may have the potential for offline contact. There is precedent for this research. Lysloff's (2003) ethnographic study of composers of computer-created music was focused on an online community, meaning that their activities and contacts were mediated by the computer and online mediums. T.L. Taylor (1999) studied online behaviors, settings and technologies to understand the concept of "digital embodiment" for users that created avatars for their interactions in a virtual world.

Ethnographers must also engage with populations that have a greater potential for interacting in the real world. The engagement of the inherently physical activity of sexual relationships becomes a virtual, online behavior in studies of cybersex. Whitty (2004) defined the CMC where online relationships between users engaging in cybersex occurred as the primary site of her study. However, she also noted that some of those online relationships did eventually develop into offline relationships.

In short, for communities where members may have the potential for offline contact, but the primary form of contact and communication is the online setting, it is feasible to limit the setting of the research to online/CMC phenomena.

Participant Observation

Participant observation refers to the practice of a researcher viewing a group of persons interacting in some form and sometimes engaging with the group. This practice has nominally been traced back to famed anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Clifford Geertz.

This practice of participant observation must be adjusted to fit the group or culture or community that is being studied by the researcher. It must be shifted even further when the group being studied exists mainly in an online, computer-mediated communication (CMC) environment. In their analysis of online ethnographic research, Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff and Cui (2009) suggested several adjustments for participant observation of online participants, nominally because the nature of observation changes since the researcher cannot directly observe the people she or he is studying. Field notes must also be changed because of the ability to technologically record events, locations of participation and interaction online. This technological focus also means that the nature of online data is different than people speaking and acting, for it arrives as textual and visual material, and thus it requires a different skill set for comprehending and analyzing such materials. In fact, existing ethnographic studies of online phenomena tend to prize these textual materials over visual movement and sound data, meaning that such phenomena can be under-analyzed (Garcia et al., 2009).

Field Notes

So how should field notes be gathered for the purposes of conducting an online study using ethnographic methods? Most online data forums and environments intrinsically alter the nature of the information gathered through participant observation. Most research on CMC populations and groups are textually based (Soukup, 2000) since most CMC focuses on the written word as opposed to the full range of modes of expression possible online. Though it has been shown that textual, visual, aural, and kinetic aspects of CMC are synthesized in different environments, they will be discussed separately at this time. In this case, my field notes were generated by my experiences in the site and community. My time spent on the Steam

Community Workshop left me with impressions of the community that would form the basis for the created codes and themes in this dissertation. I would go on to create more detailed notes over time as I focused on the textual data in the discussion boards and then contrasted them with the interview data I gathered. These notes formed my interpretive lens that I used to view the community, at which point I would include my thoughts and impressions to enhance my understanding of the Steam Community Workshop's participants, patterns, rituals and values.

Interpreting Textual Data

This study mainly concerns itself with textual data gathered from the Steam Community Workshop for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Typical textual data available for participant observation research includes e-mail, discussion board and chat room interactions, instant messaging, text gathered from Web sites, comment boards on articles, support forums, and other, similar online arenas.

The language on these sites is typically fashioned around text, though the characters of text can also take on other meanings. For example, "emoticons" have existed in ethnographic research on CMC-based groups for a long time (see, for example, Mann & Stewart, 2000, 2002; see also Huffaker & Calvert 2005; Riva 2002; Campbell, 2006). These emoticons can be used by members of online groups to construct identity and form relationships.

But how do we interpret this data for the use of ethnographic research and the understanding of community dynamics? The ethnographic researcher must not only understand her/his place in the community they are studying, they must also plan to interpret the data for a population of readers that will not have had the intense experience of immersion inside a community.

One possibility is to express findings in terms of community dynamics. Kozinets (2010) recommends distinguishing between newbies, minglers, devotees, and insiders when analyzing messages from online community members. There are specific communicative practices and patterns tied to these designations. For example, "newbies" have no strong social ties to the

group being studied, and their interest in the activity being consumed is superficial at best. "Minglers" may have stronger social ties to the activity, but they remain only cursorily interested in the main activity. "Devotees" (where I consider myself for the beginning purposes of this study concerning modders and activity) have a strong interest in the activity being studied, but they have few social ties to the community. Members of the final category – "insiders" – have strong ties and interest with the group and the main consumption activity. (Kozinets, 2010)

Kozinets (2010) adds that devotees and insiders are the most enthusiastic, actively involved and knowledgeable users of a community practice. Members who fit these classifications are the most likely to offer the type of data necessary to truly understand the community. In Chapter Four, I created similar designations for the various member types I encountered during my research.

<u>Formulating the Methodology Research Plan</u>

The following methodological stages and procedures are recommended for persons conducting netnographic studies by Kozinets (2010) as follows:

Entrée: creating research questions and identifying appropriate online community for study.

Data collection: exact, direct copy of the computer-mediated communications of online community members; observations of community and members/agents, interactions and expressed/translated meanings.

Analysis and interpretation: designation, coding analysis and placement of context for communicative acts.

All of these steps must be taken in accordance with research ethics which are discussed later in more detail.

All of these procedures are necessary to enter a culture, much like an anthropological study. Before entering an online culture, preparation must be undertaken by the researcher in terms of deciding the population, the phenomenon or habit being studied, how data will be

collected or how the phenomenon will be operationalized, how to represent oneself, the ethical implications of the project, and the potential for disruption in this study.

<div align="center">Field Notes and Field Work</div>

So how should field notes be gathered for the purposes of conducting an online study using ethnographic methods? Most online data forums and environments intrinsically alter the nature of the information gathered through participant observation. Though it has been shown that textual, visual, aural, and kinetic aspects of CMC are synthesized in different environments, they will be discussed separately at this time.

Some have argued about the necessity of field notes for the purpose of ethnographic research of online communities. For Kozinets (2010), the role of field notes is one of a first level of analysis, particularly those descriptions that explore the researcher's role and reaction to the site being explored., Kozinets (2010) focuses on the need to keep reflexive, intuitive notes that provides the interaction with the point of view of the exploratory researcher, even though much interaction is through the process of capturing textual data. This approach has been used by other ethnographic researchers as well (e.g. Boellstorff, 2008; Constable, 2003; Hine, 2000).

Kozinets (2010) suggests guidelines for netnographic fieldwork and communities, emphasizing that the researcher focus on communities that are: (a) *relevant*, or related to research interests and questions; (b) *active* with constant and/or regular communications; (c) *interactive*, consisting of a constant stream of interactions between members; (d) *substantial*, communities with a certain amount of followers and an almost-apoplectic user base; (e) *heterogeneous*, with their diverse mix and number of participants, and (f) *data-rich*, with information that is substantially detailed.

There are also particular approaches to the capture of cultural practices and community data. Netnography uses a hybrid of ethnographic practices geared to the online CMC-based communities or groups. It is participant-observation research of these online-based groups. Netnographic data can take three possible forms: directly collected information; information

gathered through the capture and/or recording of online community activities, events, incidents, and/or interactions; and data gathered through field notes (Kozinets, 2010).

This form of data collection often means researchers are directly copying text and interactions from the CMC community members and making note of observations they have made of the community, members, interactions and contextualized meaning (Kozinets, 2010). This data must then be analyzed and interpreted, usually through grounded theory and inductive coding practices implemented by the researcher that are more interpretive and holistic "hermeneutic circle" approaches. The analysis and interpretation means that the researcher must engage in classification, coding analysis and proper contextualization of communicative acts, which means that the sources of information must be triangulated for stronger data of "thicker description."

Interpreting Textual Data

This study mainly concerns itself with textual data gathered from the Steam Community Workshop for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. The language on these sites is typically fashioned around text, though the characters of text can also take on other meanings. Instead, much of the language gathered through the Steam Community Workshop is set in English. There are certain subgroups that emerge in different languages, including Swedish, German and French, but many of the Steam Community Workshop participants speak in English and write their texts as English users. They are participants who use second language skills to communicate across a text-based platform with other users.

The Structure of Observation of Work Practices

It is strange to write about observing work practices in an online environment because these work practices often take place outside of the Steam Community Workshop, especially when considering the practice of modding. That's because of the time-intensive nature of the Creation Kit as a modding tool. Most users of the Creation Kit will spend hours – days, even –

modding their game to create the appropriate tool set, and this requires time spent away from the Steam Community Workshop itself.

Therefore, the assessment of work practices was accounted for through text-based conversations with modders and interviews with selected modders. These modders were selected from entrants on a Steam Community Workshop discussion board post created by this researcher. Once they were entered into the community workshop, the user could choose to engage with the community or upload content or interact with other users via the Steam interface.

Not all users of the Steam Community Workshop identified themselves as modders. Indeed, there were several variations of the term "modder" so a new categorization had to be created. This is because the definition of modding could qualify as a blanket term, encompassing changes of all type. This covers actions ranging from changing the game's brightness settings in the menu to making huge, systematic changes that affect all the variables of the video game. Therefore, the actual act of creating new content for the game had to be separated from the act of interacting on the Steam Community Workshop.

A person who creates content for *Skyrim* in this study is defined as a "mod creator," which is an extension of the traditional definition of modder. An interactor or participant in this case would be any user of the Steam Community Workshop that does not create content for the game. The mod creators could be located by their mods, which were found on the Community Workshop.

Modding is a complicated process. At its core, its users make changes to the actual code of the video game by using a software development kit (SDK). The mods are then added to the original game code, creating a new experience for users. The changes made by modding can range from miniscule to systematic, small to large, and thus the creators of mods are not bound by traditional means of media production.

In certain cases, mods are based on previously created mods. Mod creators always needed to credit the original creators in the information section of the mod, as well as have

received prior permission from the creators themselves. Most times this involves reaching out and contacting the user themselves, either via Steam or a preferred email contact address. Because of the voracious nature of consumption within the modding community, it is unwise for users to plagiarize content on the Workshop. Most modders, mod creators and users will notify the Steam administrators and moderators if plagiarized content exists on the site, which enacts a lengthy process of content removal.

The Steam users examined by this researcher were engaged in the practice of creating and uploading mods to the Steam Community Workshop. However, to understand their work practices, this researcher had to conduct interviews that were approved by the institutional review board (IRB) of the university. Once approval was received, the interviews were conducted over a 45 minute to one-hour period of time per user. These interviews were conducted by me to understand these community practices, as well as to discuss practices of personal engagement by users with other members.

The work practices were described to me in terms of length of time spent creating mods, how much time was spent overseeing the work done by the user, and then responding to feedback through dialogue with commenting parties or fellow users of the mod. This was done on the basis of fellow internet ethnographers like Kozinets (2010), who advocated conducting ethnographic research online in accordance with research ethics. Ethics advocated that the researcher should fully disclose their presence, affiliations, and intentions to online community members during any and all research interactions, which this researcher performed as all times during research and interviews. Kozinets also recommended that the researcher should make sure that informants enjoyed confidentiality and anonymity for the purposes of study. Even though no truly sensitive information was being researched, there was a potential for loss of privacy and confidentiality from the users, particularly when describing work interactions and community engagement, so my work was adapted

Finally, I sought and incorporated feedback from members of the research community being studied online. This included the users being interviewed and the members of the group who chose to engage in dialogue with the researcher.

The work practices of modders represent a very tricky knowledge base because so much must be based on testimony instead of true observation of creation. This study focused on the overwhelming community need to view these creators and members as part of a dynamic ecosystem, one that is nurtured by dialogue between users. Therefore, the work practices of creators are not always available data, nor are they necessary to a deeper understanding of how the Steam Community Workshop operates as a nexus for these members.

<u>Triangulating Participant Observation</u>

My dissertation research uses a combination of participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis to examine how modders create and sustain online communities, along with studying their practices to see what norms, routines and/or standards are involved in their immaterial labor production.

This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Iowa in January of 2013, and it received approval by August 2013. Due to the truncated nature of this study, I limited the type of questions asked of my human subjects to focus strictly on modding practices and community development in order to avoid or minimize potential harm to subjects.

I entered the community in September 2013. For a period of four months ending in January 2014, I sought to explore the community and its users in detail. I examined discussion boards, sought interviews from select mod creators for in-depth data, and contrasted these data sets together to create a larger look at the Steam Community Workshop.

My research required me to be "on site" when I was engaged with the community. For example, I logged into Steam every day at 9 am EST and began locating new threads that had appeared after 5 pm EST the day before. I would be on site – the field – on weekdays between 9 am and 5 pm EST, and I would log into the site – the field – on Sundays between 9 am and 5 pm

EST. This weekend login was crucial because many users would upload their mods during this period, which was also the time that the heavy users could comment on the new mods being uploaded.

I would check the site daily to locate new threads of discussion, as well as see what new mods had been created and uploaded to the site. I would then take field notes about the salient issues of the community, ranging from discussion topics to the mods that were receiving the greatest number of downloads. At the end of the day, I would gather the textual data from the site and add the information to the Nvivo qualitative analysis software tool. I would then use my field notes to denote themes and codes I could assign to the data, and then I would add the codes to the applicable data in Nvivo.

My participant observation differs from my textual analysis because it involved engaging directly with the community. My textual analysis was my assessment of the site, while my participant observation was the direct process of meeting my subjects at their sites of practice.

First, I engaged in the participant observation of modders who create content for *Skyrim* and distribute it through the Steam Workshop channel. I did this by exploring the discussion boards on the Workshop. There, I could see how the content is disseminated among the community, along with how the content is rated and evaluated by groups of users through discourse and the ranking system. I also conducted a textual analysis of electronic text gathered from discussion threads focused on modding practices and standards. This multifaceted form of participant observation and online textual analysis is consistent with prior practices of cultural anthropologists.

Second, I conducted interviews with select modders to understand their function as game players and informants in the Steam Community Workshop. I inquired about their role in the perpetuation of an online gaming fan community, and I began to explore how that role benefits both the fan community and the developer Bethesda Game Studios. These interviews were conducted with English-speaking modders on the Steam Community Workshop. These modders were selected from a random sample of users who responded to multiple posts of this researcher

on Steam. The posts used the following language (some information has been edited out for the sake of researcher privacy):

> This is a formal invitation to join a research study on Skyrim modders and their use of the Steam Workshop channel. Adults (persons over the ages of 18) with experience creating mods for distribution on the Steam Workshop are invited to participate in a research study on mod creation and community communication and distribution. The study includes an online chat interview for 30 to 45 minutes. For more information, call Kyle at (***) ***-**** or email at ***********@*****.***.

Respondents were selected from these replies, and these interviews were conducted over Skype sessions, each of which lasted 30-45 minutes on average. The audio from these interviews were captured in the electronic software program Audacity, which the researcher used to capture the transcripts necessary for part the data collection portion of the dissertation.

For the textual analysis of the data I had gathered from participant observation, discourse collected from the sites, and phone interviews with my subjects. I used Nvivo qualitative research software to enter transcriptions of my data. The software enabled me to identify key themes and repeated ideas within my interviews and collected data. By using this method of discourse analysis, I was able to collate all my information into a workable collection of data. Once this was done, I organized my findings to show how the online community of gamers represents a group of people involved in the production of a community. In this way, through the dynamics of discourse and organization, I triangulated all my data points into one unique research form.

The results from my analysis will be examined in detail in the following chapters.

<u>Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Field Notes</u>

Ultimately, the data gathered comes from both online and offline data sources. As Shani Orgad (2009) says, the stage of analysis and interpretation of the data is a critical juncture. The question of how to integrate the two sets of data becomes a serious issue. Do the data sets correspond to the research question and parameters? Will the two sets of data be comparable, and if so, how? Again, "Whatever decision is made, the crucial point is that it should be sensitive to

the context being studied, and situated within the demands of the research question" (Orgad, 2009).

The text captured from the Steam Community Workshop was completed through the use of Snipping Tool, a proprietary program on the Windows 8 operating system that creates electronic photographic files of information displayed on a computer screen. The transcribed text of the Steam Community Workshop was gathered through the tool Jing, which then was used to place the transcribed text into a Microsoft Word file. Each document was labeled to denote the date and time of the capture, which was also located in the Jing image file of the capture. The transcripts of the audio interviews were placed into a Microsoft Word document, with each interview receiving its own corresponding Word file.

Both documents of the collected Steam Community Workshop captures and the audio interview transcriptions were entered into Nvivo Software. There, the documents could be coded and indexed into repeating patterns for analysis. The term "indexing" refers to the use of "etic" or *a priori* categories drawn from the initial framework of theory given at the outset of the study. The categories and codes from this study emerged from the available data, in other words. Codes were assigned based on the development of categories that emerged from the data as a result of reviewing said data for emergent and inherent concepts and patterns, also known as themes. Coding was done to locate and identify themes that emerged directly through the observations and conversations captured in the Steam Community Workshop, field notes, and audio interviews done completed by me.

These codes and themes were indexed according to the etic definitions listed by researchers such as DeWalt & DeWalt (2011). These codes and themes were defined through the categories gathered in research and are actually labels for ideas and/or concepts characterizing a number of pieces of text that have some shared meaning. These codes and themes shall be explicated in Chapter Four.

Also using the framework of DeWalt & DeWalt (2011), field notes and audio transcripts were coded into possible categories based on the existing theoretical framework. Codes were

made for terms like "media work," "community support," "modders vs. gamers/players," "community leaders," and "interface." In part, these were words and phrases that emerged as labels in my field notes during the study, and as devices to link such instances within thematic relevance. So, labeling of categories functioned as an articulation of the commonalities and patterns that linked words, phrases and sentences found within the community text and interview transcripts together, as well as functioning as an articulation of the original conceptual framework.

The original conceptual framework of the study was expanded throughout the dissertation itself. Ideas were recategorized and topics were adjusted to meet the new notions that emerged concerning the salience of particular activities and suggestions by interview participants. Managing the list of codes and themes became a conceptually based analytical process (e.g., DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

Themes could be defined as the emergence of several sets of patterned responses that captured the logistical concerns and questions set forth by the community at large. In turn, this community created a set of patterns and questions that researchers need to address for years to come. These themes represented the values that influence the online lives and offline material creations of the participants and the participants' descriptions of how their activities were came together. As a result of these themes, a sort of grounded theory emerged through this research.

<u>Conclusions</u>

Using the triangulation of several data points, such as textually captured data, participant observation, audio interviews, and historical indices of *Skyrim*, this dissertation utilizes multiple methods to locate the community dynamics and practices of the modding community on the Steam Community Workshop. My dissertation research examines how modders create and sustain online communities, along with studying their practices in relation to norms, routines and/or standards are involved in their immaterial labor production. The themes and codes that emerged from my research are analyzed in Chapter Four of my dissertation.

CHAPTER FOUR - FINDINGS

<u>Introduction</u>

Upon entering the Steam Workshop Community, I found that Bethesda Gameworks operates an official wiki site for the *Skyrim* Creation Kit. This is to make sure that its users understand how to operate their mods and use the Creation Kit. Bethesda describes the importance of the Workshop on the first page discussing the *Skyrim* Steam Workshop:

Long Live Skyrim

Bethesda is committed to supporting *Skyrim* for years to come, and this includes supporting our already-thriving mod community. It's our hope that Workshop provides the perfect meeting place for mod-makers and players – even those who have never tried a mod before. What the *Skyrim* Workshop becomes is ultimately up to you, however – and we can't wait to watch the adventure unfold. ("Introducing the Skyrim Workshop," 2012)

With over 65 million Steam user accounts created (McCormick, 2013) and over 20 million copies of *Skyrim* sold (Kuchera, 2014), the Workshop was envisioned as a crucial place for this modding community to use for participation. It is incumbent upon the community to keep the *Skyrim* game operational as an extension of Bethesda's community outreach with the eminent release of *The Elder Scrolls Online* (Kuchera, 2014).

This study looked at how the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop to see how the community was formed. It also examined ways that Bethesda is supporting the mod community, and potentially not supporting this community.

I examined how the modding community for this specific game operated. I found that this community was multi-varied and deeper than previously expected. For example, there were rules and codes set up by other users that helped enforce works and rules.

The Steam Community Workshop was selected because it was assumed to be the hub point for the modding community. It is a site where the users of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* interact in various forms. Modders follow certain rules and values to construct the community.

This study also explains how the sites these modders use affect their relationships with each other.

<center>Steam Community Workshop – A Technical Introduction</center>

Before I could enter the community, I had to gain an understanding of how Steam operated. I needed to peel back the various layers of the store to arrive at what constituted the *Skyrim* Community Workshop because it was part of the larger Steam storefront

As stated before, Steam is a digital online platform and store used to distribute and play video games. While not limited to video games, it is largely set up for the sole medium of video games. It features a massive library of computer video game titles at a wide range of prices. Within the software itself, there are a variety of options for users. There are several options readily available through its interface beyond the home page of the "Store." Users can access their "Library" of downloaded games, their own account (In this researcher's case, mine was "Kyleismoody") and a section marked "Community." Within this particular thread, users can also access subthreads such as: "Discussions" (based on communication between members of various groups and interests); "Greenlight" (a system that uses crowdsourcing of the Steam Community to select new games for the Steam storefront based on information provided by budding developers); and "Market," a storefront between users that allows account holders to be able to buy and sell items within the community. These items are typically specific to resource-scarce multiplayer games, where the lack of availability increases the value of the item.

The thread under the heading "Community" is dedicated to showcasing player-created content for a variety of games, and it is called the Steam Workshop. According to the site description, Steam's Workshop is "a central hub of player-created content and tools to publish, organize, and download that content into your games." One point that stands out about the workshop is that it has different functions for different games. Some games, like *Team Fortress 2*, allow users to create and submit new items which will be taken under consideration for inclusion into the actual title. For example, within *Team Fortress 2*, players can create items such

as hats, weapons, badges, boots, and other resources that could be used for total inclusion into the game. Other games allow modders to publish their work directly to the Workshop, and let players subscribe to mods they want to use in their game. These games include *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*.

The Steam Community Workshop can be located online without needing to download the software onto the computer. Its web address is http://steamcommunity.com/workshop/. Its interface is relatively simple to navigate, consisting of a variety of options for users. It includes a news blog feed from the store, a form of organizing the entire Workshop through popular options ("Featured," "Most Recent," "Your Playtime," and "Alphabetical"), and through the search function. As of January 2014, *Skyrim* had 19,735 items listed in its Workshop channel.

Norms and values for the Steam Community can start to be derived from the Steam Community Rules and Guidelines page (Valve Corporation, 2013). It requests that users provide constructive criticism and feedback since developers of titles on Steam will be likely to see the criticism. Administrators and moderators are given the right to change/edit/delete/move/merge any content at any point in time because it may be incorrectly or inappropriately placed. There are a variety of ways that Steam's Community moderators oversee the population. The rules for the community would also impact the limits, language, codes, styles, and values of the community, and these rules include:

Do not do any of the following:

- Flame or insult other members
- Bypass any filters
- Abuse or encourage abuse of the Reputation, or Post Reporting Systems
- Post personally identifiable information (i.e. name, address, email, phone number, etc.)
- Bump threads
- Derail a thread's topic
- Post links to phishing sites
- Post spam (i.e. +1, 10char, rickrolls) or Re-post Closed, Modified, Deleted Content

- Repetitively post in the incorrect forum (example: trade requests belong in trading forum)
- Openly argue with a moderator

In addition, the administrators have other guidelines for strict regulations of behavior.

Do not post any topics/replies containing the following:

- Porn, inappropriate or offensive content, warez or leaked content or anything else not safe for work
- Any discussion of piracy will result in a permanent ban from the Steam Community including, but not limited to:
    - Cracks
    - Key generators
    - Console emulators
    - Cheating, hacking, game exploits
- Threats of violence or harassment, even as a joke
- Posted copyright material such as magazine scans
- Soliciting, begging, auctioning, raffling, selling, advertising, referrals
- Racism, discrimination
- Drugs and alcohol
- Religious, political, and other "prone to huge arguments" threads (Valve Corporation, 2013)

Interestingly, there are no mentions of "sexism" as a behavior to avoid. This can be seen as an off-putting factor of the community. For example, one of the highest-rated mod collections in the Workshop is a "fetish mod collection." This allows users to change the clothing of certain in-game female characters to instead wear clothing that matched the more sexualized "fetish" description. While this did not qualify as pornographic content, certain users had complained about it and requested its removal. Furthermore, this list significantly leaves out any mention of handicapped persons of any sort, meaning that any inclusion of the sort may or may not be seen as an infraction of these rules.

Threads illustrate how the Steam Community is set up for its intense moderation. Within various threads, many statistics on user activity (in terms of games being played, software being

used, and posts made through their profile name) are available for registered users. Some users have their activity set as "private," meaning that a user must send a Friend request in order to be able to see their activity. Most modders have left their profiles public and available for the user to view, provided that the user has registered on Steam.

Moderation of the Steam Community is also important because the user has been set up to think that the publishers and developers of many games on Steam will be perusing the site to monitor the content. Whether this actually occurs or not is outside of the parameters of this study, but it has been placed into consideration for all who enter into the community and store. Therefore, while its impact on the community cannot be fully considered in terms of application, this content would obviously affect the community.

At this time there is no way to gauge the total number of participants on the site, so the total number of participants within the Steam Community Workshop for any game cannot be known. It is only possible to see the information given on an individual's profile, and there are no demographics given in the template setup. The only fields where a user can input their real names and information are the name and summary fields, along with a profile picture. However, no user I encountered used their real photo or name while creating content. Therefore, the total number of participants and their demographic information are currently unknown.

For the purposes of this study, I examined a specific group of users within the Steam Community Workshop. The research population was a sample group of registered Steam users who posted content on the discussion boards and Steam Community Workshop between September 2013 and January 2014.

As of this writing, there are 19,914 mods available for download from the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop (Valve Corporation, 2014). These mods vary in terms of quality and defining characteristics. The full spectrum of mods can be downloaded in two distinct categories, "Items" and "Collections." The category of "Items" places each mod as its own individual download, while "Collections" is a set of mods that have been bundled by the various mod authors. Currently there are 196 collections of mods created by mod creators.

The goal behind the Steam Community Workshop for video games is to make the process of downloading and sharing mod content for software as easy as possible. However, it is also constructed to allow modders to make changes to their mods. According to the company's description:

> "Each game or software might support slightly different kinds of content in their Workshop, so it's best to check out the official documentation for more details on what can be created and shared in that area." (Valve Corporation, 2012)

The process of adding a mod to the game is very streamlined. When a user locates content that they wish to add to their game, they simply click the "subscribe" button. In most cases the content will be automatically available to the user the next time they launch the game. Those items are listed by the logo "Ready-To-Use Item." But some modded software require that the user go into a specific area of the game or software to activate or access the new content.

The process of downloading the *Skyrim* Creation Kit software is similarly easy. The toolkit is available for free from Steam for persons who have purchased a copy of *Skyrim* for the PC. To access the Creation Kit, the user needs to go to the Library tab, where they can find the Tools subhead. Once in there, the user can locate the Creation Kit (provided they have purchased a copy of *Skyrim* for the PC) and download the Kit to their computer's hard drive. This process is automatic once the user selects the Creation Kit download. After the installation, the Kit is available for the user to navigate.

The Creation Kit is a unique and advanced toolkit, a fully authorized development toolset from Bethesda Gameworks. It uses the same data format and user interface layout as previous Elder Scrolls creation software, meaning that modders who have previous experience with modding Bethesda titles would be able to apply their same toolset here (Barnes, 2012). It is a difficult toolkit to begin using, which is why Bethesda has a wiki site available for users to read in order to make mods. Opening up the Creation Kit, Bethesda has made it possible to see all the elements that went into the creation of *Skyrim*. "Every map. Every object. Every quest. Every marker. It's all there to be played with, and in case you haven't noticed, *Skyrim* is a pretty big

game." (Cobbett, 2012) For example, creating an indoor area such as a cave or a house means a user needs to click together prebuilt blocks in the Kit. There are several packs of these available out of the box, each broken into specific pieces like walls, corner pieces and doorways, and these are designed to fit perfectly against each other.

The Creation Kit allows its users to leave holes in the side of the world in created mods; if there are corridor pieces not fitting perfectly over in the corners, the mod is not considered broken but is instead presented in its existing form. The Kit also allows users to approach fixing these types of problems using painstaking object nudging, like moving a boulder in front of the gap so the player doesn't see it.

The Creation Kit was a very daunting and admittedly difficult tool for me to use. While attempting to create several mods, I was unable to create or upload any content to the *Skyrim* Community Workshop. I attempted to create enchantments for the in-game weapons of my sword and my bow and arrows, which would have given me the ability to shoot flames out of my weapons at enemy combatants. But I could not successfully calibrate the magnitude or duration of the fire effect for each to my liking, and after much consternation I withdrew from the Creation Kit as a creator.

However, the Creation Kit is set up so that it is a separate entity from the *Skyrim* files located on the computer, which means that nothing that occurs in the Creation Kit can break the main game. The master data file is locked down by the developers, which forbids the user from manipulating it. Instead, users create mods that are added onto the top of the master data file and can be switched on or off individually. This allows users to stack them up to create whatever Skyrim activity they desire.

The daunting nature of the Creation Kit has resulted in Bethesda Gameworks releasing a series of tutorial videos on their official blog, as well as having several text-based tutorials for users. Several users have also created their own versions of the text and videos, uploading them to Steam Workshop, *Skyrim* Nexus and several YouTube channels. This is one example of the community in action, replicating the existing assets of the corporate works.

<u>Entering the Community – Introduction and Interface</u>

The interface for *Skyrim*'s Steam Community Workshop is part of the proprietary interface used by Valve Corporation, the owner and operator of Steam, and also the developer of the popular first-person shooter franchise *Half-Life*, which is responsible for a generation of user-created mods.

Entering into the Steam community was not difficult at all. It required a download of the software for my personal computer, an online connection, and creating a username and password. Once I created my account (username: Kyleismoody), I began to traverse the modding community on Steam. I purchased a copy of *Skyrim* from the digital storefront, downloaded the file and installed the game, then I downloaded the Creation Kit toolset for free from the Steam tools collection. All of this occurred in a very easy, prompt fashion.

I entered the community in September 2013, and I examined the proceedings of over four months of conversations. After entering the site, I began gathering my textual data through the discussion boards. As stated earlier, every morning I gathered information at 9 am EST and copied it into the Nvivo software tool.

Much of my time was spent as a participant observer. I would witness the discussions taking place on the boards and check terminology in my field notes with corresponding Steam searches. A few terms caused me some trouble, so I had to ask the users what they meant if I could not locate the meaning outside of Steam. I would occasionally send users a request to add them as a friend so I could begin privately messaging them to assess rituals, values, norms and practices. However, while certain users were forthcoming, many users did not respond to my requests. I had to gain the trust of certain higher-level mod creators before I could communicate with others.

I would post my requests for interviews on the discussion boards, about once every two weeks. As I solicited interest from users, they were contacted about scheduling an interview through Skype. Once we had confirmed the interview time, the users remained on my friends list for further instant communication if necessary. Several users emailed me directly as well.

Within the site, I would very rarely engage in discussion in order to avoid any influence the community formation. I was mainly interested in how modders and users interacted with each other, and so I took on the role of a lurker most of the time. I gathered my field notes from watching how the participants interacted with each other on discussion boards and on the comments and reviews of the mods that had been uploaded.

Eventually, I found that the community was able to open up to me. I had a previous knowledge of video gaming history and a basic understanding of modding, and my attempts to create mods were met with pleasantries. I would soon interact with other modders through instant chat by asking how they were creating the tools, and then seeing how the distribution and feedback affected their work. I would also ask about specific incidences or events in the modding community, notably an incident where the users would engage in heated discussion over the viability of non-mod creators paying modders to create content for their use.

I found the community to be an engaging and varied one. Several users were involved in coding for their professional or academic careers. Others were active in the community but did not utilize their modding skills outside of the community. As I studied community practices, I began finding that there was more separation between the non-modder user and mod creator groups.

Active modders responded to the term "mod creators," which indicated that they created wholly unique mods for games and software. This distinction came up several times throughout my analysis of the Workshop, and while it was not recognized as the sole distinguishing title of these creators, its use was frequently supported by heavier modders and mod users. This was an important step in learning how the community organized itself and also set itself apart from others on the Steam Digital Storefront. For example, one interviewee claimed that modding could be a "dirty word" that referred to changing settings in a game from the in-game menu as opposed to using the Developer's Toolkit of the Creation Kit. Therefore, users who actually created content in the Creation Kit were seen as users with a higher status among the community, and in turn they were labeled "mod creators."

Parsing through the community became a challenge since every registered user of Steam could be a potential member or leader. Furthermore, since the Creation Kit had been released in February 2012, many of the larger mods had already been created, and there were several links to various sites and searches that would offer answers to questions users had regarding mods and loading.

Another challenge was the retrieval and location of discussion threads relevant to the creation and maintenance of the online community. This was because the Steam Community Workshop for every game with Community Workshop pages only kept discussion threads for 30 days. After 30 days had passed since the first posting, the thread was removed from the search results. This resulted in the potential loss of data necessary to contextualize the community's artificial structure.

This also resulted in a unique addition to the Community Workshop itself, which was the possibility of questions being asked repeatedly even after they were answered. For example, problems with the popular modding tool *Skryim* Script Extender (SKSE) were common for many users, and the questions of proper loading of mods within the SKSE often were repeated on a monthly basis. Even though the Steam Community Workshop could potentially answer these questions with a simple addition, the fact that the threads were removed so quickly meant that this query would arise multiple times in this forum.

As stated in Chapter Three, I gathered materials from relevant conversation threads on the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim*, and conducted interviews with 15 participants in these forums. Much of the information overlapped in these interviews, at least regarding the answers from the participants.

The relevant conversation threads were pulled from a cross section of 1,146 conversation threads posted between September 2013 and January 2014. To eliminate unnecessary or irrelevant threads, I focused on threads that openly began with discussions of modding, with focuses on mod creation, mod maintenance or mod collection and curating. I chose over 403 relevant conversations based on these criteria.

From there, I was able to begin breaking down different aspects of the study. Several modders and mod creators posted numerous times in the forums, often showing up in almost every thread. These heavy users would be considered "authorities" in this community, potential "exemplar leaders" due to their continued presence and their ability to answer technical questions.

Furthermore, I could determine where the community lines were being formed. Several of my interview participants started showing up in my comments notifications, which Steam displays upon entering the store from the login screen. These users would consistently provide information about modding techniques and questions about designs and mechanics of *Skyrim* and its mods. These frequent users were reminiscent of Postigo's work on the AOL volunteer community (2001) and the existing research on makeshift online communities (e.g. Turkle, 1995; Bird, 2011).

<div align="center">Communities and Discourses</div>

The modding community exists on the Steam Community Workshop, especially for *Skyrim*. The community operates in several forms, but they are mainly constructed of users who have played *Skyrim* and have interacted with mods created for the game. During the course of the study, it was discovered that there existed two distinct large groups who interact in the Workshop: Modders – or mod creators – and Gamers, or users of mods who do not create. Modders define themselves through the mods they create, the number of hours they put into their creation, their knowledge and technical skills, their value of a democratic – almost meritocratic – vision, their ability to navigate a toolkit, their passion, and their frequency of commenting in the discussion threads.

One of the more prominent items that was raised by the discussion board posts and the interviews was the level of involvement of the members of the Steam Community Workshop. How much time did users spend interacting on the website? And what were the types of questions that were being asked? Finally, how did these users differentiate themselves based on

their discourses? The answers to these questions formed the crux of this study and started to provide a picture of how modders in a digital community differentiated themselves.

The modding community on the Steam Workshop was defined by their discourse, much like research on online communities has already shown. This was the primary means by which the community members communicated. Through conversations with each other, there was also an obvious hierarchy of users created. Perhaps 20% of users who were heavy participants, or who submitted multiple texts on the discussion threads on the Community Workshop, would qualify as "community leaders," setting themselves apart from others. These leaders would often answer many of the more technical questions and provide deeper answers.

Examples of this discourse were prominent in every one of the discussion threads and the comments on mod artifacts and collections in the Steam Community Workshop. One of the most common statements found in the community was the promotion of the Creation Kit as its own teaching tool. Discourse ranged from praising the Creation Kit to answering technical questions about the Kit and its tools, to discussing mod ideas and proper implementation. The pattern among heavier users involved displaying technical prowess and encouraging others to take it upon themselves to learn the tools necessary to create mods. One of the heaviest users of the forum often used their experiences with the Creation Kit as a sort of Rosetta Stone text, one that made modding a skill set equivalent to university education in their opinion. He looked at the Creation Kit as a language that could be learned to bring modders closer, as well as a tool that fostered creativity and empowered users. This extremely progressive stance was not appropriated by all, but many higher-level modders and mod creators espoused the same ideas.

Site moderators monitored the Workshop, with users able to report problems by highlighting a "flag" button that would contact an internal moderator in much the same way that a passenger would get the attention of a flight attendant. The control of the Workshop was always within the grasp of the Steam/Valve employees. This control would prove to be an important point of discussion and integration within the community, and I will discuss that later.

Modders spent a varying amount of time on user forums. As stated earlier, it was impossible to tell the empirically correct amount of time that was spent occupying the forums on the Steam Community Workshop. Statistics on each user page identified the places where the user had participated in the discussion in the past 30 days, and the heavier Steam users would have more threads open on their individual user profile page. These users would be coded as heavier users solely through their prominence in discussion threads and level of activity online. For example, a heavy user in the Community Workshop had 334 individual posts across the various forum threads. This was an extreme form of the definition of heavy usage. Most heavy users had at least one post daily on the community workshop.

Persons who had at least two posts per week would be the minimal definition of moderate users in the community. These users were light modders, if they were modders at all, or posted simply because they were interested in using mods. Often their discourse focused on asking others very simplistic questions or responses with little to no reasoning attached to their dialogue.

The third category of users were non-modders, or persons who interacted on the site very infrequently. A user in this category would have only posted once during the time that I intersected with the community, or would have been considered a "lurker" by other standards of online communities.

For example, when one person asked a question about removing the cities in *Skyrim*, they were asking the community to create this mod for them. The person who was asking was considered a moderate user because their frequency of posting was only limited to once or twice a week. This user had used in-game specific text, but had not grappled with the specific text or language of the Creation Kit. Several modders responded to this user's request with specific answers (often it was a distinct "no" answer, or they focused on the fact that such a request would remove the majority of the original game's assets and would cripple the game as it is played), simply citing some variables and items within the Creation Kit that would be necessary

for such a task. This modder spoke in a tone that was almost condemning of the post author's

suggestion:

> You understand that that would totally CRASH THE GAME - right?
> Besides what would be the point???? -> You've killed over 95% of the
> Quests - which means those areas related to the quests will not activate ...
> which means, basically if it does work - you have sandbox to run around
> in - but that is about it.... You realize this right? (AlluManZ, 2014)

Modders used definitions of themselves as a way to show how they belonged in the

community. One common definition emerged in a community post: modders enjoy showing off

the mods that they create. The post in question asked what the best mods for *Skyrim* were, and in

turn it revealed a great deal of information about the community in terms of discourse, practices

and values. For example, when the discussion thread author asked what users would prefer for

their top mods to install and play during the game, one user responded with a detailed summary

of their choices, along with their reasoning behind their list.

> An overhaul (SkyRE (*sic*) probably, Requiem is good too but way
> uncompatible (*sic*) with lots of stuff), probably some of the really big
> quest mods like Falskaar and Wyrmstooth.
>
> Frostfall and Realistic Needs and Diseases for realism, Professions aswell
> (*sic*), because I like how it makes everything you gather/animals you skin
> or take actual in game time and that plays really well into the other two.
>
> Honestly though overhauls like SkyRE change so much on their own that
> just that mod is like having more than 10 already, so perhaps that's a bit
> cheating =) (StabbyStabbs, 2013)

Another modder provided an even more detailed list, linking their choices to the Steam

Community Workshop pages so to allow the interested parties to download them at will.

> Even though this is my mod, it is of course my favorite. I built everything
> I ever wanted all into one mod..... So it's more like 30 mods in one.
> Dawnguard DLC is a req.
>
> Castle Volkihar Redux - A Player Home
>
> A Workshop Item for The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
>
> By: DiGiTaL CLeaNeR
>
> Now the size of a town, Castle Volkihar Redux is the ultimate Vampire
> Castle home for the true King of Skyrim. Every blocked portal is now a
> new place.

This mod is pure genius. Amazing scripting really.

Adura's Merchant Mod - Player Shops

A Workshop Item for The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

By: Adura

Do you ever get tired of running out of merchants to sell your items to? Have you ever wanted to open up a shop or merchant stand within the wide world of Skyrim? Are you dissatisfied with the in-game spouse shops?

This is clever, since day one playing skyrim I always felt ripped off the bard quest didn't end with me being a bard.

Become a Bard

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By: LP

Tired of being a warrior or mage? Become a Bard! To those of you who just picked up Skyrim in the Steam winter sale... WELCOME! Also, please check out... (StabbyStabbs, 2013)

When asked why they enjoyed promoting their own mods, as well as why they promoted mods in posts recommending excellent mods, one creator responded:

My mods are my hobby, I do have a life, but love mods and modding and think it's fine for people to put forward their own, nothing wrong with being proud of something you done. The Dark Brotherhood Resurrection: Part 1 is awesome because it is, it's a huge extension to the dark brotherhood missions and extra cool chars! Horseless Headless Horsemann's Headtaker is awesome (sic) because it is; awesome weapons excellently spread arouind skyrim on named giants. Wyrmstooth is awsome (sic) because it is, it's practically an official DLC. Iomaungandr Rising is awesome because it is. there are many challenges in this which you don't get in the game. So, basically in concusion (sic) the mods i recommend (sic) are awesome because they are! They are paragons in their fields. (RetardedPolarBear, 2014)

Modders and mod creators take great pride in their work, as well as the work of others that they believed deserved the recognition. This pride in their work comes from a historically situated view of modding as a hobbyist exercise among a community of fellow hobbyists. It also displays a hierarchy of value and merit attributed to the work done by the users, with mods that were best executed as the premier, standout user-generated content. This practice of promotion is

one of ranking, which will be explored in the next section with other forms of rituals and practices.

<div align="center">Practices</div>

As research has shown, communities of culture can emerge from the practices and values of the participants. Traditional culture's web is located in the physical, temporal, social, and geographic boundaries and spheres of the real, while digital cultures can eschew those physical characteristics. The practice of bricolage truly informs this community since it involves the remixing of base video game code with the user's identities. In many ways, the modding community represents a collection of loose ties, but the ability to create collections of mods and to hierarchize certain mods based on technical ability and performance indicates a set of values that is dependent on the community members.

While this Steam Community Workshop may not be a strong community at this time, it exists as a community with an evolving structure. There are elements of temporally-located communities structured around a central activity. The values of that community are tied up with the central practice of modding. Consequently, each action taken in the community must be seen as an extension of this practice. Remixing the content to fulfill personal desires within a community of users is a signal that the action of modding remains grounded as a communal, shared ritual.

Practices in the community were very limited in the text gathered. While users could interact with each other through the Steam interface, oftentimes it was limited to private messaging and direct community interaction through a discussion board. The activity of content creation takes place on individual computers outside of the Workshop. Using their computers, the users could create content to upload to the Workshop's cloud-based services.

The Workshop practices were thus limited to a more simple form of interaction. The frequency of commenting was one practice that was used to highlight the use of the Workshop for these modders. For example, half of the frequent users expressed a frustration with Steam's

interface, citing it as a limitation for the organic growth of the community. An earlier post described a frustration with the copyright limitations and the infrequent moderation of the site. Other users found that the site would crash several times, or that they could not access their created mods or downloaded mods due to an overflow of traffic. This pattern illustrates the lack of control that users had over the content and the interface of the site, which also indicates a potential for dissatisfaction.

The limited categories were: *mod uploads*, *mod downloads*, *ratings of content*, *reporting content for moderation*, and *commenting on discussion boards*. User statistics were available for all of these categories, except for the reporting of content for moderation. Users could show how frequently they interacted on the discussion boards on their profiles, and through a simple click of a button I could access that information. This was included in my field notes to ensure I was locating the heavier users of the site, which also informed me on how these users were interacting on the site. The frequency of interactions would determine the level of involvement users had with the site and the community.

There were no instances where the users overtly reported other users or content; however, there were instances where content that had been flagged for copyright infringement, theft of user assets, or illegal content was removed from the Steam Community Workshop. This was noted when users would take to the Steam Community Workshop to discuss the loss of mod content and what had happened in their user load queues for the mods.

For example, one modder explained that their mods had been removed because they had used the same assets that another modder had created for their content, which is an infraction of the highest order. I saw this interaction play out over the course of a tense discussion board post as a participant observer who did not directly engage with the post. The heavier users immediately ostracized the offending party, lambasting their lack of creativity and discussing the act as a larger offense. One particular commenter called the request to remove all the cities in *Skyrim* a pointless question, while another called it "the most brain♥♥♥♥ed mod request i've ever heard off (*sic*)" (AlluManZ, 2014).

Furthermore, copyright informed several users' actions. The patterns of copyright awareness emerged through discussions about specific mods. This was possibly due to the existing research and history of contentious relationships between modders and copyright owners. One post by the community was an entire discussion thread focused around the prospect of Fair Use within mods. The more established users would be able to provide examples of mods being shut down and hyperlinks to such things, while other, more skeptical users would claim that mods were protected as free speech and not copyrighted by the copyright holders.

These interactions only occurred in text form, but they were emerging from previously established historical and cultural norms based on values within the modding community. These established values would clash with the newer ideologies of the non-modder user groups. For example, many modders encouraged non-modders to learn the Creation Kit and generate content themselves.

Another instance of this clash was the disparity in technical knowledge between the groups. In one thread, a user asked about the proper way to get *Skyrim* mods working without having the game crash on them. Another modder told them the following, which helped to establish the user's level of credibility and advanced placement in the community hierarchy:

> For starters are you running the game from the NMM under the SKSE program or are you running the game from Steam? If you're running it straight from Steam it will CTD every time. Now IF you are running it from NMM and click SKSE from the manager itself or the executable which SKSE creates onto your desktop and crashing then you might want to turn off all of your mods and try turning them on one by one to see where the problem is. Also, be sure that with whatever mods you are running that they are compatible and up to date as well as (personal preference) lore friendly mods. (Fluxus, 2014)

The language of the comment indicates a knowledge of the technical skills and software necessary to run *Skyrim* mods correctly. The commenter references different applications with their acronyms (Nexus Mod Manager – NMM; *Skyrim* Script Editor – SKSE), points out the possibility of the game crashing to desktop (CTD) if opened in the Steam application, and helpfully addresses the most logical way of locating the problematic mods in the *Skyrim* mod loading queue.

Practices varied across the user base in terms of out-of-Steam actions, and thus were not readily available for research purposes. Some modders chose to share their real-world occupations, locations and routines, but most only focused on the modding or mod maintenance discussions on the Workshop. This matters because it created an insular environment for users by limiting the discussion to the topic at hand. Since *Skyrim* had its own user forums on Steam, along with forums on outside sites including that of developer Bethesda, the modding users and creators were encouraged to discuss the practices surrounding modding on Steam.

Much of this discourse was very kind, with heavy users standing out as very polite and helpful. However, there was a distinct difference in language between these groups, as well as codes that were held up. This distinct difference in language would provide greater insight into this community. It began to show where the divide between users was established in the opinions of the modders and mod creators. The languages, styles and codes of the community would enhance this picture of a differing mod community, one where gamers mingled uneasily with other users.

<div align="center">Languages, Styles and Codes</div>

Languages in this community were stylized by the storefront. Most of the community members communicated in English, but some Asian languages are used as the community expands. For example, several Japanese characters were included by modders posting in the community forums. There were very few instances of this. Other modders had created language-specific forum groups through their profile, but it was not necessarily related to the *Skyrim* Community Workshop. Here, the users could communicate with other Steam members who shared their preferred language.

Discussions of in-game lore and narrative was common; 30 threads explicitly discussed these topics in sync with modding. For example, one thread focused solely on asking what characters these users would prefer to be in real life, as well as what species of animal the users wanted to be. These users responded with statements that they would prefer to be powerful

animal classes ranging from werewolves to vampires, and the fictional race of Bretons in the game.

Codes on the Steam Community Workshop were created through the constraints of the Rules and Regulations on the storefront. For example, since swear words and vulgarity were not allowed under these guidelines, users implied them in discourse by replacing the vulgar language with hearts or asterisks. This meant that the users were still instigating profanity, but without any violation of the overt rules set up by Steam, though some pejorative terms were still permitted through the Steam Workshop.

One user provided an ample example during a heated argument about modding, which started because the user in question was angry about how other modders had turned down his request for creating mods for money. When the argument became focused on the user's overuse of profanity and aggressive behavior, the user used several hearts to indicate pejorative terms in conversation:

> Actually I do say the ♥♥♥♥ I do online in real life. Almost got into a fight with my own dad when I told his best friend to quit being a pedofag when he was hitting upon my sister. My sister was 16 at the time and the dude was 42. Me & best friend parted ways after I told him he was ♥♥♥♥ing worthless piece of trash cowering behind his God when his cousin was almost faternity ♥♥♥♥♥ at the party. I told that whole faternity they can suck my balls for being ♥♥♥♥♥♥bags. Even called them white hillbilly trash & n******s. Almost got my ♥♥♥ kicked & still didn't care. My philosophy is simple don't be a dumbass then I won't chastise you. (TBAGtv, 2014)

These hearts were used to replace profanity and denote stronger, coded words. The norms and values of the community are exploited by the modders to create a newer coding to indicate levels of frustration.

Codes of modding are popular on the Steam Community Workshop otherwise. In the community itself, most users communicated in English, with some users utilizing Japanese text or a variety of European languages. Several users were part of a Danish modding group that communicated through their native languages. But since I did not speak the language or utilize a

translation software to translate the text, I could not account for any codes these users may have crafted.

Nevertheless, codes did emerge as prominent within the language of the community. A "modder" who actively creates is a "Mod Creator" to some users, including several community authorities and heavy users. This was a unique denotion from the expected terminology, but it came from a new perspective on modding. One interview participant claimed that this was partly due to the nature of the Steam interface, as well as the trend towards streamlining the modding download process.

> Steam, via its Workshop, has abstracted away some of the technical parts with modding, or at least the art of loading mods into your game because, well, modding is kind of a bad word because you can, like, download mods and install them and call that "modding," but that's not modding.

What the user represents in this quote is a shift away from the historical understanding of modding within the gaming and software industries. He posited that many users who were new to the modding communities had appropriated the term from the creative process, instead applying it to the process of downloading software or mods and applying them to the game. However, what is interesting here is that the term "modding" could technically be held to both practices of making mods and downloading mods due to the potential for changing the base software code. Therefore, this new designation was borne out of the community perspectives.

Mods for *Skyrim* became extremely popular once the Creation Kit was released; almost 10,000 mods were made for *Skyrim*'s Community Workshop seven months after the Creation Kit was made available for the public (Purchese, 2012). Within the Community Workshop, it became popular to refer to *Skyrim* with mods as a normative state. When users denoted a version of *Skyrim* that had no mods added to it, it was referred to "Vanilla *Skyrim*." Furthermore, the community popularized the term "load order" to refer to the order in which mods would be loaded when *Skyrim* was opened.

Every heavy user in the modding community also appropriated technological shorthand when describing tools they would use and problems that they would face. These became common aspects of discourse in the community. Several users would abbreviate commonplace tools and problems, including the following:

NMM – Nexus Mod Manager

SKSE – Skyrim Script Extender – Hugely popular mod

BOSS – software program that automatically sorts user load order, but only for well-recognized software

CTD – Crash to Desktop

P.I.T.A. – Pain In The Ass

It was difficult to differentiate between modders and Steam users who did not engage in modding at first. Unless they self-identified in their statements online, there was no way to immediately tell what activities the users were involved in on the store. Several posts called for modder participation because the author could not immediately identify a modder for interview. Indeed, many of the discussion forums were focused on simply locating mods and identifying quality mods for *Skyrim*.

50% of the threads that were examined had relatively little user participation. Most conversation threads had an average of five unique user posts. Threads were frequently created as a form of asking questions of the modders themselves. These questions formed the basis of the discussion threads, often presenting a unique problem that the user had which could potentially be answered by community members. The community members are part of a larger community of video game players, so they exist in an offline capacity, yet they can also exist as part of the Steam Workshop for any video game. Occasionally these identities overlapped, but heavy users and explicit mod creators would identify themselves in these posts or profiles. For example, one interviewee labeled themselves as a mod creator in their profile, while another heavy user stated that they had experience with the Creation Kit in three different posts.

Styles of communication were very different between mod creators, non-modders, or mod users. All of my interview participants noted that they could understand the difference between mod creators and non-mod creators by their styles of communication, especially when it came to the grasp of technical language. According to one interview participant, this led to differences in interactions between users:

> Kyle: And how often do you interact with others through the Steam Workshop channel for *Skyrim*?
>
> Y4K: Hmmm, other modders? Not so much, really. I mostly interact with gamers, and mostly through tech support. And I find it to be a bit….uh, what do you say? They don't have too many modding discussions on the workshop, the Workshop page (*for Skyrim*). It's more "I need this mod, where can I get it?" Or just complaints for mods. So, from a technical point of view, with regards to discussing the art of modding, no, I'm not doing that so much on the Workshop. I've had a few discussions, but not so many. I think that most technical discussions are on the official forums.
>
> Kyle: How often do you interact with other modders through the the *Skyrim* Nexus fansite?
>
> Y4K: Daily, probably. I think that I get at least one – or around one or two – comments per day. I don't know if it counts as interaction if I only read them, but if it's something that requires my feedback, I post a reply, even if that's only something like "read a fucking manual" or something.

The language of Y4K underscores the unique frustration that comes with being a modder, particularly one whose work is being downloaded, explored and critiqued by a potential population with a vastly different understanding of modding and its purpose. Furthermore, the language betrays a tone of ubiquity within the community, an understanding of what makes it tick, and how he relates to other modders.

The most successful threads (in terms of achieving a larger conversation base and in terms of resolving issues) utilized language that was specific to the game itself; over 300 referenced game codes such as character classes, non-playable character (NPC) interactions and quests, and locations and histories. The codes of the conversation threads often invoked in-game texts and analysis, such as when over a dozen unique players responded to that one request for a mod that wiped out cities. This was explained with a rationalization that it would not work under any circumstances due to the "mesh" of the *Skyrim* Master Data File being removed, as well as

the association that the cities have with the Master Data File. Furthermore, it would "cripple" the game (AlluManZ, 2014).

<center>Rituals</center>

There was great difficulty in locating the rituals of the modding community on the Steam Workshop. I created my own rituals of entering, observing and discussing the content with other modders. My regular interactions with modders occurred almost daily, and I would see that most heavy users were regularly interacting with questions and posts on the discussion board site. Discourse was an extension of this material, and it represented the culmination of the unseen rituals of operation and engagement within the community.

Rituals within the Steam Community Workshop were dictated by specific patterns of use. Rituals were focused around the practice of discourse, and this was uniquely linked to the Steam Workshop's interface and limitations. Beyond the creation, maintenance (bug fixes, patches, updates) and provision of feedback for mods, mod creators had very limited access to information. Therefore, they could only communicate with each other through the Steam chat interface, allowing for private messaging between users.

In other words, rituals were dictated by the interface of Steam. Some modders claimed that the comments notification system provided them with their daily rituals. For example, when a user receives a private message, a comment on one of their discussion threads or replies, or a comment on one of the mods that they upload, Steam sends the user a notification of the event. This notification appears in a white unopened letter image in the top right of the user window with a bright green background that can be easily viewed on the gray window.

For some users, this would become annoying, particularly for top mod creators who receive more comments than most users. According to one interview participant:

> Greil: Like I said before with Steam Workshop, I made the decision that it was no longer conducive to me to continue to monitor the comments on Steam Workshop, part due to the content of the comments that I've been getting, and part due to the fact of how pervasive Steam is. You use Steam, right? So there's a little green icon in the top right corner of the screen to let you know that you have new notifications, right?

Kyle: Right.

Greil: As a non-modder, you might get one or two of those every few months. Maybe more of those if you're popular, I guess. You know, I get tens of these a day, sometimes. That thing is always green, and I have this obsessive-compulsive personality where I have to check new messages all the time. And it's even worse because I have a home theater PC, and I have Steam Big Picture mode on there, and so now I have all of these comments on my television too, and not all of them are ones that are very nice. So I don't really want all of that negativity in my living room that often. So, as is regarded to Steam, I've started to feel the need to separate me the gamer from me the modder because of the platform.

In this extreme example of the notification system, the interviewee discussed the comments situation as part of a larger issue within Steam, which was the potential for negativity in feedback from users. This negativity in feedback stems from a new user base in the modding community. Though most modders had polite and constructive discourse amongst their peers, new users unaccustomed to the norms and values of the community did not always share those values, resulting in interactions that would occasionally chafe the mod creator in the Steam Community Workshop.

It was important to see how often a user engaged in modding, and that was through the statistics gathered by the Steam storefront. When I was digitally exploring the users I would interview, I saw statistics for how long they had been using the Creation Kit. These were gathered by Steam because Valve collects aggregated metadata for developers, publishers and users about the frequency of use of video games. Tools and related items also qualified as trackable software in this storefront, and so one could see how many hours these users had logged with tools, including the Creation Kit. One interviewee used the Creation Kit for over 2,000 hours prior to our interview. I asked him to break down the average number of hours per week that he spent modding, and he admitted to spending all of his free time making mods, totaling over 40 hours per week. Most heavy modders have similar workloads and time spent modding. This is not unusual for the community, and it matches with what previous research has found about the modding community.

<u>Values</u>

The values of these modders were informed by outside media, outside sources, and the democratic vision of freedom and "purity" associated with mod creation and creators. Traditional modders in this community were not selfish. Instead, they were intent on creating things that others were interested in using. However, I found that many heavy users were discouraged by the site because of the storefront nature of Steam, which placed a premium on consumer satisfaction instead of consumer creation. This meant that the perceived values of the community were focused on playing games instead of creating for games, which is a disruption in the traditional distribution and power dynamics of modding.

Extending the work of Postigo (2007), heavy modders and frequent mod creators wanted the Steam Workshop and the modding community to remain a free, meritocratic society for self-expression; two-thirds of those interviewed explicitly agreed with this statement. This is partly linked to the ideas of copyright infringement, which was a frequent topic among the modding community. Among users, it was clear that they needed to avoid using graphical assets in their creations that could be linked to commercial entities that did not support the licensing of their product or image. Select modders had their mods removed from Steam as a result of this improper licensing issue, and the appeals process meant that the users could not retrieve these mods very easily.

Major copyright enforcement comes from the banning and removal of mods using copyrighted material. Authority figures among mod creators will try to post these mods outside of the Steam Workshop, though other sites have similar banning policies. When asked why their mod was banned, one user admitted that it was a recreation of assets from Mordor, taken from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings fantasy series. They also admitted to plagiarizing other mod creators' works. According to the user, "yes it got banned because i used other peoples (sic) mods...and i know i have done wrong but anyway lets dont (sic) talk about it" (AlluManZ, 2014). This displayed a knowledge of copyright laws, along with admission of guilt for their actions. There

was no other punishment given, but the volunteer nature of the modding creation and uploading process linked the removal and censoring of mod content to a defeat for users.

In fact, copyright enforcement was seen as a major part of making mods, especially among community members. Heavy mod users and community members would use the discussion boards and direct comments under the actual created mods to inform users if they were in copyright violation. Some users even used the discussion boards as a way of informing other users about potential copyright practices that are used by companies. According to one participant, this copyright law will be something to know about in the future:

> I've read some legal news briefs and saw that Companies of Copy-Righted Materials are not just going to go after the creator, poster of said material. But they are also going to start going after the Web Sites that allow this material to be posted on their sites. Their rational is this: They should be aware of what is being posted on their sites. Ignorance or blind allowance or "is this copy-righted material" and you 'trust' them to answer truthfully is not going to 'cut it'. This is becoming more and more a "hot legal issue" and the companies are seeing $$$ being lost and abuse of their material being done willfully and/or blindly. Again, ignorance of the law is not a valid excuse or legally accepted." (jjb-54, 2014)

> So owners of sites that allow mods, you might want to be aware and go through periodically the mods on your sights (sic). If they have LoTR - Star Wars - Batman - Superman - Hulk - or other Copy Righted Characters or Items ... well. (jjb-54, 2014)

Because this was a heavy user of the site, multiple users thanked this individual for their knowledge of copyright. However, others took umbrage with this information, stating that the mods were already protected.

> Remember that thing called the Digital Millenium Copyright Act (DCMA)? Its already got 'safe-habor' immunities built into it (stuff that specifically protects websites from having to defend from the exact accusation quoted), along with a mechanism for copyright holders to assert ownership and force the take-down of infringing materials - heard of those 'take-down notices' that everyone screams about when their favorite ♥♥♥♥ dissapears from Youtube? So no, IP owners aren't going to start attacking 3rd party sites that host infringing material - as long as the infringement is incidental to the site's main purpose. (jjb-54, 2014)

This lead to a heated discussion of the value of copyrighted material on Steam, along with a description of what the potential repercussions would be for copyright violation. Conversations covered how the content would be examined, by whom, and the consequences of

the violation. This also covered how Steam would be reacting to content hosted on the site, which closely links to its place as a home for digital content to be sold at a premium.

The 'plan' - is basically --

A. They have "Trolls" trolling websites, like Nexus - Steam - TESV Website - Origin and other such game/sites - taking "notes" of mods and users names.

B. Then looking at the 'attention' of said use of their material >IF< found.

C. Issue a Court Order for the Specific User(s) for the web-sites to disclose the users information.

This can be done, under these conditions - Proof of Use of Copy-Righted material and the order giving only SPECIFIC information for said user(s). They cannot be issued for "phishing expeditions".They will be very specific and showing specific use of said copy-righted materials by website and mod creators.

D. Then they go after them. How that will done, I am not in the privy.

E. As stated also - apparently if there seems to be enough interest in their products, they might actually engage in hiring 3D creators to make said models for the games and sell them for the games. <- This actually makes sense and I can see that happening. Apparently w/the LoTR owners already have 'gone there' with their warnings and won, this is now, I see, becoming less and less a 'gray area' and more "Black & White".

The bottom line - I don't think they care who they use to "make an example of" ... and I certainly would not want to be their 'example' ..... Especially with some being "kids" - these would most likely also ruin their parents lives as well ....

As to the HOSTING sites - they will likely get 'hit too' - in that the rational is: This is your site, you should be aware of what is going on. Ignorance and/or too busy to do 'this' will not be a 'valid excuse'. Trusting the people to answer the questions "Truthfully" - if you already see that copy-righted material is on the site ... well, that says it all right there. Basically as I saw NEXUS quickly DELETE the Mordor Mod, recently ... that is what has to be done and be seen as being done.

If you allow copy-righted material to 'slip by' - well again, short of a great legal answer, I would simply error on the side - When in doubt - toss it out.

Here is the thing;

Light Saber Mod - that is seriously and clearly STAR WARS and Light Saber is Copy Righted. G. Lucas sued a company for using the name and won, with not even a debate.

> Batman and logo is Copy-Righted - The S design for Superman is TM - Copy-Righted. I think you get the idea.
>
> Where is the 'line' on some of these - I honestly do not know? (jjb-54, 2014)

Again, modders do not explicitly receive any payment for their works. There are instances of modders using their experiences to become professional game developers and designers (Kenny, 2010; Knight, 2012), but many choose to remain in their hobbyist spheres while creating their work.

But beyond the heated tones of the above conversation, almost all modders are friendly and patient because the leaders want to help out and offer their services in translating problems. Heavy users in particular are cognizant of how the community views them since they maintain strong ties to the other modders and mod creators on the site. One mod user – but not a creator – thanked mod creators in a post on the Workshop post, saying "I want to say I appreciate all the hard work you guys do to make a great game so much better. Keep up all the hard work. Love you guys!" (Dan, 2013)

Finally, the values of modders were prominent in the uploading and oversight of their mods. Modders value creation, not ideas, and this was expressed by a constant push to teach others to use the Creation Kit. Because there was a proliferation of ideas for mods and mod users, many non-modders asked mod creators to produce mods for them. There was an entire thread dedicated to mods that users wanted to have modders create for them. Another user posted a detailed description of a mod that they wanted.

> AS A FOREWORD: I completely understand if no-one has the time or patience to do this. It's just a suggestion from a person who doesn't have the skill or programs to make said suggestion a reality.
>
> I hope someone does pick up on this, however, as you'd be doing something that, to my knowledge, hasn't been done before.
>
> In Skyrim, I play a Breton assassin; I also have two friends, maybe three, who play Breton Spellswords.
>
> Recently I've been browsing the workshop, and I've seen plenty of really good armour mods that are really popular, such as ones for Redguard or Bosmer.

Yet none of these mods entertain the Bretons of High Rock.

SO, let me outline my suggestion:

* A set of two, maybe three sets of Breton armour/robes.

* One set of light armour, maybe a basic infantry suit (perhaps with some different options for assassins, hehe)

* The second set would be robes, tailored to a Spellsword but also fit for courtly intrigues. I can imagine the robes possessing rich embroidery as well as a few pieces of light armour plating.

I don't want to tell anyone who picks this up exactly what to do, because they will most likely know more about what they are doing than I would, and will have much more experience.

However, if someone does decide to do this, and wants any advice on what Breton armour or clothing in general might look like, I'll be completely willing to help, as I'm probably the reason you'll be slaving away over this. :P (Castra Tanagra, 2014)

Several modders replied to the user that there were potentially mods available on the Nexus site, to which he responded that some people wanted to have a similar mod available on the Workshop. This indicated an interesting dynamic that will be explored later: That modders preferred to utilize the Nexus site for distributing mods, while users who were already tied to Steam for *Skyrim* wanted those mods to also be found in the Steam Community Workshop.

<div align="center">Structures, Controls, Constraints, Boundaries & Limits</div>

As this community of modders gather on the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim*, there are a large number of variables that affect the structure. These were linked to earlier discussions of values, number of posts, and ranking of mods by users on the site. But the community is also structured by the controls, constraints, boundaries and limits of the Steam digital storefront, the focus on *Skyrim*, the constraint and potential threat of copyright violation, and the limits of the interface.

Control of the community meant that the community was limited to the Steam Workshop, *Skyrim*, mods, and the creation or maintenance of mods. Because the Workshop was set up to be specifically focused on the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop, the discussions never diverged

from that set of values. This resulted in a very limited community, held together by the boundaries of copyright and a standardized language of English.

Limits of the community and the Steam Community Workshop lacked full control by the modders. While outsider modding sites were operated by modders to distribute content, Steam is an arm of a corporate entity (Valve Software, Inc.). Thus, any moderation of modder-created content was done by professional site moderators, not modders themselves. Also, because Steam required uploaded mods to be inspected by its moderators, this resulted in a delay in the time between submitting a mod for release to the community and its eventual unveiling. Copyright infringement and plagiarism of mods were the offenses most often cited for removal of privileges and suspension of accounts. There was no documentation available about how Steam's community moderation occurred beyond the documents available on the storefront. However, the users shared stories of being kicked off the site for various infractions, as well as having their chat privileges suspended by other users for "griefing" or "trolling" others. "Griefing" is a practice of saying disparaging things to other people with the intention of hurting them, while "trolling" is a practice of continuously aggravating or annoying another user to incite them to react.

Steam's interface for uploading gave several users problems, with some users stating that the content was unable to properly load on the site after it was uploaded. A few users found themselves unable to properly gather all their mod content together, particularly when they had to upload new, similar versions of a previous mod to the site and needed both mods to remain on their user page. This lead to another problem, which was that Steam limited the types of files that could be uploaded to the site, as well as the size of the mods that could be uploaded. All users faced this same issue, regardless of rank or ability or size of the mod. The moderation of Steam and the cap on file sizes were limitations of the community that were out of the control of the modders.

Most of the modders I interviewed with said that they policed themselves when they were engaging in mod creation. For example, the copyright thread on page 146 was started by a user

who intended to help the community avoid any problems with having their content removed due to violations.

All of the modders who were interviewed – and those who volunteered to speak up on the discussion boards – identified several problematic areas for the Steam Community Workshop. During the interviews, several participants identified a "separation" of sorts between themselves and other persons on the Steam Community Workshop. This separation was outlined through forms and values of discourse. The message they presented was clear: there were more modders for video games than ever before, but many could not be found on the Steam Community Workshop.

One participant claimed that this was due to the growth of the very gaming market itself, which had increased the number of users. This also resulted in changes to the forms of installation, which sets modders who are technically proficient apart from other users.

> There are more *modders* for *Skyrim*, but there are more gamers compared to modders, so the ratio has differed. If, for example, you take the *Morrowind* or *Oblivion* days, for example, you need to install a mod, you need to download it, unzip it, and then move it into your data folder. Quite simple stuff, really. And with Steam, you only press a "Subscribe" button and that button hides quite a lot of the technical stuff. I mean, it's not technical that you have files on your hard drive, but even though…well, it's kind of interesting that some people don't get that, and they don't understand that it's the same thing, really, you have files in your data folder. So…you have more modders, you have more gamers, but more gamers than modders for *Skyrim*. And that Steam, via its Workshop, has abstracted away some of the technical parts with modding, or at least the art of loading mods into your game because, well, modding is kind of a bad word because you can, like, download mods and install them and call that "modding," but that's not modding.

There were examples of wording and discussion points that the community found inappropriate, such as the discussions about modders receiving payment, copyright issues, and illegally copied files. The community responded during example posts here to protect the original mod and mod creator, as well as reinforce the norms of the community. However, these responses were largely held by the modders themselves.

Another participant found fault within the actual setup of the modding community itself, locating themselves as the opposite of many participants in the forum. Said the user:

> I guess that you don't see so many…what can you say…if we take for example the Skyrim Workshop discussion where you guess the most high-tech stuff is…you don't really see so much technically knowledgeable people there discussing stuff. So I try to provide my point of view. Like, "Oh, I have this great modding idea," and I will try to post, "Oh, it would probably work like this, you need to learn this," and "this could be a problem." So I try to provide my point of view on the subject as a modder.

This user discusses the modding community as one that is technologically sound and driven. He backs up what previous research has found, that these users are more likely to engage in discussion with peers sharing their interests. These modders are also more likely to recommend technological and/or software tools to other users, as well as promoting research on other mod sites. For example, in a conversation on Steam regarding what essential tools were needed to fully enjoy mods for *Skyrim*, one user explained:

> Also, for those that need information on SKSE and why it's needed for specific mods like SkyUI I'll give you what knowledge I have come up with since SkyUI's inception. It's basically a small executable that allows you to run utility programs and specific overhauls that enhance your game. It's actually completely harmless. And while many people are sadly mislead by the lack of updates, SKSE actually updates when Skyrim itself adds a new patch update to Steam. I can understand how many people would like to support Steam more as much as I do, but the sad truth is they have set far too many limits as to what we can upload and how much space it will take up on their servers. I understand them and that is fine, but if they didn't want people to create small executable programs like SKSE then they should remove their limits, but that is just me. That also applies to Bethesda as well. They give us the Creation Kit but limit us on how much content we can actually upload to services like this. ([731]Xaromir, 2014)

Copyright Issues

The issue of copyright was a consistent threat. Bethesda Gameworks's policies for Steam Community Workshop caused consternation among modders, particularly in threads about copyright (AlluManZ, 2014; jjb-54, 2014). On their official wiki site for the *Skyrim* Creation Kit, Bethesda announced that they would be overseeing the Steam Community Workshop. One disclaimer read "We won't host offensive, copyrighted or trademarked material on the *Skyrim* Workshop. Mods with this kind of content will be banned, so please don't bother uploading them" ("Introducing the Skyrim Workshop," 2012).

Yet this copyright protection of commercial content did not extend to modders; protected creations were not what many modders claimed was their experience. One modder claimed that the Steam storefront was responsible for the changes to the modding scene, finding fault with the implementation of certain rules. For example, this person referred to many persons who pirate mods as "rotten apples," and claimed that the presence of these people on Steam – combined with Steam's slow moderation of illegal content – pushed them away from using the storefront more often.

> Some of the biggest "rotten apples" on Steam Workshop are people who exploit the slow and ineffective moderation the workshop has; in order to upload stolen content under their own name or mods that contain illegal content (*for instance resources taken out of other games without permission*). With the bad moderation of Steam Workshop, such content can stay there for weeks.

This moderation was also seen by other users as problematic. A second user was curious about the location of a specific mod, then found out that it had been pirated by another user and was removed without consulting the author.

> I had the MOD where it altered the begining of the game and now it is gone. Was it taken off the library? Why would it just disapear from my subscribed items? Can anyone help with this question?

Another user replied:

> Altered beginning... do you mean Live Another Life by Arthmoor? If so you may have downloaded one of the ones a user stole from him. Not too long ago a user attacked him and stole all his mods, then re-uploaded them. They were eventually removed, if you had subscribed to the stolen mod it would no longer be found in your subscribed items. If that is not the case, I believe he also had to re-release the mod due to corruption from TESVSnip. Though, I followed the mod on Nexus, so as for his workshop version I am unsure if he removed the old version completely.

This prompted the original poster to inquire about the reason the mod was removed in the first place. "I don't understand why Steam would remove ESPs from your computer if the mod's taken off the library. That's majorly f@#$ed up."

The responding user elaborated on the Steam Workshop practices, "Which is why I download mods from the nexus. They don't become forcibly removed if they're taken off steam." In fairness, it was later clarified that the mod in question had been removed by its author, not

Steam, but the perception of Steam as an aggressively anti-consumerist and slow platform remained.

An interesting side effect of this "clash" between modders and gamers is the distinct possibilities for conflict. In one discussion thread, this latent conflict between users broiled to the surface when one user started the conversation with the incendiary title "I lost my faith in the modding community & steam workshop community."

> However I always thought modders who created stuff & fellow mod users understood that some people might want a certain mod made but don't want to do it themselves…I found out the whole community is trollish. You get modders ignoring you or your peers telling you to become a modder yourself if you want it. Which now makes me think the whole community of modding are just ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥s. It doesn't mean you are. Its just that you all have no manners. I guess people feel manners aren't necessary online…Either way. I lost my faith in the entire community & refuse to make anymore requests nor believe anything from a modder who states "Hey people, if there is a mod you want to see. Request it & I'll see what I can do." (TBAGtv, 2014)

The modders and users who responded to this post represented a reframing of the modding narrative, something that this user was trying to co-opt. The respondents were displeased with how the poster depicted their community and responded with vigor. One of the most common respondents stated that they found the original post to be shameful.

> First - Mod Creators are not at your's or other's or my beckon call. Sorry they are not.
> Why do you honestly think Mod Creator's are just suppose to do what you want? Do they get paid, no. I was told by a mod creator - "We have our own mods we want to make. We do not get paid and gratitude is not enough for the time involved to make a user requested mod." I had to agree. I find it funny, in a sad sort of way, that you think they 'should be there to do as you want'? Again, why should they? You seem to have a very selfish attitude here, to be really honest. One mod creator told me this - "You want a mod, create it!" So I bought the boxed version of Skyrim Legendary and put a tag - DO NOT OPEN TILL YOU LEARN CREATION KIT - Guess what? I did and I now totally appreciate the time - energy - effort that the other mod creators put into THEIR MODS ... and they are right. Now in saying that - Creation Kit is NOT all that hard to learn. IF I can do it, being 59 yrs old .... so can you. You just have to get off your "*you do it for me*" attitude and do it yourself! I'm sorry for the tone - but your post reeks of selfish - self-centered attitudes ... sorry it does. Basically you said, "Since you won't do this for me, I'm not going to endorse and or support your mod." <= Ya, that is exactly what you said. Kind of sad. (TBAGtv, 2014)

This strongly worded statement set the tone for the rest of the conversation. The user responded back to the post's author multiple times, making sure to tell the author to "Put your $$$ where your mouth is." The user stands up for other modders throughout their posts, claiming that modders cannot be expected to create this content for potential money when the amount of time spent creating mods is rather large.

 Several of the interview participants were also involved in this discussion about modder ethics and responsibilities. One interviewee claimed that the offended author's requested mods were grotesque and could not be done by any modder whatsoever.

> "A fatal animation where you rip a npc's genitals off and stuff them down his throat before you decapitate his ass." "If you can't understand why someone would not want to graciously create this for you just from just the goodness in their heart, then you really need to get out more often and meet real people." (TBAGtv, 2014)

<u>Structure and Hierarchy of Modders</u>

One of the more difficult aspects of the community was locating the "top modders" or leaders of the community. Many of the heavy users of the forums were often discussed by users as top modders or mod creators. One of the more frequent commenters had a large set of mods available for download in a packaged collection, which was highly rated according to the Steam Community Workshop rating system.

The rating system is based on a binary choice mechanic placed at the outset of the user experience with mods. Once the user finds a mod or a mod collection, they see multiple buttons beneath the mod or collection, including a "Favorite" button with a star icon, a Share button to recommend the mod on social networks, a "Collection" button to add to a user-aggregated set, and a button with a flag on it to report content to the system administrators. Next to these buttons are two distinct buttons with hand icons, both with a protruding thumb. One button has the hand and thumb pointing upward, and the word "Like" next to it, indicating that a user may click this button to represent their enjoyment of the mod. Next to this button is a similar one with the hand

icon placed in a reverse direction, indicating a "Dislike" option. The star rating – between one and five stars – is calculated through the mean score of unique user selections of the "Like" and "Dislike" options.

The discourse of the modders emerged as the way of detailing hierarchy in the community. While the review mechanics of the site helped, the boundaries of the community meant that actual on-site engagement was limited to textual data and discussion on mods and message boards. The boundaries of the community meant that there was only few ways to determine who was a top modder, at least on the site. Many times the discourse would reinforce the status quo. For example, one user asked other users to give their favorite mods and assess which ones were the best. Discourse was used here to showcase which mods were rated highest among a group of peers.

Consequently, if one lacked technical knowledge or did not display it in their discourse, they were labeled outsiders to the community. The disconnect between these users is made evident by the differences in speech. While non-mod creators would often engage in very technically flawed speech, top modders had a technical knowledge that gave them authority. This knowledge could only be displayed through discourse and the actual mods themselves.

The discourse here, and across the community, is relevant because it defines the community's actions across several points. The discourse defines the modders because it showcases their technical knowledge, ability to engage with questions, and their frequency of interactions. Through discourse, one's ability to navigate the Creation Kit, the Steam interface, and the competing, subjective desires of mod users is made evident to all. Discourse operated as a way of reinforcing the social and cultural norms of the group.

Other boundaries for modders and other users included the availability of free time for creating mods. Several non-modders agreed that learning the Creation Kit would be valuable, but they regretted not being able to find the time to create content for the game. This regret emerged through the discourse and discussion threads as well.

Outside media played a critical role in determining the structural hierarchy of the Steam Community Workshop, in addition to the boundaries of the site and the discourse of users. I asked several mod creators what their proudest moments and greatest achievements were in modding. One of my interviewees discussed their accomplishments, citing outside media as a source of validation.

> Well, I have been featured in several magazines. Wearable Lanterns was featured *in PC Gamer Online's* "Top 50 Mods for *Skyrim*." It was originally the top 25 mods for *Skyrim*, but now it's the top 50, so. I was featured in *PC Gamer UK* in January of this year for Frostfall, and I was recently contacted by a German gaming magazine that will be featuring Frostfall in the January 2014 issue, and it will actually be included on the DVD. So that will be pretty cool for those users, and it's already fully localized into German from contributors from my community who are bilingual, so that's exciting.

This validation of the popular mod Frostfall by one of my interview participants was similarly represented within the community. When asked which one of the thousands of mods available for *Skyrim* a user should select, a respondent cited Frostfall due to its realism and its simulation of hypothermia in cold environments. They also stated that they had heard about these mods from other users through means of this various media.

Furthermore, there is a new form of media that also promoted modders and elevated their status among the community. One of the interview participants explained that they watched YouTube videos and review shows as a way of seeing what new content is available and worth pursuing. "I think there's some guy on YouTube called Goofer that I also look up to because he does mod reviews, and tutorial videos like 'Oh, how do I do this update,' or 'How do I install this mod?' 'How do I do stuff X?'" These YouTube reviews were important forms of exposure for many modders because it gave them exposure to audiences who may not have previously shown any interest in their mods.

These YouTube videos are not limited to on-site reviews, either. The interview participant pointed out how the advent of streaming video in the community helped users to create visually engaging previews of their works. In another interview, the participant argued

that these YouTube videos and the site were immensely important to spreading the knowledge

about mods to users

> One thing we have not touched upon is that with the release of *Skyrim*, you have another, er, new player on the modding arena, and that is the YouTubers (*people who make videos for popular online social video site YouTube*) with their modding reviews and Let's Play videos, and also their trailer videos. In the previous games, you had to create…if you wanted a YouTube trailer for a mod where you could not describe in text or screenshots, or just like a trailer in general because hey, trailers are awesome. You needed to create one yourself. With the release of *Skyrim*, you have quite many people just creating trailers or creating reviews for you. It's very fun actually, because the YouTubers, or Let's Players, -ish…it's some kind of weird hybrid breed of Let's Players anyways, and they create these really neat things called modding reviews, where they say, "Oh, these are new mods of this week." They tell the features, show them in action, and, well, just show the mods off, and that is a really good thing because back in the old days you had to create videos yourself or contact someone who knew video editing. Like, I've created some crappy trailers myself for my mods. But now you have them doing that by themselves, and I guess you could call that a contribution also because it's not necessarily something a player would do because you, like, you-ish play a journalist. Like, oh, I will take these mods and cover them and tell things about them.

Additionally, leaders of these modding communities often emerged as the heavy users of

the discussion boards on the Steam Community Workshop. For *Skyrim*, these leaders were

implicitly selected because they could answer questions users had about the Creation Kit and

Skyrim modding. They had technical expertise and knowledge they could pass on to other users.

For example, one user who frequently posts and replies to questions posted by others could offer

technical expertise on mods that others didn't know. When a non-mod creator asked why their

mods weren't loading, this mod user responded with:

> Did you read the requirements of the MODS???
>
> IF you are running mods that Require SKSE - you should have an ICON on your desktop:
> SKYRIM (SKSE). Launch w/this icon ...
>
> But it sounds more like a mod conflict - because most SKSE mods, notice I said - Most - Not All - will run under Skyrim launcher - you simply will not have the features that SKSE offers. But some indeed will NOT work without SKSE.
>
> Do you have the DLC's?
> 1st - Dawnguard?

2nd - Hearthfires?
3rd - Dragonborn?

They >MUST< be loaded in this order, even if only two - they must be loaded in the above load order.

Now, the thing is some require the DLC's and/or a 2nd party mod - IE: Unlimited Bookselves, or some other 2nd party mod.

Also do the mods state - WILL NOT WORK WITH (DLC) and/or REQUIRE a DLC you may not have???

You'd be surprised at how many people miss these statements. Some due to the Author not putting it at the TOP but more at the bottom as "Fine Print".

Also you have to see if any mods conflict with another mod - as do they occupy the same Cell Spaces or do similar enough things - that they conflict??? <- this likely is what I think is going on, you have two mods that are "dragon shouting" for the same cell space.

Which means (if not already tried by the time you read this) - turn them ALL off - and turn the first one - run .... (leave it on) and turn on the 2nd one ... play - 3rd one and so on... until you find the one(s) that conflict. Be careful because it could be more than 1 mod conflicting with another. (Trust me - been there done that.) (Fluxus, 2014)

Another frequent user was able to provide technical support for when the Creation Kit

kept crashing. This was a much more technically advanced problem the original user was facing:

Whenever I try to open the CK anymore, I keep getting the Assertion error:

File: C:_Skyrim\Code\TESV\TES Shared\FileIO\TESDatahandler.cpp, Line 1054, Invalid Y coord passed to TESDataHandler::NewCell

All of my research into this error has pointed it to the INI mods for multiple editor, and integrating the bsa files, which I've done repeatedly. The CK used to work, and now it doesn't. I've tried verifing local files multiple times (and redoing the INI mods), and also re-installing CK. Nothing helps. (saviornt, 2014)

The user was having a difficult time keeping the Creation Kit open, and in their struggles

they attempted to describe the steps they had taken to repair the problem themselves. One

community leader offered their help during this conversation with some more advanced technical

options.

In the SkyrimEditor.INI
SkyrimEditor.Ini

[General]
bAllowMuitipleMasterLoads=1

also in

[Archive]

SResourceArchiveList2=Skyrim - Shaders.bsa, Update.bsa,
Dawnguard.bsa, Hearthfires.bsa, Dragonborn.bsa

(It has to be in that specific order too, by the way. I've read several posts,
when I started CK - this was pretty much a HAVE TO DO.)

Also Spelling is important:
Dawnguard.bsa, Hearthfires.bsa, Dragonborn.bsa (saviornt, 2014)

These examples of technical knowledge also extend to the ability to craft mods, and

knowing what would need to go into the creation of mods. One thing that emerged from the

conversations was a constant outcry for mods to be developed based on certain ideas. Non-mod

creators were interested in certain mods, ranging from various armor patterns, to satchels that

would be useful for carrying a wider variety of items within its space, to full quest mods that

would create new subplots and scripted sequences within the game, and even wiping out the

detailed city areas from the video game map of *Skyrim*. Some of these users explicitly mentioned

that they intended to pay the mod creator for their services, while others said that any interested

parties should send them a private message to begin working on the details of their arrangement.

However, the non-mod creators were also told the same thing: "Learn to mod," or "Learn

to use the Creation Kit." One sample exchange captured this perfectly.

> I am looking for someone who knows there way around the creatin kit
> very well. I am a game story writer in training and hope to get out there
> and show my work. I have quest mod ideas that I would love to make but I
> am not that good at the creation kit. I need someone who actually knows
> how to use it. I'm looking to do some quests (big ones) having to do with
> the daedric realm we havent seen yet (Quagmire, Hunting Grounds,
> Evergloam, etc.). I am working on a quest for Quagmire right now.
> Without going into mutch detail you have to meat a Dunmer who wants to
> see the skull of corruption and betrayal happens yatta yatta yatta, you get
> trapped in Quagmire. It will be fully vioced. And this is a very cynical
> mod. So you must have s dark mind. (DrMrCole, 2014)

Certain modders told the user to create the mods on their own, and suggested that they

use the tutorials that Bethesda provided for the user.

> I've gotta say that unless you mean to get ur hands dirty with creation kit there's absolutely no way anyone will try to translate ur stories. Srry to be the party crasher. Use Creation Kit Wiki! It has great tutorials by the developers at bethesda themselves! (DrMrCole, 2014)

Other frequent users seemed to break apart the user's request by displaying the technical skill and time necessary to create the mod.

> My point is this - Do you have any idea even remotely what is involved, work and time and effort wise for a Quest Mod? I have my doubts...Now can I ask this? Yes, because I too have a HOT Quest Idea and even posted the main plot idea and was told the exact same thing.So I opened up Creation Kit and found it does indeed take some time - energy and effort. It is NOT as "easy" as I thought it was. Am I still going to do my Quest??? HELL YES!! Just not as quickly as I thought I would is all. Just saying - Stories/Quest Ideas - to be honest - are a dime a dozen. I cannot tell you since 2011, how many "HOT QUEST IDEA" (including my own) I have seen posted.

> Here is what I was told more than once: Learn CK and create your own Quest. Most Mod Creators have a life and have taken the time to learn CK to create their own mod creation ideas. Sorry, as I have learned, over the past two years - You want a MOD created, you will have to do it yourself. (DrMrCole, 2014)

The modders telling the user to become technically proficient is a common trope on the Steam Community Workshop. But it also represents something that is new in the community. While mod creators have been asked to create or change content in the past, it has not been on the pages of a digital download service store for the games that they mod. The Steam Workshop exists as a place for users to upload and download mod content for their games, and to receive feedback from the community of users. Non-modders soliciting modders to create for them presents a unique problem for modders because it distinctly goes against the prevailing value of openly democratic and meritocratic creation. According to my interview participants, it's not a conversation held between fellow modders. Instead, on the Steam digital storefront, the modders are treated like contracted developers who are not paid. Mods are available to download for free on Steam; no money can exchange hands between mod developers and users since the toolkits were created by outside developers.

Control and Innovation: Modders and Non-Modders

The structures and elements of the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim* displayed an online community undergoing changes, especially regarding values and services. This resulted in unique tensions between users, as well as tension between the site and its producer-consumers. This tension between innovation and control impacts the ability of modders to create, along with the negotiation of community standards, copyright, values, ethics, and the site itself.

Throughout the interviews and participant observation with community members, one thing became clear: Steam's storefront interface and platform presented a unique twist on the community dynamics. One interviewee found that the storefront interface had a direct impact on the types of interactions within the community.

> Greil: Steam is a storefront first and foremost, correct? So, you know, you already have that sort of store mindset whenever you step foot into Steam and you use and interact within Steam. And so, often when I am interacting with the community at Steam, I sort of feel like I am the owner of the mod store, and I am at the front of the mod store selling free things to people. And that's kind of the attitude I have often gotten from users at Steam Workshop, for better or for worse. It doesn't like it's a very contributive, or a very collaborative, community. Now, on the other hand, if you look at *Skyrim* Nexus, it has often lent to itself a feeling of a more close-knit, more tightly integrated, helpful, constructive criticism-driven environment that just feels very different. I wish I knew why that was. **Part of me thinks that it's because Steam is a storefront, part of me thinks it's because Steam has a lower barrier to entry, you know? You can very, very easily install mods through Steam. So you have a higher quantity of users on Steam, which is good for, you know, distribution. That's good for getting your name out, at the price of potentially getting users you may not want on your pages sometimes.** *Skyrim* Nexus is just harder to use, but the ones who do get it are usually the ones who are more technically minded. (**Note: bolded words were emphasized by me**)

This longer quote emphasizes a popular view within the modding community: That Steam, its Workshop and the Community around it is not the ideal location for modders to interact. The community that Steam has fostered is not exactly the one it may have wanted, and it is not wholly accepted by modders.

This storefront mentality also affected the modder's mentality when it came to interacting with other users on the Steam Community Workshop.

>Greil: When I interact with other mod creators, that doesn't change depending on what platform that I use. I'm most specifically speaking about other mod users.

>Kyle: Ok. So the people that don't actually make mods, they just interact with your creation.

>Greil: Correct, correct. That is a different experience. But actual mod creators, that's not an experience that changes, and a lot of times that's because we're on both places. We're on *Skyrim* Nexus and Steam Workshop, and we talk to each other in both places.

Some of the interview participants cited multiple reasons for preferring other platforms to the Steam Community Workshop. For example, a lower barrier to entry in the community, a much greater user base in terms of unique users, a growth in the modding population, and a lack of technical ability as forms of separating "gamers" or non-mod creators from the modders who populate sites like *Skyrim* Nexus.

But with a greater user base comes other challenges, particularly with a lower barrier of entry. Two-thirds of my interview participants noted that there was a distinct difference between the conversations that they would have on the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop versus other sites. Several of them claimed that, in order to interact with modders, they would need to visit other websites outside of Steam. This suggests that there was an uneasy mix of people on the Steam Workshop as compared to the modding-friendly sites on other forums. According to one participant:

>Bethesda hosts a forum…anyway, that is more like technical discussion, "oh, I have this problem, oh I want to do this script," modder types of discussion. You don't really have them on the Workshop, where it's more "My game is broken, please help." They're not so technical in their nature. Nexus also hosts many technical, or quite many modding discussions, as in the art of creating mods. Yes, I can link it to you here (sends me a link). However, I don't really post so much on the official forum right now, or nearly nothing, but I've talked on the Nexus to some other guys, or I've helped contribute to their mods.

Several modders claimed that they would prefer to use a Nexus site or outside connection to communicate with fellow modders. One interview participant noted:

>Vidya: …people don't go on discussion boards every day to see if there is something there. Only a few people do that. Other people just pop up, ask a question, and sometimes they don't even return to see if it was answered. They just leave it there and never return. Other cases, they leave it and

they get an answer and they return and they leave it after that. So it's, yeah, it's different to forums like Nexus or other places. Does that answer your question?

Kyle: Yes it did. Then how often do you interact with other modders through the Steam Workshop channel for *Skyrim*, or the *Skyrim* Nexus fansite?

Vidya: Well, I frequently browse through discussions on the *Skyrim* Workshop. It's not often that I'll post something because many of the questions I've found to be trivial, the answer to which can easily be Googled. But sometimes good questions will turn up, which I will attempt to answer if I can. So from time to time I will visit. On Nexus, I no longer engage in technical conversations since I am currently on a standby with modding, but I do check out if anyone made any comments or questions to my uploaded mods and answer them. Which also happens daily.

Again, discourse matters. What was communicated here was an idea that the "trivial" or "lesser" nature of the questions and interactions between users affected the perception of the use of Steam Workshop for the particular activity of modding. In fact, the annoyances of communicating with this base could be pronounced.

I've used Nexus for a longer time. I like the *Skyrim* Workshop because **it's more easy to use if it's possible to upload your mod, but that's another rant**. But it's a very nice feature, but my biggest problem with it is you have a little bit less technical user base, and they are sometimes a bit annoying.

Not only is the problem of an annoying user base mentioned, but so is the interface for this user. This would come up again in several discussion threads with community members. During one of the threads, a user told the post author to avoid asking for modders to create content for him on the Steam Workshop. "If you want to try get "real modders" go to the nexus, thats (sic) where most *Skyrim* modders are at the moment" (TBAGtv, 2014).

The interview participants also cited the existence of Nexus as one that was linked to a history of modding, one that has existed for almost two decades. Since all of the heavy users – and most of the moderate users – had previous experience with mod creation, this value became a unique factor in the structure and hierarchy of the site.

Modders and Their History

Users tended to have longer discussions about their history of modding saw it as a sign of credibility for the community, a badge of honor of sorts. One modder described his history of modding as one that created the community before Steam Workshop could be possible:

> Y4K: But I think that was actually before the release of *Skyrim* because we had discussions on how and what you could do in *Skyrim*, and what kind of mod we will be able to create in *Skyrim*, so it might be a bit weird but since we're already a part of the modding community, and it's nearly always the same guys modding Bethesda's games because they're very similar in their technical nature. I was already part of that community, if you can say that.

Nearly all of my interview participants had previous modding experience, and many with prior entries in the *Elder Scrolls* series that also included similar technologies to the Creation Kit. According to one participant, this helped him in adjusting to the Creation Kit because of the changes. "Well, the tools changed a lot, even though it's the same principles of the Creation Kit – or the Construction Kit, as it was called back then. It has changed."

Some mod creators had modding experience that went outside of the genre of fan creation, as well as the role-playing game (RPG) genre.

> I think that the first time I did anything that could be considered modding would be back with (*Command & Conquer*) *Red Alert 2*, where I modified the settings for which units had the parachute action, but that was just a notepad so it doesn't fall under your definition, I think. But with actual, official tools, I'd have to say it was *Morrowind* in, um, I'd say perhaps six years ago.

This history was a common thread in forums, particularly among the top modders.

> Since the day *Oblivion* was released, I started making mods. No, wait! Let me see. For…very good question, really, because I don't think I released those mods publicly. But…but I'd say that *Oblivion*'s release date is a very good starting point. And I have no idea how long that is.

The focus on the history of the modders is important because it locates the views and values of many modders within an existing historic context. In fact, a number of modders had prior experience with modding, and that included previous experiences uploading content on other sites. All of my interview participants claimed that they used *Skyrim* Nexus to communicate about mods with other mod creators. Reasons for this included what has been

mentioned before: a more open interface for uploading content, and greater control over their work as opposed to the moderation and regulation by Steam. One new reason that was mentioned was habit, and this was mentioned because many users had used a large Nexus site for navigating mods.

Some users cited this history as a reason why there was a gap in the knowledge base and technical skills of certain modders and users. According to one research participant:

> in order to mod the previous games, you need to go to a website and download stuff. So you need to know, for instance, "oh, I can mod this game. I can go to a website and download stuff for my game." However, in *Skyrim*, you have it integrated into your Steam client. You have some buttons somewhere saying "Oh, go to Steam Workshop and download stuff." So I think that those are the two main reasons that people not really technically interested in that stuff is modding, or is using mods.

This streamlined interface the mod creator discusses is the Subscribe button, which takes care of the work originally done by the user in order to install and use a mod for a game.

> If, for example, you take the *Morrowind* or *Oblivion* days, for example, you need to install a mod, you need to download it, unzip it, and then move it into your data folder. Quite simple stuff, really. And with Steam, you only press a "Subscribe" button and that button hides quite a lot of the technical stuff. I mean, it's not technical that you have files on your hard drive, but even though…well, it's kind of interesting that some people don't get that, and they don't understand that it's the same thing, really, you have files in your data folder.

Because of the streamlined interface, the Steam Community Workshop is intended increase the enjoyment and accessibility of mods for Steam users, not necessarily to placate modder needs. Indeed, several modders cited this as a reason why the Steam Community Workshop was not a place intended for them. The *Skyrim* Nexus, as one interviewee put it, was created "by modders for modders." This extends the work of Hong & Chen (2013), who found that there exists a desire for optimal standards of production within the modding sphere. If the interface of Steam is intended for streamlined access for lower-level users, as opposed to being modified for the increased output and oversight by modders, then the Steam Community Workshop is one platform with limits placed upon the modding group, and optimal standards of production may not be possible.

Ultimately, the Steam Community Workshop is a new player on the modding scene due to the existing history of several modders and participants, while other sites like *Skyrim* Nexus house a wider repository of mods and are crafted "by modders, for modders." This delineation between users and the actual content creators stems from the differences in how Steam exists in comparison to *Skyrim* Nexus and other unofficial fan sites that collect user mods. But it also results in a unique tension among a historically situated modding culture, one between innovation and control. The tension not only exists between users in the community, but also between the site and the user. The limits placed upon the modder/mod creators in terms of copyrights, lack of control over mods, and the problematic interface represents this tension that has to be negotiated in this online community.

The Value of the Community

I did find values that were positive within the community. Lest it seem as though the Steam Community Workshop is beyond the reach of modders, many did see a reason for maintaining a tie with the community. One modder saw his audience as a primary motivating factor for continuing to post on the community site.

> Why do I interact with users? Well, one is because oftentimes some of my best ideas come from the users. They come up with things that I never would have thought of, you know, and ideas for features that would be simple to add. Things that I just can't see in front of my face, and they point it out. Some of the best additions to Wearable Lanterns and Frostfall have come directly from user feedback, so that's something I'm very much in my users' debt for. You know, I make mistakes often. I make plenty of mistakes. I don't clearly articulate on my pages certain instructions, or certain nuances of how my mods work, and I need to provide clarification for that. I pride myself on providing a level of support to my users that is very high. I try to reply to every single comment on *Skyrim* Nexus for the mods that I support. And I think that users appreciate that feedback in general. It's a very positive feedback loop like that. You give back to your users, your users give back to you, and it just goes around and around and around like that.

Comments such as these indicate a level of support for the community. In fact, there was an entire discussion thread dedicated to the promotion and support of modders who made mod

content for non modders. This thread was created by a non modder who was grateful for all the hard work that went into the creation of mods.

The culture that is being produced within this community is one of a storefront culture, not one that specifically embodies modding culture and communities as it currently exists. After its release in 2012, the Creation Kit brought a massive influx of mods to the gaming world, which one user claimed heralded "a golden age of user-generated content." This golden age of user-generated content has also resulted in a growth in the modding scene, with more users downloading mod content than ever. The growth in the modding culture has resulted in more unique downloads for mods; all of my interview participants had at least one of their mods downloaded by more than 500,000 users on the site.

So why is the Steam Community Workshop not a place for the traditional modding community, at least according to some modders? According to the interviews and textual data, the actual values of the core participants on the Steam Community Workshop are specific to playing games, not creating them. This has resulted in some altercations in the community over time. For example, in the middle of the abrasive post by the non-modding community member, one of the modders pointed out that there had been some discussion of the actual store affecting the principles of modding.

> was it you and me who had some discussion about a related topic; that you could see the Workshop as some kind of market place?..Consider the following philosophy of why to create and share mods: See modding as a collective way of improving the game & make it more fun. If you see something that can be improved or added then create it and share it. The collective consensus is that it is good to share your work because everyone benefits from it. "I do the cool mods I can create and you do the cool things you can create". Now think that an individual arrives to that community and has a lot of ideas. Great! However, this individual does not want to create things, only requests and ask other people to do it for him. Okay... maybe if a lot of other people agrees with him and also finds those ideas good.... Apperently that is not the case. What would such a community gain from giving that individual his requests? Instead of creating things they want? (TBAGtv, 2014)

This conversation explains the ideas facing the Steam Community Workshop in a unique way. There is a distinct form of tension in certain conversations. The Workshop was intended as

a place for users to upload, distribute, and communicate about mods in an exciting fashion. But many users are not historically situated in the modding scene unless they are frequent, heavy users. Instead, several modders find themselves receiving "annoying" requests for mods from persons unwilling to create their own, which isn't a problem unless modders begin fulfilling those requests. If the mod creators create because of requests as opposed to other existing reasons, it threatens the ideological potential of the site.

To put this into perspective, most modders create content for free. They upload the content for free. They are not expected to receive any financial support for their works. They create simply to create, and the expectation of payment or fulfilling the whims of other game users goes against their ideological principles. The idea of creating mods for other players based on requests is not one that is likely to be embraced unless it represents a challenge.

The tension here lies in the control of the situation. Modding is a collective art, a democratic display of skill, technique, mastery of a complex toolkit, and a liquid art form that can change. It has largely been a dedicated, hobbyist practice shared amongst community members and fellow modders. With the introduction of a more vocal group of mod consumers in a pro-modding environment, the types of interactions have shifted, which means he community may have shifted, as this research suggests.

<u>Conclusions</u>

Thus, the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim* does foster an online community with unique values and cultural structures. But there is also tension between users and mod creators, such as the site interface, the designs of the modders, the freedom of creation along with the oversight of copyright and content by a digital store focuses on maintaining a positive business relationship with clients. In the next and final chapter, I posit how this research can push forward the academic disciplines of media studies, digital media technologies, video game studies, and professional networking in the 21st century.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

As I entered into the Steam Community Workshop, I was prepared to study how modders and nonmodders effectively gathered in a defined space to discuss the practice of creating and modifying software without any form of payment. What I found was not the cohesive group I imagined, but rather the users of the site were dividing themselves into different sects within the community. Gamers vs. modders, mod creators vs. users, technically sound vs. questioning and inept users…the community seemed to encompass a wide group of users, with very little overlap in their communication styles. Moreover, it seemed as though this practice – which had been considered a democratic, thoughtful one by its user base – was indeed going through a potentially major shift of meritocracy.

I chose the Steam Workshop Community because I believed that modders would use the primary platform of Steam as a way to unite. The boundaries on *Skyrim* included the requirement of owning Steam in order to play it. Therefore, I assumed that the modding community would eagerly embrace the platform as a definitive area for disseminating content.

Instead, this community is a unique and varied incorporation of persons with multiple skill levels and different histories with modding. The difference between the mod creators and the non-modders and users was substantial, and the contention in the community was made more apparent due to several outbursts of anger between these groups. The anger was also directed at Valve itself, which was surprising because of the goodwill the company had fostered through the evolution of the Steam platform.

This community of users was focused around the question of control over the site itself. This control and the limitations surrounding the community would affect every aspect of the study.

The first research question was focused on the larger impact that modders potentially had on their surroundings and their fellow content creators. Modders as an organization qualify as a

community, according to the definitions laid out in previous chapters, However, their discourses, practices, languages, styles, codes, rituals and values are relatively unknown within the academic world. Using the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim* as a central environment, I found that these areas were difficult to locate and sometimes outside of the environment I was studying.

During the four months I spent on the Steam Workshop, I became used to creating my own rituals and forms of interactions. These were important to me because I had to find ways of engaging with the community. Daily check-ins with the community, asking questions of mod creators, posting interview questions, downloading and testing mods, and examining the changes in the ranking boards of modders were all forms of ritual during my time with the community.

Consequently, the mod users, mod creators and gamers all had their own forms of activity. I sought to understand the community in terms of its structure, hierarchy, and values. These elements of culture are important because they legitimize a group as a functioning, organic being. The values of the community – in this case, modding and technical knowledge in opposition to play – defined how the users would interact, and how the discourse would be shaped to illustrate competing forms of hierarchy.

Turkle's (1995) study on early internet communities was massively influential. She defined elements of culture as partly through shared interests and experiences, which prompted strangers who might never meet to engage in discourse and interaction among themselves. These interactions created and reinforced values, norms, and rituals within the community of users. Here, I saw the same thing emerge among the users. Modders would engage in technical discussion with each other, while non-modders would ask questions and ask for mods to be created. There was a substantial disparity between these groups that could only be seen in their discourse, much like Turkle (1995) witnessed.

Skyrim modders craft unique experiences that exemplify the levels of creativity inherent within the medium of games. Yet this creativity is also counterbalanced by limits and constraints such as copyright, interface problems, complex toolkits, inefficient moderation, and professional oversight of the Workshop. These factors drive some users to avoid the Steam Community

Workshop, with several creators expressing a disdain for using those services. This is important because it represents a possible refutation of the work on convergence done by Jenkins (2006), which states that the practice is important for all companies as a way of allowing for creativity and power to be shared among all parties. Here, the power dynamic seems to be placed in the favor of Steam and its control, which removes several of the existing historic reasons for modding.

According to Carey (1988), the ritual of communication and discourse is used to remake and reinforce the actual existence and practice of the world in which we live. Therefore, an online culture is no different from other cultures. The discourse located on the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop extends this idea, reinforcing norms, values, structures, and hierarchies among a makeshift community. The conceptual linkage of codes, technical skills, and validation through outside media unites disparate elements into a singular narrative, thus creating meaning and order. This extends the work of ritual into the realm of modding, linking it to conceptual practices and further cementing it as an interpretive culture and community of practice (Becker, 1982; Carey, 1985; Deuze, 2007; Dimaggio & Hirsch, 1976; Hall, 1980; Hong & Chen, 2013; Postigo, 2010). Future research needs to provide a clearer definition of the rituals and practices while studying additional interpretive communities.

Mod creators and users on the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop, as members of an online community, share unique values, dimensions, codes, and structures. Online communities are possible within commercial domains, sometimes involving relationships between consumers and the company, the brand, the service, other users, or the community organizer. (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002; Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008). These social, economic, and commercial relationships form the backbone of many online communities and interactions, with recent trends indicating that these consumers tend to form more closely-held bonds with those commercial organizations (Heinonen, 2011).

However, the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop offers challenges to Heinonen's (2011) assertion. Many heavy users and mod creators preferred an amateur fan site to upload

their mods and interact with their peers, citing a shared interest in technical knowledge, constructive criticism, and the open nature of the interface and moderation of Nexus over Steam. These modders are also consumers, and as consumers they are tied directly to Steam to play *Skyrim* on a PC. Many of these users did not see Steam as a commercial organization that had the interests of modders in mind. Instead, the digital storefront of Steam and the problematic interfacing, moderation, imperfect mix of community members, and notifications were all symptomatic of what several modders saw as a strained bond between modders and Steam.

The Steam Community Workshop is part of the Steam digital storefront and platform, which is owned by Valve Software, Inc. It is part of a corporate structure, a segment of a larger company that is overseen by a multitude of professional developers and publishers for the site. Having said that, it should be made clear that this apparently has had distinct implications for the user base and community of users segmented across the site.

The Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim* is a community based on the practice of modding. This practice has instilled meritocratic values among its leaders and authorities. There is a web of significance given to the boundaries and spheres of modding and the website. The activity is occurring as a way of interacting and creating molds for each of these members. While it may not be a strong community, the Steam Community Workshop has an evolving structure focused on this activity, which is tied to the values of the members. These elements of real-world communities suggest that this online group of users represents a basic online community.

Organizationally, the modding platform of Steam has direct implications for the constitution of the community. Its existence as an extension of a commercial ideology had a major impact on how users viewed their interactions, particularly heavy users and mod creators. These users took umbrage with the lack of control and moderation of their content, while most non-modders embraced the community.

The refutation of Steam by certain modders is not the intended effect that Valve and Bethesda had in mind when they implemented this Community Workshop. Modding is a lucrative practice, particularly for professional developers who depend on modders for a variety

of reasons. The goal of the industry is profit, which is typically gained via control of the marketplace and the product. But modding is focused around the idea of free creation and distribution, which does not fit with the profit model on the surface. Research has shown that modders contribute to the extended lifespan of certain popular video game titles, such as *The Sims, Half-Life, Doom*, and *Total War* (Jenkins, 2006; Postigo, 2007, 2010). Even *Skyrim* has benefited from the use of modding as an extension of product support; it has been suggested that modding heavily contributed to the title's current sales of 20 million units (Kuchera, 2014) since 10,000 mods had been created for the Steam Workshop within months of the Creation Kit's debut (Purchese, 2012).

Research question two explored the structure of this modder community. Several of my interviewees described long hours modifying the game, with one person stating that they broke their 2,000 hours of time on the Creation Kit into forty hours of time spent per week modding. However, these long hours are not uncommon. Many modders in previous studies admitted that they spent overwhelming amounts of time on modding (Hong & Chen, 2013). This is because the structure of a modding community and the status that is associated with being a top modder is drawn from this work. The amount of time spent modding content, and the outcome of the final product, are all factors in evaluating the quality of a mod. Therefore, a great deal of work and skill is required to maintain one's status as a high-level modder, and especially because it requires understanding the intricacies of incredibly varied toolkits used to create mods.

At a higher level, modding represents gaming culture's pinnacle because it allows gaming outsiders to become a part of the industry. Most modders will only ever create mods as a hobby. Yet others will use the skills and products of modding as a gateway into the video game industry. Appropriately, one modder of *Skyrim* earned a job by spending an intense amount of time with the Creation Kit. Alexander J. Velicky was a 19-year-old modder who spent 2,000 hours on the Creation Kit when he created a massive *Skyrim* mod called Falskaar in the hopes of being hired by Bethesda. According to him, "The best way to show Bethesda Game Studios that I want a job there and should be hired is to create content that meets the standards of their

incredible development team" (Birnbaum, 2013). For Velicky, this meant not going to university after graduating high school and living in his father's home, only focused on creating and refining Falskaar through the Creation Kit. His efforts paid off, though not with Bethesda; in November 2013, Velicky was hired as a designer at Bungie Studios, makers of the popular *Halo* series (Dyer, 2013; Schreier, 2013).

These tales of success are motivating factors for modders, and several modders form teams to create ambitious mods that can refine and emphasize entire gaming systems. For example, the makers of *Counter-Strike* were hired by Valve after the company was impressed by their team's work (Corliss, 2011). Other modders take the skills they have learned to form their own collectives and companies to publish their original work. One of my interviewees had created their own software company with several other *Skyrim* modders, and he was in the early stages of creating a title for their product during our interview.

All these modders were seen as top modders within their games and respective toolkits, meaning that achieving elite status within this culture offers tangible benefits and rewards. The values and norms of unique and original creations are thus prized by the modding community at large because of its potential for incorporation within the greater video game industry. Therefore, understanding the structure and hierarchy of modders is important because it informs the professional development and growth of the video game industry. Furthermore, it also provides a unique look into the potential future of our economy. As our media industries become more focused on social sharing and distribution of user-generated content, those who create high-quality media products will find themselves more likely to achieve a position in an economy increasingly reliant on digital media creation and dissemination. Modding and its culture may represent a new lens of seeing how and what we value in online communities of practice. The Steam Community Workshop is a focused area where these values and interactions reflect the changing economic structures.

This study complements the work of several important researchers who have studied communicative social relationships and institutional norms of media organizations, cultural

industries and systems, and how the process of production is affected by various dimensions both in and out of the producer's control (Hirsch, 1972; Tuchman, 1972; 1978; Peterson & Berger, 1975; DiMaggio & Hirsch, 1976; Faulkner, 1976; Rosenblum, 1978; Turow, 1978; Baxandall, 1988; Perlmutter, 1991, 1997, 2000; Bustamante, 2004; Deuze, 2007; Turow, 2010).

The values and dimensions of the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop are very similar to other new media organizations, building a relevant culture of production. For instance, several mod creators relied on user feedback to erase bugs and update content to maintain the credibility and quality of their user-generated content. This dimension of the relationship resembles a professional creator developing a quality portfolio of work. These modder codes and values resemble the normative and formal codes and dimensions that traditional mass media production firms would place upon their products. This links modding and some facets of amateur production to a larger historical context of media production, and locates modding within the production of culture studies of communication.

Membership in the Steam Community Workshop meets research done by Mark Deuze (2006, 2007), the elements of media work are rituals of participation, remediation, and bricolage. The *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop provides an illustration of these elements in action, with historically situated heavy users providing context and solutions for interested new members of the community through discourse and content creation. This extends the work of Deuze and others by illustrating that the modding community is a strong one, relying on the principles of media work and reflecting the practices of modern social grouping through the lens of shared personal interests, dialogue and focused discourse.

It could be argued that the Steam Community Workshop operates as a place of convenience for everybody involved. Many gaming journalists and industry analysts see the use of the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop as a place that streamlines the modding search and upload process. The popular consensus is that "there's an even more important function to having Steam Workshop run alongside the *Skyrim* Creation Kit: no longer will users need to browse the internet and the many modding sites hosting Skyrim mods since now it'll all be easily

found in one, easy-to-access location" (Barnes, 2012). If this is the case, then it could be assumed that the Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim* should be the premier hosting site for all *Skyrim* mods. I believe this is potentially true:

Limit the amount of places for interested modders and mod users to search for uploading and downloading mods.

Ensure that Bethesda Gameworks can easily see the types of mods that players are creating for their game, thereby incorporating elements of popular mods into their future commercial products.

The incorporation of modding elements into professional, commercial products has long been a part of computer gaming culture. For example, in *Skyrim* the *Dragonborn* expansion pack allowed users to fly on dragons, which was originally a mod that users had created for free.

The fact most people who identified as modders in the community claimed that they preferred to use another site most frequently for uploading mods and organizing them says that the Steam Community Workshop is not yet the premier location for modding and mod creators.

The Steam Community Workshop may be a new force at play, which could account for the unexpected change in attitude. Coming into the community, I expected its members to be fully supportive of the Steam Workshop and its function as a modding home. Instead, many of the mod leaders preferred the *Skyrim* Nexus as their primary upload site and home for conversations about modding.

It may be possible to link this preference to an established habit of uploading mods in a single, specific location outside of Steam. But the modding community is also a deeper community of practice. There are values, discourses, languages, styles, codes, rituals, constraints, limits, boundaries, and principles being developed. The Steam Community Workshop is a relatively new addition to the modding scene, and it's a professional addition to the community, made and authorized by professional coders in an attempt to bring a loosely scattered community of amateurs to it. Its interface and forced oversight over content means that modders have to adjust to the rules and regulations of this new site. Consequently, this may be

the very reason why so many modders do not necessarily prefer to use it, instead frequenting the *Skyrim* Nexus or similar fan sites for modding.

The Steam Workshop both encourages and limits interaction, creation and discourse in the community. The encouragement is stated in the mission objectives of the workshop, which is promoted by Bethesda as a way to connect modders with non-modders on the same platform. The limitations are due to the restrictions of the interface, the inefficient moderation (as reported to me by the modders and heavy users), and the rules and regulations of communication. The potential for having hard work be displaced or removed due to site policies caused a large level of frustration among the community members. I did not encounter any areas where space was appropriated for unexpected use. This is a counter to what previous research on modders had seen, where modding was a space for remixing and distributing subversive and challenging content among users (Postigo, 2008).

The Steam Community for *Skyrim* was conceived as a convenient and accessible site for modders. But this doesn't fit the perceptions of the modders Bethesda and Valve were trying to court. One could potentially infer that the convenience isn't actually for the modders, but instead for the companies that would benefit most from being able to oversee user-generated content and controlling it in a way. There was no overt statement by Bethesda or Valve that directly supported this, but it was easily seen through outsider articles and perspectives. This clash of ideologies, perceptions and intentions between professional producers and fan creators has bigger implications for the future of digital businesses in the creative industries.

The tension between innovation and control of the Steam Community Workshop was one that emerged as I explored the community dynamics in an effort to answer Research question three. As stated earlier, the Community Workshop was an idea implemented by Steam. The project created a central portal for all mods and mods created by registered Steam users of PC titles. The intention was to make it convenient for users, publishers and developers of PC games. Users could have one central location to upload their mods, while publishers and developers only

needed to peruse one area for the entire output of the modding communities for their games. It is not an uncommon venture in modern production, particularly as a manner of convenience.

Yet many modders chose to remove their mods from Steam. Several modders told me through interviews and discussions about their frustrations with the interface of the Community Workshop, the moderation of the site, and the makeup of the community itself. The limits and controls of the communities were out of the hands of modders, which marks a shift in the control of modding content and output that would also change community dynamics. Since the community would be overseen by Steam and the associated game developers, the modders no longer had control of distribution over the fan-made content for the game.

The idea that a central location would become the premier hosting site for these mods was linked to a historical understanding of the community's existence and proliferation (see Huhtamo, 1999; Schleiner, 1999; Postigo, 2004; 2007; 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Sotomaa, 2010; Au, 2002; Kushner, 2003; Kow & Nardi, 2010; Poor, 2013). But the reliance and expectation of use within the Steam Community Workshop may have been a specious one for Bethesda. Many modders who had previous history with the practice – and especially with the *Elder Scrolls* series of games that Bethesda releases – stated that they preferred to communicate with other modders on other sites. Sites like *Skyrim* Nexus and the Elder Scrolls Alliance were mentioned repeatedly in the interviews and in community discussion threads.

Here lies the tension of innovation and control, much like that linked in earlier production of culture studies (DiMaggio and Hirsch, 1976). This tension is not uncommon among newer media industries, as the clash between producers and technologically savvy consumers faces the digital media workers and traditional media producers of the present day. Businesses want their users and customers to utilize their products and services – including websites, social networks, and data portals – to make it easier to track what their users are doing with their content. Therefore, the goal was that more users – particularly amateur fan users, and especially modders – are more likely to rely on the existing makeshift communities for support.

Businesses engaging in digital media production that outsource user production would be wise to recognize the lessons of the Steam Community Workshop in this study. Introduced as a consolidation of strengths and a unique holistic portal for the publishers, developers and modders who all benefit from creating mods, this is instead seen by many as a flawed design with a frustrating consumer base, problematic interface, and unnecessary amounts of oversight limiting the modder and consumer rather than creating a great space for both to interact.

Moreover, the modding community is facing the challenges of the digital storefront interface. Beyond the problematic load times and the moderation of content that could result in painful delays in communication and distribution, modders also see some potentially disturbing trends in the future with Steam Community Workshop users, particularly those that do not wish to create their own content and would rather have other mod creators produce for them.

This is another form of tension in certain conversations. The Workshop was intended as a place for users to upload, distribute, and communicate about mods. Many users are not historically situated in the modding scene. Instead, experienced modders find themselves receiving "annoying" requests for mods from persons unwilling to create their own, which violates the existing principles of modders. The fulfillment of such requests limits the actual creating done by others, turning modders into indentured servants or volunteer developers for other community members.

Therefore, it is important to recognize the collective history of users, particularly within digital media production and social media that is economically founded on a democratic principle of open sharing. If the nexus point between the user and the producer overtly benefits the producer (in terms of the traditional production of communication model), the user/consumer is less likely to engage with the site in favor of another one that will provide more freedom and less constraints.

Modding is a distinct form of immaterial labor, a form of participatory content creation where the users create elaborate modifications to existing commercial software that benefits the commercial product by lengthening its economic lifespan (e.g. Jenkins, 2006). This dissertation

shows how companies not only understand this principle of modding, but how some businesses are attempting to better utilize these mods as selling points for games by encouraging players to interact with the user-generated content in a single location. Since the Creation Kit and the Community Workshop are tied directly to the Steam digital storefront – where all players of the PC version of *Skyrim* must register – Bethesda Game Works and Steam could potentially be persuading its users to adopt a new portal for all their mod access.

Immaterial laborers do not receive payment for their work. However, they do receive creative fulfillment in their ventures, as well as potentially using the experience and publicity of modding to jump into a career in the video game industry. Since the modding community has long been held to principles of meritocratic, open publication of content, the storefront interface, copyright oversight and notifications of Steam represent potential changes for this community. It also threatens the potential anti-capitalist subversion that mods can take since most mod creators hosted their mods on amateur, unofficial sites.

This study pushes the work of modding researchers forward by illustrating the nexus of technologies and political economy of communication that are present within the discourse, structure and values of the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop. Principles of modding inform the use and implementation of video games. These principles of immaterial labor and a meritocratic community of users are also seen in modern social media. Thus, there are similarities between video games and the increasingly commercial practices of social networks like Facebook and YouTube. Both offer the potential convergent modding practices of user creation, distribution and remixing of content. The reticence of some major users to integrate these changes illustrates how modding communities are similar to entrenched social communities on major social networks.

Earlier, I suggested that the larger tension in shifting professional involvement and convergence comes from a multitude of factors inherent to the change in professional discourse. If digital technologies and cultures have facilitated participation at the cost of traditional publishing control, how does this development strain the professional character of media

industries like journalism, publishing, television, and especially video games? "If professions are defined by a certain degree of control over an information domain, what happens to professional jurisdiction in the journalism space, and with what potential consequences?" (Lewis, 2012)

This dissertation shows one example of how Steam may be working to regain control of distribution and oversight through the modding community. Heavy users on the Steam Community Workshop may be valued by their roles in informing the community of top mods, technical expertise and solutions to problems, but this is occurring under the auspices of a digital storefront operated by Valve Software, Inc. Though modders value creation over ideas, Valve and Bethesda directly benefit over having all of these mods readily available through an official portal. This is one way that the tension between innovation and control may be resolved by controlling the space where innovative practices can be located.

Conclusion

The practice of modding will continue to shift as video games continue to increase in popularity. This dissertation increases our understanding of video game studies by illustrating the importance of interface, historically situated communities, and the work done by mod creators and distributors to strengthen video games into economically and culturally viable properties.

This dissertation is a unique look into an online community. It is part of a historically understudied movement in fan cultures and amateur programming. Online communities arrived at a time when digital media was growing at a massive rate, enough that the modding scene is much larger than what can be found on only one site. This study is by no means comprehensive. The work that was done for this research looked at a specific subset of the larger modding community, and it only focused on one specific site – the Steam Community Workshop – for a specific game, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. The sample size chosen for the interviews and the textual analysis captures at best a specific moment in time. A more thorough look is necessary, as well as a longer research period. A larger sample size could provide a more comprehensive overview. This can be accomplished during future research.

This study is also not generalizable to all modding communities or online communities of practice. Many users on this site are not necessarily representative of the entirety of the larger practice of modding. Since this dissertation only focused on one modding community for one game, it cannot represent the entire practice. Future research needs to take into account multiple communities and multiple games since there is a chance for user overlap. Furthermore, not all modding communities are created alike due to differences in game genre and the tools used to create mods. The tools in the Creation Kit dramatically affected the discourse and values in the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop, and thus it impacted the makeup and satisfaction of the community.

This research is also limited in its scope concerning contextual studies. For example, it did not take into account the creative content found on sites like YouTube, or the features found in magazines and similar online publications that promote mods for community members. Future research can include these artifacts for a much more holistic portrait of the community.

It would also be interesting to explore how the Steam Community Workshop evolves over time as bandwidth and memory space changes in the global market. With a large registered user base, Steam is at the forefront of PC gaming distribution in the 21st century. Future modders may eventually come to see Steam as the premier, singular location for distributing mod content. As of now, Steam is a new player on the modding scene, and among the subset of the modding population, they are faltering next to the historically situated Nexus site and other unofficial modding host sites such as *The Elder Scrolls* Alliance.

In addition, more studies need to be specific to the actual mods themselves. The principles of media work and convergence inform much digital media production today. Mods are an area where the artifacts themselves are not explored in full, yet they could potentially provide insight into the cultural assumptions and values of the creators. Analyzing specific mods to examine coded images, stereotypes, and issues of reality in a fantasy setting would further determine the values of the content creators.

Fan production increases every year thanks to the changes in technology of modern society. Studies looking at how principles of modding operate in other media creation and distribution situations would benefit those industries such as cartooning, anime and tabletop board games. These are all media where fans have a major impact on the type of content that is popularized and successful.

The practice of modding will continue to expand as more people gain access to personal computers capable of creating computer-ready mod content. Greater bandwidth will mean more users will be able to distribute and access mod content. Furthermore, mods will be increasingly vital to the industry as the costs of developing high-quality, massively popular video games increase over time. Forms of low-cost innovation and risk will mean that users will themselves author engaging content that creates growing demand for the original video game product, which in turn will increase the product's commercial longevity. Entire games are emerging that revolve around modding as their goal. Games like *Minecraft* and *Project Spark* use modding and distributing user-generated content as their basic mechanics. *Minecraft* itself may be a template for the future of mod-directed gaming, having sold almost 15 million copies of the title and inspiring a youth-oriented modding focus through its cartoonish graphical display and its ancillary merchandise lines.

Independent game development has also become more popular than ever thanks to the same changes in technologies that have affected the growth of modding. Modding is often seen as a gateway to professional development among its highest-achieving members. Independent game production relies on the same creativity and openness that characterizes modding communities, so it is important to note how amateur production occurs in ways that are very similar to this form of electronic media production.

Finally, future research could utilize different methods to gain a broader overview of the greater modding community. Survey research with a larger sample size can provide a larger picture of the modding community, and could potentially shed some insight into changes in the community based on the amount of user feedback.

This examination of the Steam Community Workshop helps us to better understand the modding community. Academics and professionals studying digital media, video game studies, online communities, and social network managers will continue to study its growth. As I left the community (for now), I realized that the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop presents new opportunities for researchers to study how online communities are changing through the nexus of technology, user experience, and commerce. The Steam Community Workshop for *Skyrim* is a vibrant community, one that remains active almost two years after the Creation Kit was first made available for download. Modders continue to create the larger extended pieces that make up the *Skyrim* experience for many users. While no numbers exist as to how many unique users exist on the Steam Workshop, *Skyrim* is approaching 20,000 uploaded mods on the Workshop as of this study.

In conclusion, my research on the *Skyrim* Steam Community Workshop offers opportunity to acknowledge theoretical and practical applications of immaterial labor, media work, production of culture studies, video game studies, and online communities of users. It can extend the unique elements of such communities in the midst of potential change, one that may upend years of history with the practice of modding. Representing a first step into cataloguing that change, this dissertation illustrates the benefits of studying modding through ethnographic methods and practices, and provides a more complex examination of this online community. It illustrates the dynamics of this particular group making them more knowable, much like Geertz (1973) wrote:

> "Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity...It renders them accessible: setting them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity." (Geertz, 1973)

APPENDIX A. IMAGES FROM SKYRIM MODDING COMMUNITY

WEAPONS

FILTER

NAME	TYPE	MAT	DAM	W
Ancient Nord Arrow (898)	Arrow	Draugr	10	
Assassin's Bow (Legendary) ◆ ★ ⚡	Bow	Daedric	84	1
Assassin's Dagger (Legendary) ★ ⚡	Dagger	Daedric	117	6	2685
Dragon's Fang (Legendary) ◆ ★ ⚡	Sword	Daedric	239	16	5422
Dragon's Talon (Legendary) ◆ ★ ⚡	Greatsword	Daedric	64	23	9995
Dwarven Arrow (221)	Arrow	Dwarven	14	-	4
Ebony Arrow (42) ◆	Arrow	Ebony	20	-	7
Elven Arrow (81)	Arrow	Elven	16	-	5
Glass Arrow (60)	Arrow	Glass	18	-	6
Orcish Arrow (127)	Arrow	Orcish	12	-	3
Pickaxe	Pickaxe	Iron	28	10	5
Steel Arrow (189)	Arrow	Steel	10	-	2

◆ TYPE
◆ MATERIAL
◆ DAMAGE
◆ WEIGHT
◆ VALUE
◇ VALUE/WEIGHT

[Tab] Exit   [Space] Search   [LAlt] Magic

Carry Weight **243/465**   Gold **92257**

Wearable Lanterns

APPENDIX B. SAMPLE COMMUNITY WORKSHOP CONVERSATIONS

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 4 @ 2:21pm

Skyrim Mod request: No more cities

Can someone make mod that removes these cities: Whiterun, Windhelm, Solitude, Dawnstar, Winterhold but dont delete Jorrvaskr, Morthal and Falkreath please! Leave Jorrvaskr to open area and replase whiterun to a field and on the field there must be animals like cows and the animals would be Companions animals :) Thats all i ask!

Showing 1-43 of 43 comments
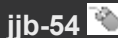
Maloy20 Jan 4 @ 2:31pm

Do you care if the quests involving those cities get trashed as well?

#1

jjb-54 Jan 4 @ 7:43pm

You understand that that would totally CRASH THE GAME - right?

Besides what would be the point????

-> You've killed over 95% of the Quests - which means those areas related to the quests will not activate ... which means, basically if it does work - you have sandbox to run around in - but that is about it.... You realize this right?

#2

Bradenm1 Jan 4 @ 7:50pm

Remove it yourself... Im sure modders dont want to make a mod that fks up the game..

#3

Cpt.McDickButt Jan 4 @ 10:23pm

this is the most brain♥♥♥♥ed mod request i've ever heard off.

#4

Master Smith Jan 4 @ 10:39pm

I don't think it's possible

#5

jjb-54 Jan 4 @ 10:45pm

*Originally posted by **Cpt.McDickButt**:*
this is the most brain♥♥♥♥ed mod request i've ever heard off.

I really cannot disagree at all .... LOL ....

#6

ALDERSONI Jan 4 @ 10:45pm

why would you want this

#7

jjb-54 Jan 5 @ 12:12am

*Originally posted by **aldersoni**:*
why would you want this

I basically asked the same question when I asked:

What would be the point?

#8

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 5 @ 12:21pm

*Originally posted by **Maloy20**:*
Do you care if the quests involving those cities get trashed as well?
No...it dosent bother me :)

#9

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 5 @ 12:22pm

*Originally posted by **jjb-54**:*
You understand that that would totally CRASH THE GAME - right?

Besides what would be the point????

-> You've killed over 95% of the Quests - which means those areas related to the quests will not activate ... which means, basically if it does work - you have sandbox to run around in - but that is about it.... You realize this right?

Of course i do! I just wanted some thing crazy

#10

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 5 @ 12:24pm

*Originally posted by **jjb-54**:*
*Originally posted by **aldersoni**:*
why would you want this

I basically asked the same question when I asked:

What would be the point?

I just want that kind of mod :)

#11

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 5 @ 12:27pm

PLEASE! can some one atleast delete whiterun!?

#12

J3X Jan 5 @ 12:31pm

I suggest that you pick up the Creation Kit and play around with it. You might discover that it is a little bit harder than simply selecting it and press delete.

#13

jjb-54 Jan 5 @ 12:46pm

I agree with J3X - do it yourself - as there is not a MOD Creator that would want to put his/her name to this no small disaster ..... you want to shoot yourself in the foot and trash your game - you do it!

#14

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 5 @ 12:55pm

*Originally posted by **jjb-54**:*
I agree with J3X - do it yourself - as there is not a MOD Creator that would want to put his/her name to this no small disaster ..... you want to shoot yourself in the foot and trash your game - you do it!
U know what im not crazy and i already KNOW THAT NO ONE will ever make this mod :/ Atleast i hoped that some one better modder than me could do it....

#15

jjb-54 Jan 5 @ 1:03pm

*Originally posted by **♣AlluManZ♣シ**:*
*Originally posted by **jjb-54**:*
I agree with J3X - do it yourself - as there is not a MOD Creator that would want to put his/her name to this no small disaster ..... you want to shoot yourself in the foot and trash your game - you do it!
U know what im not crazy and i already KNOW THAT NO ONE will ever make this mod :/ Atleast i hoped that some one better modder than me could do it....

Yes you are crazy - if you even remotely " i hoped that some one better modder than me could do it...." ... because obviously you did not think this through.

Amazing - simply amazing.

#16

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 5 @ 3:16pm

*Originally posted by **jjb-54**:*
*Originally posted by **♣AlluManZ♣シ**:*
U know what im not crazy and i already KNOW THAT NO ONE will ever make this mod :/ Atleast i hoped that some one better modder than me could do it....

Yes you are crazy - if you even remotely " i hoped that some one better modder than me could do it...." ... because obviously you did not think this through.

Amazing - simply amazing.

Im not crazy! This is just a mod request! NOTHING LESS NOTHING MORE! Why in the hell cant you just understand! I just asked that could someone make this kind of mod! I didnt command someone to do it! can you just ♥♥♥♥ing understant

#17

Mr.Shaggnificent Jan 5 @ 7:55pm

I wouldn't mind this mod. i greatly dislike the main quest line anyway, and the companions kind of annoy me too. in fact, i would love to see whiterun burn down. maybe leave one house you could live in, and the forge/smelter could stay too.

#18

Sweet Jesus Jan 5 @ 9:44pm

1, If you delete all of that, it wrecks the game.

2. When you delete it, all of the stuff there will go, there is no meshes already made that would fit that big hole you just made in the map.

3. Making a mesh would be very hard because of the size of the hole you just made, it would be a very buggy and terrible job.

4. No one would like this mod, total waste of time.

#19

Mr.Shaggnificent Jan 5 @ 11:19pm

When you guys say it will "wreck" the game, do you mean it will screw up the story/quests/etc.? or do you mean the game will no longer function?

#20

Maloy20 Jan 6 @ 1:29am

*Originally posted by **Mr.Shaggnificent**:*
When you guys say it will "wreck" the game, do you mean it will screw up the story/quests/etc.? or do you mean the game will no longer function?
It will just no longer function, but throwing some ideas out there if others are interested in hearing how this might work.

What if you left the WhiterunCity Exterior cell intact and just deleted the Whiterun in the Tamriel Exterior Cell?

Whiterun and its quests still exist you just can't access it.

The navmesh thing is a problem though, I'd sooner just make it a bottomless pit lol

#21

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 6 @ 10:38am

*Originally posted by **Mr.Shaggnificent**:*
I wouldn't mind this mod. i greatly dislike the main quest line anyway, and the companions kind of annoy me too. in fact, i would love to see whiterun burn down. maybe leave one house you could live in, and the forge/smelter could stay too.
FINALY SOMEONE POSITIVE PERSON COMMENTS THIS MOD! :)

#22

AR15freedom1 Jan 9 @ 1:27am

I don't think it would be very difficult actually. The cities are in their own world spaces and you wouldn't have to delete those, just the walls of the cities in Tamriel. Then a quick resizing of the elevation and some environmental additions. In about 10 hours I think it'd be good to go. With that being said, no rational person will ever do it. AlluManZ, you're on your own.

#23

Mr.Shaggnificent Jan 9 @ 1:47am

*Originally posted by **AR15freedom1**:*
I don't think it would be very difficult actually. The cities are in their own world spaces and you wouldn't have to delete those, just the walls of the cities in Tamriel. Then a quick resizing of the elevation and some environmental additions. In about 10 hours I think it'd be good to go. [...]
that's what i was thinking. the world map existed before the cities, so it would just be like going back a few steps to before they were even there.

#24

AR15freedom1 Jan 9 @ 1:55am

Well, maybe. It's possible that the elevation meshes are missing from those areas within the walls. If they are, it's a big problem.

#25

AR15freedom1 Jan 9 @ 12:16pm

I've given myself black eyes before. Of course, I didn't mean to hurt myself quite that much when it happened. I hit myself in the face to toughen up the nerves and bone. It's called bone densification. It's a good thing to practice on elbows, forearms, shins, and knuckles.

#26

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 9 @ 1:05pm

*Originally posted by **AR15freedom1**:*
I don't think it would be very difficult actually. The cities are in their own world spaces and you wouldn't have to delete those, just the walls of the cities in Tamriel. Then a quick resizing of the elevation and some environmental additions. In about 10 hours I think it'd be good to go. With that being said, no rational person will ever do it. AlluManZ, you're on your own.
Yeah i know...

#27

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 21 @ 11:06am

EVERY ONE PLEASE CHECK OUT MY MORDOR MOD THAT IS COMING OUT SOON IS A HUGE MOD! LINK: http://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/50179/

#28

Mr.Shaggnificent Jan 21 @ 2:19pm

*Originally posted by **♣AlluManZ♣シ**:*
EVERY ONE PLEASE CHECK OUT MY MORDOR MOD THAT IS COMING OUT SOON IS A HUGE MOD! LINK: http://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/50179/
File not found
The file you requested was not found in our database.

#29

mpd1958 Jan 21 @ 2:45pm

I'm guessing that you are a werewolf or you want to be one? Why else would you want to keep only Jjarvaskar and have lots of animals on the plains.

But you are missing the point that all these people are trying to get across to you. The game would never function. The modder would basically have to rewrite the entire game from start to finish.

It will never happen!!! But you can Hope, Hope is good!!!

#30

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 23 @ 10:06am

mu morodr mod got banned on skyrim nexus...so link dosent work any more and yes i know that this will never happen! :(but idont need this kind of mod anymore

#31

jjb-54 Jan 23 @ 10:18am

Originally posted by ♣AlluManZ♣シ:
EVERY ONE PLEASE CHECK OUT MY MORDOR MOD THAT IS COMING OUT SOON IS A HUGE MOD! LINK: http://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/50179/

There is a very good reason it got BANNED - it is COPY-RIGHTED by LoTR and they, like Disney - Marvel - Atari, et all - are cracking down big time on people using their Copy Righted Materials.

#32

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 23 @ 11:17am

yes yes i know

#33

Bradenm1 Jan 24 @ 6:39am

I knew it was going to get banned but did not comment.

#34

Mr.Shaggnificent Jan 24 @ 11:01am

What about all the lotr crap here? the third most popular one is weapons of lotr. i've seen at least half a dozen other related mods besides.

i would've liked to have seen your mod though.

#35

Brandybuck Jan 24 @ 11:44am

There are tons of LOTR related mods that never get banned. So I suspect it was some other reason.

#36

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 24 @ 1:09pm

yes it got banned because i used other peoples mods....and i know i have done wrong but anyway lets dont talk about it

#37

cameo2001 Jan 24 @ 7:20pm

Making something that fits the description youve given would be virtually impossible. First off starting a new character without skyrim unbound would be impossible as well as all the rest of the quests that go with said cities as in the stormcloaks vs. imperials quest and many others. In short doing this would probably crash your game upon opening

#38

Mr.Shaggnificent Jan 25 @ 2:02am

I would love having a world with dungeons, but no quests. that's mostly how i play anyway. the only reason i would keep the cities/towns is for the vendors and facilities(forge, smithing, etc.). and maybe housing for storage, but there are plenty of mods to get around most of that.

#39

tcmaxwell2 Jan 25 @ 11:44am

I dig you dude. Skyrim becomes boring after a while and you feel it needs Pazaz! However i do object to the fact that you cant do anymore main quests... but yeah its as simple as deleting the cells. Msg if you want me.

#40

[FIN] Walking dead Jan 25 @ 11:46am

*Originally posted by **Cpt.McDickButt**:*
this is the most brain♥♥♥♥ed mod request i've ever heard off.

Agreed. I guess asker has no idea what he even talking about. Good thing no one gonna make that mod anyway.

#41

♣AlluManZ♣シ Jan 25 @ 11:55am

*Originally posted by **tcmaxwell2**:*
I dig you dude. Skyrim becomes boring after a while and you feel it needs Pazaz! However i do object to the fact that you cant do anymore main quests... but yeah its as simple as deleting the cells. Msg if you want me.
Nhaa...I dont think i will need this kind of mod anymore

#42

tcmaxwell2 Jan 25 @ 12:01pm

Thats fair enough. Happy playing and Talos guide you.

Fluxus 🔌 Jan 14 @ 7:41pm

Skyrim Crashing: Unsolved modding mystery?

Hey guys. just got Skyrim and it booted up fine without issue, but, I wanted to add more to the vanilla game by modding it so I went, did my research and downloaded the nexus mod manager and then SKSE files. At this point I have downloaded about 40 mods from the Nexus and when I went to run the game it wouldn't run, it would just get to the Betheseda logo then 1ms of the Skyrim logo then close itself. I naturally thought that there was a bad apple in the mods conflicting so I did an order of elimination process but they all ran, but when I had more than 8 installment/mods it would crash, no matter the mod. I have searched the internet, trying everything I could that was even remotely related to my topic but alas I have no luck. If anyone can help me, I would be greately appreciated.

Showing 1-25 of 25 comments

NeS 🔧 Jan 14 @ 7:52pm

For starters are you running the game from the NMM under the SKSE program or are you running the game from Steam? If you're running it straight from Steam it will CTD every time. Now IF you are running it from NMM and click SKSE from the manager itself or the executable which SKSE creates onto your desktop and crashing then you might want to turn off all of your mods and try turning them on one by one to see where the problem is. Also, be sure that with what ever mods you are running that they are compatible and up to date as well as (personal preferrence) lore friendly mods.

#1

Fluxus 🔌 Jan 14 @ 9:00pm

I've made the shortcut and checked to see if SKSE is running when I start it up from the shortcut and I've only downloaded up to date modes. I've also done a process of elimination to see if there are any bad apples but they all work fine if I am only using 8 (or less) installments/mods D:

#2

jjb-54 🔌 Jan 14 @ 9:10pm

Kind of along the lines of NeS -

Did you read the requirements of the MODS???

IF you are running mods that Require SKSE - you should have an ICON on your desktop: SKYRIM (SKSE). Launch w/this icon ...

But it sounds more like a mod conflict - because most SKSE mods, notice I said - Most - Not All - will run under Skyrim launcher - you simply will not have the features that SKSE offers. But some indeed will NOT work without SKSE.

Do you have the DLC's?
1st - Dawnguard?
2nd - Hearthfires?
3rd - Dragonborn?

They >MUST< be loaded in this order, even if only two - they must be loaded in the above load order.

Now, the thing is some require the DLC's and/or a 2nd party mod - IE: Unlimited Bookselves, or some other 2nd party mod.

Also do the mods state - WILL NOT WORK WITH (DLC) and/or REQUIRE a DLC you may not have???

You'd be surprised at how many people miss these statements. Some due to the Author not putting it at the TOP but more at the bottom as "Fine Print".

Also you have to see if any mods conflict with another mod - as do they occupy the same Cell Spaces or do similar enough things - that they conflict??? <- this likely is what I think is going on, you have two mods that are "dragon shouting" for the same cell space.

Which means (if not already tried by the time you read this) - turn them ALL off - and turn the first one - run .... (leave it on) and turn on the 2nd one ... play - 3rd one and so on... until you find the one(s) that conflict. Be careful because it could be more than 1 mod conflicting with another. (Trust me - been there done that.)

#3

NeS 🎮 Jan 14 @ 9:17pm

Hmm... You could try the following to help out.

http://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/29865/?

Make sure that before you load Skyrim open up NMM and check that the load order is as follows:

00:Skyrim.esm
01:Update.esm
02:Dawnguard.esm
03:HeartFires.esm
04:Dragonborn.esm

From here if you're running any Unofficial patches be sure that they are up to date. If you're using any race mods make certain that the RaceCompatibilty.esm is directly after the aforementioned esm files. after that you should run smoothly. If the problem persists you might want either unstall and reinstall Skyrim in it's entirety. I had something similar like this happen a year ago and these steps actually helped me. Hopefully they'll help you.

Be warned, make sure that you read the entire description to any mod you install. Also LOL jjb-54 got to you before I did XP

Last edited by NeS; Jan 14 @ 9:18pm

#4

Snowchief Jan 15 @ 5:06pm

did you check your load order? if you don't know what to do use a program called BOSS, just run it and it will automatically sort your load order (thing is BOSS only recognizes well known mods, so downloading something that has 10 endorsments will not be sorted, you can check under Summary if all mods you have are recognized by BOSS)

#5

Fluxus Jan 18 @ 11:47am

Well, I tried all of those things, checked em all, and they didn't work so I just uninstalled then reinstalled but now I can't open like, any doors, at all ;-;
I walk up to a door, hit 'E' and the doors swing open but there is no loading screen, I just sit there. Nothing happens ;-;

#6

Fluxus Jan 18 @ 11:47am

Skyrim and it's modding problems ;-;

#7

Fluxus Jan 18 @ 12:13pm

I'm so confused, I just unselected all installed mods from the nexus plug ins, did a process of elimination, but this time, it isn't happening, it's working now but the exact same environment which caused the door problem hasn't changed
wot ;-;

#8

Fluxus 🔌 Jan 18 @ 12:14pm

But Skyrim does crash alot randomly which if anyone could help me with, I would be very grateful for you help

#9

jjb-54 🔌 Jan 18 @ 12:28pm

There are some CTD's that are just that - Random and are sadly a part of the game.

There are indeed mods that add to the frustration. Some are well noted on the MOD FORUMS - and other's can be 'unique' to the specific user, his/her's mod set up - system set up and such.

We use to call it in Typing Terms - "Hunt and Peck" - for those who did not know how to type by touch .... Finding out the specific mod(s) that are at play is no small challenge.

Feel free to Friend me if you wish and if you use Skype - I'd be glad to help you figure it out,if we can.

#10

Fluxus 🔌 Jan 19 @ 3:20am

I don't have a mic or camera at the moment but I do I have skype.
I've done BOSSing and rooted out red errors but I'm not sure why it just closes without any warning or explanation randomly when I start the game

#11

jjb-54 🔌 Jan 19 @ 11:32am

Okay - is your computer over heating or graphics card? Do not assume it is not.

But just so we understand:

1. You did UNINSTALL SKYRIM and re-installed it clean?
... You also in doing this (I failed to post this in the original post)

Went to: <Directory>:\MY GAMES\SKYRIM\

A. **Copy all folders and files into a backup folder.**
B. DELETE ALL FILES AND FOLDERS IN THE SKYRIM DIRECTORY. That includes saved games and SKSE and, well everything.

Now when you do this, remember A. (Just in case.)

Now - yes, you will have to start a brand new game.

If you have Skyrim Launch Icon only and NOT SKSE Loader ...

1. Click the Skyrim Icon and let it do it's 'setup' thing. It will re-establish the MY GAMES\SKYRIM == Folders and sub-folders.

... Also turn OFF (you do not need to delete or remove) >ALL< MODS - except any DLC's that you have. Dawnguard - Hearthfires - Dragonborn. Leave those ON. But turn OFF all other MODS.

2. If you have SKSE - then after the Skyrim Icon does 'its thing' ... then click the SKSE and it will 'do its thing' and launch the game.

Now play the game and see what happens?

If it plays fine - say play up to first Dragon Shout Earned....

Then ONE-AT-A-TIME - turn on your mods and see what happens. Understand also it could be more than one (1) mod that could be at play, if it is not an over heating or system issue.

#12

Fluxus 🔌 Jan 19 @ 8:07pm

Yeah, I did a complete clean delete of skyrim including mods aswell. I've got it to work stabaly but because of skyrim restictions it cannot run at it's full potential on my computer. My computer can definately handle it and it's never gotten hot before but the skyrim restrictions can't handle the rate I was using it before so I just turned down the in game graphics (except texture and decale quality to low/medium) and just used the mod graphic enhancers. It seems to run at a stable rate now but it crashes at a certain point if I try load any more mods in. I'm using about 117 mod files in total but if anyone else has a lot of CTD issues, I'd reccomend turning down your in game (or stock) graphics.

#13

Fluxus 🔌 Jan 19 @ 8:12pm

BUT, here is a glitch my friends if you have the unnoficial patch and Dragon Born DLC.

Sometimes if you have the unnoficial patch and you go to fight your first dragon to earn your force shout, the soul won't absorb and you cannot continue in the quest line.

Go to your mod order, make sure the Dragon Born go AFTER the patch. (It may crash a few times but you'll eventually kill the dragon)

When you kill the dragon the soul will absorb. As soon as it absorbs QS or save and exit to the desktop.

Go and change the mod order back to the Dragon Born DLC being before the unnoficial patch and you shouldn't have anymore problems with stuff like that and you'll continue your quest as Dovakiin :D

#14

VanillaWafers 🖱 Jan 19 @ 8:13pm

Wow, this has been up for 4 minutes and has so many comments.

#15

Fluxus 🔌 Jan 22 @ 8:46am

It's been up for alot longer than 4 minutes XD

#16

jjb-54 🖱 Jan 22 @ 10:58am

did you do the ONE-AT-A-TIME load of MODS?

What this means:

Turn >OFF< all mods and game works fine, correct?
... Based on what I read, you did.

But here is what you need to do, that I did not see in your post.

1st. Again, turn all mods OFF, except for DLC's (Dawnguard - Hearthfires - Dragonborn)

2nd. Turn first mod on, run and see if it plays.
... Yes? No? ...

Then leave that mod ON - and turn ON the next one. Play game and see if games still plays.
... Yes? No? ...

Do this on all mods until the CTD (Crash To Desktop) happens.

From what I am reading, you have a mod(s) that does not like the another mod. Likely because they occupy the same cell space and/or do the same thing close enough that it conflicts.

You will likely now find the problem mod.

Then go to that mod forum and re-read the description/bugs/conflicts and likely you will find it listed there .... IF not, then post it in the mod specific forum so the creator knows this is a conflict.

Happy Hunting, Dovahkiin, happy hunting!

#17

Fluxus Jan 23 @ 5:38am

I've done that, but yesterday my computer got hacked into and I've had to do a complete system restore on it so all of my data was wipped clean of it. So all of my progress on fixing my problems has been completelt erased. I've reinstalled all of my mods again but now I have all of these new problems such as random freezing and I'm finding it really hard to find skyrim enjoyable now. Just to many problems happen on it. 3:
Was it really worth the $50? I'm starting to wonder... :/

#18

Fluxus Jan 23 @ 9:41am

A tip for preventing less CTD and freezing is to turn off your steam cloud sync which will corrupt saves on a lot of occasion causing these sorts of problems. (You can do this by simply going into your library and right clicking on your Skyrim game and go to properties/updates/ and then turn of the sync at the bottom check box.) This helped me have less CTD and other problems. Of course, I still have them every 20+ minutes, but it is no biggy for me really. I've learn to become patient troubleshooting this game Q-Q

#19

jjb-54 Jan 23 @ 9:52am

Okay - Wow, sorry and I mean that about the hack job ... > .. < Been there a couple of years back and I understand.

Did the game play w/out any mods at all.

That was the first thing you should have done. Play the game w/NO MODS.

As for Skyrim and Mods - the mods are and have always been "at your own risk" ... This is an understood "policy" if you will.

Bethesda did **not** create these mods for Skyrim. Some great mod creators did and some "not so great mod creators" .... thus MODS are always -> AT YOUR OWN RISK <-

So let's start all over, as you have had too.

1st. Turn **OFF** all mods.

DLC's are >NOT< mods, if you have any:

1st - Dawnguard
2nd -Hearthfires
3rd - Dragonborn.

They > MUST < be loaded in that order.

Again -> turn **OFF** all MODS including the HighRez ... 1/3 - 2/3 - 3/3. Turn these off as well.

We want to play the game with a FRESH CLEAN START.

So do this to insure a clean start.

GOTO: <DRIVE>:\My Games\Skyrim and **move** all files and folders to a "holding" directory. Again, MOVE and make sure you do NOT COPY only.

Reason is we want to remove any and all corrupted saved games that might have been done by the 'problem mod'.

So now when you open the above directory it should be totally CLEAN (EMPTY).

When you launch Skyrim - it will reset all of these and 'rebuild' the files/folder w/the current base information. Let it.

Now launch the game through the Skyrim Launcher -> Do Not Use SKSE if you have it just yet. <-

Play the game and it should work just fine. If by some chance it does not, then we have a computer problem - and well .... (but I'll be surprised if that is the case.)

Again - Skyrim is a lot of fun without MODS. But yes, Skyrim is a lot more fun with certain mods of your choice.... But again - Mods are at our own risk. They are not Bethesda's fault or the Games fault they do not work. They are 'at your own risk'.... But most of the really good mods are safe to use in and with Skyrim. I have over 120 different mods .... But in those that I have used, there was some 'bad apples' - and some were just (because I did not always read the fine print) not compatible with my 'current' set up and use of other mods and/or DLC's .... So the end users does have to take the time to read both the DESCRIPTION PAGE with bugs and problems noted and also read the User Threads of these mods as they post "bugs" and frustrations with the mod....

Good Luck.

#20

Fluxus 📎 Jan 23 @ 9:42pm

Thanks for your help jjb-45, you've really helped me get better at trouble shooting problems 'manually' (in a way) and have increased my performance of my skyrim game by ten fold. You're a good bloke! :D

#21

jjb-54 📎 Jan 23 @ 11:14pm

So I take it - we have "lift off" - It is working??

The only thing I ask - is "Pay It Forward" - when someone comes along and needs help - give them the same time and attention and patience. :)

#22

Fluxus 📎 Jan 24 @ 12:18am

It's...hlaf working. I'll get the occasional crash every now and then with gameplay enhancement mods but I'm fine with that, I enjoy seeing Whiterun so beautiful and the armours so detailed ^-^

#23

jjb-54 📎 Jan 24 @ 9:58am

*Originally posted by **xXFluxusXx**:*
> It's...hlaf working. I'll get the occasional crash every now and then with gameplay enhancement mods but I'm fine with that, I enjoy seeing Whiterun so beautiful and the armours so detailed ^-^

Ya, I'm at the 'occasional crash' as well for the very same reasons. I have high detailed mods, for the exact same reason .. and I live with it until I get my new high end machine. It got put on hold for 'awhile' - so hopefully this spring! :)

#24

Fluxus 🔧 Jan 24 @ 10:48pm

Nice! I built my new rig not too long ago, but I need a bigger graphics card because I couldn't afford a nice flashy one at the time (getting a 4GB) and I'm getting a webcam with built in mic so I should be good! :D
Summary of this thread really, if you want to play skyrim with mods, you have to do the hard yards XD

jjb-54 Jan 23 @ 11:06am
Copy-Righted Material Update:
My friend (corporate lawyer) sent me an e-mail. (He also plays Skyrim and other games.)

"Jj, post this. I've read some legal news briefs and saw that Companies of Copy-Righted Materials are not just going to go after the creator, poster of said material. But they are also going to start going after the Web Sites that allow this material to be posted on their sites.

Their rational is this: They should be aware of what is being posted on their sites. Ignorance or blind allowance or "is this copy-righted material" and you 'trust' them to answer truthfully is not going to 'cut it'.

This is becoming more and more a "hot legal issue" and the companies are seeing $$$ being lost and abuse of their material being done willfully and/or blindly.

Again, ignorance of the law is not a valid excuse or legally accepted."

Now my friend has two fields he works in: Employment Issues and Copy-Right Issues.

So owners of sites that allow mods, you might want to be aware and go through periodically the mods on your sights.

If they have LoTR - Star Wars - Batman - Superman - Hulk - or other Copy Righted Characters or Items ... well.

No, I am not a lawyer.

But I have very strong trust in my friend, as he has proven himself to me to be "in the know" and he is paid very well by the Corporations that have him on staff ....

Last edited by jjb-54; Jan 23 @ 11:06am

Showing 1-12 of 12 comments

NeS Jan 23 @ 10:04pm

Thanks for the information Jj.

#1

Incunabulum Jan 23 @ 11:41pm

Originally posted by jjb-54:
My friend (corporate lawyer) sent me an e-mail. (He also plays Skyrim and other games.)

. . .

Their rational is this: They should be aware of what is being posted on their sites. Ignorance or blind allowance or "is this copy-righted material" and you 'trust' them to answer truthfully is not going to 'cut it'.

Uhm, your 'friend' the 'corporate laywer' is about a decade behind in how IP enforcement is done nowadays.

Remember that thing called the Digital Millenium Copyright Act (DCMA)?

Its already got 'safe-habor' immunities built into it (stuff that specifically protects websites from having to defend from the exact accusation quoted), along with a mechanism for copyright holders to assert ownership and force the take-down of infringing materials - heard of those 'take-down notices' that everyone screams about when their favorite ♥♥♥♥ dissapears from Youtube?

So no, IP owners aren't going to start attacking 3rd party sites that host infringing material - as long as the infringement is incidental to the site's main purpose. That's how Mega-Upload got boned - its was asserted that the site's *primary* purpose was to make money from infringers and the legitimate stuff was jsut cover.

#2

jjb-54 Jan 24 @ 9:56am

No - he's not. (Obviously you missed the point. Which I'm not surprised.)

What he is saying - is that 2014 is (based on the legal journals he reads - is going to be a serious crack down on Mod Creators and 3D mesh designers using Copy Righted Material for games without permission and for "Donations" and/or for "Free".

As some have stated, Mod's were / are the "gray area" - the corporations are going to move it out of the 'gray zone' and force it to become "Black & White".

And since my friend - has 20+ years of legal practice behind him and you have what?

(Arm Chair Knowledge?) - Which admittedly is not a bad thing -

But he does this for a living and is paid a salary that you likely only dream of. He is paid what he is worth in the legal discipline ...He also has Journals that he subscribes to that cost anywhere from $300.00 to $500.00 a MONTH that keeps lawyers in his discipline up-to-date. What Journals are keeping you in the current "legal now"?

Just asking.....

#3

J3X Jan 24 @ 10:00am

Did he said via what ways? Directly via sending PMs or going after the sites hosting the mods?

I hope that this is not the case.

#4

jjb-54 Jan 24 @ 11:16am

The 'plan' - is basically --

A. They have "Trolls" trolling websites, like Nexus - Steam - TESV Web-site - Origin and other such game/sites - taking "notes" of mods and users names.

B. Then looking at the 'attention' of said use of their material >IF< found.

C. Issue a Court Order for the Specific User(s) for the web-sites to disclose the users information.

This can be done, under these conditions - Proof of Use of Copy-Righted material and the order giving only SPECIFIC information for said user(s). They cannot be issued for "phishing expeditions".They will be very specific and showing specific use of said copy-righted materials by web-site and mod creators.

D. Then they go after them. How that will done, I am not in the privy.

E. As stated also - apparently if there seems to be enough interest in their products, they might actually engage in hiring 3D creators to make said models for the games and sell them for the games. <- This actually makes sense and I can see that happening.

Apparently w/the LoTR owners already have 'gone there' with their warnings and won, this is now, I see, becoming less and less a 'gray area' and more "Black & White".

The bottom line - I don't think they care who they use to "make an example of" ... and I certainly would not want to be their 'example' ..... Especially with some being "kids" - these would most likely also ruin their parents lives as well ....

As to the HOSTING sites - they will likely get 'hit too' - in that the rational is: This is your site, you should be aware of what is going on. Ignorance and/or too busy to do 'this' will not be a 'valid

excuse'. Trusting the people to answer the questions "Truthfully" - if you already see that copy-righted material is on the site ... well, that says it all right there. Basically as I saw NEXUS quickly DELETE the Mordor Mod, recently ... that is what has to be done and be seen as being done.

If you allow copy-righted material to 'slip by' - well again, short of a great legal answer, I would simply error on the side - When in doubt - toss it out.

Here is the thing;

Light Saber Mod - that is seriously and clearly STAR WARS and Light Saber is Copy Righted. G. Lucas sued a company for using the name and won, with not even a debate.

Batman and logo is Copy-Righted - The S design for Superman is TM - Copy-Righted. I think you get the idea.

Where is the 'line' on some of these - I honestly do not know?

Last edited by jjb-54; Jan 24 @ 11:22am

#5

Brandybuck Jan 24 @ 11:53am

Many companies realize that attacking fandom just hurts themselves. So they're not going after small non-commercial fan created works. They can't afford the bad will. There's also no profit in hiring someone to scour the internet for non-commercial uses of their work just so they can tell them to take it down. Companies aren't in business to be d*cks, they're in business to make money, and there's no profit in harrassing fans.

#6

jjb-54 Jan 24 @ 2:28pm

Not really - Brandy,

They have PR people that work for them ... I find this mentality actually rather sad.

Let me explain:

A. Person breaks copy-right laws.
B. Company sues.
C. Person says - Look what big bad company did to me.....
D. Response: You broke the law and blame them?

End Of Story

#7

Brandybuck 🗨️ Jan 24 @ 4:33pm

B: Company sues some guy who created a mod. Guy goes bankrupt fighting it in court. Company still has to pay its lawyers. Company loses lots of money. Fans disgusted, stop buying company's products. Company gains nothing but bad reputation.

Seriously. There are some slimeball companies out there that just don't know better and slowly bleed themselves to death fighting the little guys. But companies lie TE, DC, and Marvel are big enough to know better. They know that ♥♥♥♥ing off their fan base will lose them money in both short and long terms. Contrary to Hollywood myth, corporations do not act like James Bond villains. They're goal is to make money, not to to waste it on expensive displays of villainy.

p.s. That said, Tolkien Enterprises can sometimes be royal jerks.

#8

jjb-54 🗨️ Jan 24 @ 6:20pm

You really do not get it do you? I'm actually laughing right now.....

First off understand 99.9 % of the companies will issue a STOP order first. *Unless there were funds collected, then likely they would ask for the funds and rightly so."

Who is the "slime ball" so to speak:

The guy that breaks the law with full knowledge and willfully or the one's that protect their copy-rights?

Secondly - Corporate Lawyers are staff / retainers - which means they are paid no matter what.. It's really not adding to the corp. costs. Not at all ....

You seem to think 'fans" give a care for the person who knowingly breaks the law? They are going, "Well you gambled and lost, suck it up...." I've yet to see anyone go - "What? How dare they sue you and/or tell you to stop!!! We stand behind you...." Nope, honestly I've yet to see that even remotely happen. In all the cases that I'm privy too and such - it is, "Wow, dude - you gambled and lost. Sucks to be you."

These companies - Disney - Marvel and such will not even slowly bleed out and if you think they will ... *BLINKS* ... (not going to happen and Tolkien Enterprise is still doing very well ....)

I know for a fact a Disney Case 5 + years ago. A guy added Mickey Mouse to a game he created for FREE - (But did not get permission to use Mickey) - Disney issued a nice STOP ORDER and no longer distribute said game with Mickey. He umm, didn't think they 'meant it' ... (They did and they

took him to court and won.) Then he started to 'bad mouth' Disney. Enters another Court Order - Stop or face defamation and slander legal actions.

Judge stated: "You chose to ignore Disney and you broke the law. They are not the bad guy here, you are. Slamming them because you were not smart enough to follow the law, even when asked nicely is not Disney's fault, but yours. Any further negative words / posts and such from you towards Disney will result no small fines and further legal actions."

Disney won and won and rightly so.

Sorry you have this "Entitlement" attitude - but you and others are not entitled to do as you please with copy-righted or TM items. Sorry you are not.

And yes they would have no problems taking this task and they would win - and it would indeed "suck to be you".....

That Brandy is REALITY.

#9

Sesh Jan 24 @ 6:48pm

This is actually the first time you ever mentioned "stop orders". Everything you said up until post #9 implies that companies would take full legal action, to the extent of ruining someone for life, without warning, which would make them slime-balls.

If the hosting site cannot use the ignorance as an excuse, why can the company that made the game and the modding tools use it? This is actually a question I would like an answer to, as it seems to be a double standard.

It seems to boil down to the classification of mods and modders. As there is no "official" classification, that I know of, companies are classifying them as rival entities, whereas most modders feel they fall under "fanart", of course the party with the most money seems to win in most of these sorts of situations until other powers wiegh in.

#10

Brandybuck Jan 24 @ 6:50pm

Copyright includes the concept of Fair Use. Sorry you do not understand this. Copyright does NOT empower the holder to do whatever the ♥♥♥♥ they want. The public has rights as well, including Fair Use. Some fan works fall under Fair Use, some works do not, and many are in that fuzzy area. This isn't entitlement, this is just the facts of USC Title 17, which I have actually studied.

Yes, some assbite corporate lawyer could take it on themselves to go around suing authors of fanfic,

but they still have to answer to their bosses. I've actually seen a lawyer get called on the carpet and threatened with termination if he didn't stop harassing the company clients about minor license violations. Sure it doesn't cost anything to issue a cease and desist letter, but once you do you are committed to legal action if the recipient won't back down.

#11

jjb-54 Jan 24 @ 7:09pm

*Originally posted by **Brandybuck**:*
Copyright includes the concept of Fair Use. Sorry you do not understand this. Copyright does NOT empower the holder to do whatever the ♥♥♥♥ they want. The public has rights as well, including Fair Use. Some fan works fall under Fair Use, some works do not, and many are in that fuzzy area. This isn't entitlement, this is just the facts of USC Title 17, which I have actually studied.

Yes, some assbite corporate lawyer could take it on themselves to go around suing authors of fanfic, but they still have to answer to their bosses. I've actually seen a lawyer get called on the carpet and threatened with termination if he didn't stop harassing the company clients about minor license violations. Sure it doesn't cost anything to issue a cease and desist letter, but once you do you are committed to legal action if the recipient won't back down.

Let me know how that works out for you if you choose to ignore Copy-Rights ...

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