

ANTH 2100 Final Paper

This assignment is worth a total of 50% of your final grade

- **Proposal (5%) = July 7**
- **Bibliography (5%) = July 14**
- **Peer Review (5%) = July 25-27**
- **Presentations (15%) = Aug 2-4**
- **Final Paper (20%) = August 5**

All deadlines are at 11:59pm on the respective date.

This final product of this assignment is a brief research essay of 2000 words.

It involves choosing one of the topics we cover in this course, reading at least three outside sources on that topic, and making an argument based on your findings.

Details:

Proposal

- 300 words, double spaced
- Must include a research question based on one of the course topics
- Your question must focus on how your topic affects a specific group of people at the local level, and how people from this group experience and make sense of this issue or problem in their daily lives
- Works cited page, if using references (not necessary)
- Use Chicago style for references and formatting.

Bibliography

- You must choose three sources relevant to your research question for your bibliography.
- You may only use articles from the fields of anthropology and sociology.
- You may also use book chapters from relevant edited volumes and readers.
- The sources you use must...
 - be full-length (not introductions or book reviews);
 - be based on qualitative research (not theoretical articles or literature reviews);
 - be published from 2000-2022;
 - not be listed on our syllabus, or covered in our textbook;
 - be a work of anthropology or sociology. The source does not have to completely answer your research question (it is highly unlikely that any one source will do

so). It must be relevant enough to help you form your own answer to your research question.

Peer Review

- You will each prepare a “three minute thesis” style presentation
- In small groups, you will present your topic
- After each presentation, there will be a question period
- Take notes about each presentation, as you will write reviews for each group member
- **Your mark will be based on your review**, not on your presentation; the short presentation will serve as a rough draft for your full-length presentation, described below.

Presentations

- After receiving the consolidated comments from your peers, you will edit your presentation
- In front of the class, you will present your revised presentation
- 10 minute presentation

Final Essay

- Based on the feedback you received from the proposal, bibliography, peer review, and presentation, you will write a 2000 (max. 2500) word research essay
- Answer your own research question with an argument that is informed by the sources you found, plus at least one source from our course syllabus (this can include the textbook).
 - Look over the syllabus and identify the readings that are relevant to your topic. What have anthropologists said about this issue?
- Make a rough outline of your argument, two or three points that support it, and the evidence you will use to prove these supporting points.
 - Make sure that all the questions contained in your essay topic are answered by your argument and/or supporting points.
 - You cannot pass this assignment if your essay does not make an argument that is supported by clear points based on the course material and your own research.
- Turn your outline into prose.
 - Give yourself plenty of time to make sure you have done your best work. Check that all of your points are relevant to your argument, that your paragraphs are well-organized, and that there are no typos. Proper citations are necessary for a passing grade (see “academic integrity” below).

- Editing is crucial and often overlooked. It is nearly impossible to do better than a C if you do not edit your work.

Academic Integrity – Citations:

- To review some principles of academic integrity and methods for citing material, please watch the “How and Why to Cite” video.
- Now that the course is nearly over, it is expected that all students are well-versed in academic integrity and fully capable of citing material appropriately. For example, every idea that is paraphrased from another source must be cited with a page number. Every phrase quoted directly from another source must appear in quotation marks and be cited with a page number.
- Any essay which contains one or more instances of uncited or improperly cited material from other sources will receive a grade of zero, and will result in an Investigation of Potential Academic Misconduct as per Senate policy. There is a zero tolerance for plagiarism (intentional or not) on this assignment.

Academic Integrity – Shared Work:

- There is zero tolerance for sharing work on this assignment. Sharing work is as serious an offence as plagiarism.
- If two or more essays contain matching phrases, sentences or paragraphs, or content that is substantively the same but worded differently, these essays will all be flagged on Turnitin, receive grades of zero, and result in Investigations of Potential Academic Misconduct as per Senate policy.
- The same applies to essays with content that matches submissions in other courses and/or previous versions of this course.

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ANTH 2100

Dr. Fulton-Melanson

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Human Resources: Livestreaming as a Form of Biolabour in Neoliberal Society

The rise of neoliberalism has brought forth new definitions of labour and methods of capital accumulation, further facilitated by advancements in technology and globalization. These same advancements have resulted in the compression of time and space (Harvey 1989), making it easier for individuals to communicate and establish connections, thus highlighting the diminishing significance of place in these interactions. In addition, this deterritorialization can also be attributed to labour and the different methods of profit generation that have emerged in a capitalist, neoliberal society. This experience is embodied in the phenomenon of video-based livestreaming, which has garnered a particular popularity in China and South Korea. In China alone, over 10 million livestreamers were hosted across 900 different livestreaming platforms as of 2019 (South China Morning Post 2019). From holding simple conversations with viewers, singing, dancing, and even eating in front of the camera (a definitive characteristic of Korean *mukbangs* or eating shows): anyone with access to a smart device and an internet connection can access streams of various forms, with hosts streaming themselves in acts that are both performative and mundane.

Despite being a seemingly innocuous form of entertainment, it is undeniable that the livestreaming industry has emerged as a money-making machine, with platforms like South Korea's AfreecaTV generating a sales revenue of \$2.2 million USD in the third quarter of 2017, \$2.1

million of which was accounted for by viewer donations (Song 2018, 3). These donations are integral to these platforms' success, hence streamers' willingness to subject themselves to hours in front of the camera, baring every emotion and aspect of their personality in front of thousands who, in return, view, interpret, and respond to all of their movements in real time (Bruno & Chung 2017, 161). Streamers are also beholden to livestreaming agencies, their managers, and sometimes exploitative contracts that "engineer" every aspect of their lives (The New York Times 2021). While these conditions may elicit an image of an Orwellian nature, it is crucial to understand the capitalist motivations behind this phenomenon.

This novel job as a livestreamer has emerged as a form of "biolabour", which Morini & Fumagalli (2010) describe as labour performed through "biocapitalism", or "the production of wealth by means of knowledge and human experience". This has been facilitated by the hegemonization of neoliberal culture and, as such, in this paper, I intend to elaborate on the different ways in which this culture is expressed through livestreamers and livestreaming agencies. I argue that through neoliberalism's emphasis on capitalistic success achieved through competition and a false sense of personal freedom, neoliberal culture is proliferated by livestreaming agencies, livestreamers, and their viewers. Conversely, I will also be exploring an alternative narrative, where livestreamers utilise this form of biolabour as a means of resistance to neoliberal ideals.

In "A Short History of Neoliberalism", Susan George (1999) states that "the whole point of neoliberalism is that the market mechanism should be allowed to direct the fate of human beings".

This statement resonates with Morini & Fumagalli's (2010) sentiments regarding the emergence of biocapitalism, where human beings' "relational, emotional, and cognitive faculties" have become commodified. They assert that in an industrial-Fordist capitalist society, time was

primarily used as a measure of value, however, biocapitalism has made it impossible to “determine a clear distinction between working-time and non-working time”. Additionally, the value of the intangible, such as emotions and relationships, cannot be quantified numerically; however, biolabour makes it possible for such immaterial things to become valorized. In the case of livestreaming, streamers are often broadcasting from their own homes and bedrooms, utilising language and humour that suggests that they are presenting an authentic representation of themselves to their audiences (Hsiao 2022, 9). Livestreaming agencies will otherwise stage these environments to present a similar image, with office spaces serving as literal backdrops to the commodification of authenticity and genuine human connection, as shown in a 2021 New York Times Op-Doc sharing the life of a livestreamer in China, where different rooms in an office building were made to simulate the decor of a streamer’s bedroom.

This desire for authenticity and genuine connection can be attributed to the neoliberal rat race, where “competition is central” (George 1999) and fulfilment is found in long work hours and financial success. The true cost, as Rhee (2019) states, is a “rather depressing social context”. Case in point, the immense popularity of mukbangs or eating shows is reflective of what has been characterised as an “emotional famine” (Kim 2021, 115). Mukbangs have become a popular form of online entertainment, especially in South Korea, where the name for this type of content originates. Livestreamers will sit down to a meal and eat in front of the camera, typically holding conversation with viewers as they eat. The food consumed varies, but there is a particular allure to the consumption of traditional Korean food. According to Rhee (2019, 58), this desire for home-cooked meals has grown because, in a neoliberal society, there is a reduced opportunity to have them. Rather than hunger for actual food, there is a pervading hunger for “companionship

and comfort” instead. In this sense, livestreams provide respite from the monotony of everyday life, which has grown increasingly stressful and competitive as a result of the hegemonization of neoliberal culture.

The gendered nature of livestreaming must also be considered in this social context, as a vast majority of streamers featured on these platforms identify as female. In the case of South Korea, Seo & Choi (2020) assert that after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, neoliberalization was intensified, therefore reinforcing “the gendered social order”, resulting in “the irregularization of female labour”. A parallel may be drawn with Yilin Wang’s (2021) ethnographic work “Playing live-streaming ‘love games’: mediated intimacy and desperational labour in digital China”, where Wang herself undertakes work as a livestreamer. She describes the relationship between streamer and patron as a form of “mediated intimacy”, where interactions are carefully conducted and regulated to “accommodate to patriarchal heterosexual norms” to encourage a transaction consisting of “gift-giving, emotional intimacy, and support”. She also experienced the unfair distribution of wages, as a majority of the donations she received from her patrons went to the livestreaming agency. The potential for exacerbating gender inequalities and exploitation must be highlighted, since large profits are being generated from literal human faculties. This underscores the contradiction between potentially exploitative contracts and neoliberalism’s emphasis on personal freedom. Additionally, this highlights how the relationships established between livestreamers and their viewers are the main source of biolabour emerging out of this practice.

The true context here is that of “a declining number and instability of full-time jobs in a mature neoliberal economy, accompanied by low birth rate, decreased marriage rates, and less upward mobility” (Song 2018, 3). Despite this, Song (2018) argues that individuals are still coerced

to present a neoliberal and capitalistic persona that aspires towards a “high economic, cultural, and social capital”. Enter the emergence of *yingyo*: according to Song (2018), a dictionary definition of *yingyo* is “surplus”, however a nuanced definition of this has surfaced in the vernacular as “activities that do not carry productive outcomes or meanings but nonetheless have entertainment value for killing time ,procrastination or genuine enjoyment”. With a rise of individuals aspiring to become successful livestreamers as a result of a tough job market, livestreaming emerges as a means to “avoid the self-defeating narrative of neoliberalism”. Neoliberal culture entails preparing oneself to be an ideal competitor, by way of pursuing a higher education, foreign language proficiency, and other such skills that “makes one competitive in a globalized and cosmopolitan neoliberal economy” (Song 2018, 4). Becoming a livestreamer, or in this specific example, a livestreamer that participates in mukbangs, elicits the opposite: livestreamers can skip the aforementioned preparation and still achieve capitalistic success. Simply eating in front of a camera in your spare time can turn you into the ideal neoliberal citizen that is “capitalistic, income-generating, and productive”. Song (2018) argues that there is no actual guarantee of success in the neoliberal sense due to a lack of job security, low chances of home ownership, and limited opportunities to develop a cosmopolitan identity. In this sense, livestreaming emerges as a form of resistance to the unrealistic expectations within neoliberal society.

Despite time-space compression and technological advancements’ capacity to connect individuals, neoliberalism has managed to ultimately fragment society and exacerbate inequalities. As a result, traditional forms of labour have evolved and new methods of accumulation have emerged. However, as Morini and Fumagalli (2010) have pointed out, “the traditional hierarchical and unilateral factory form” is still replicated, particularly in the practice of biolabour. Through the

success and high profits present within livestreaming, biocapitalism's capacity to exploit and valorize "all of the psychic and physical faculties of human beings" (Kim 2021, 117) is brought to light. In addition, neoliberalism's inherent contradictions are also highlighted. Despite the ideology's emphasis on personal freedom, the deterioration of the social contexts that neoliberalism operates within do not allow for its ideals to come to fruition. This is exhibited by the exacerbation of gender inequalities and labour exploitation, with livestreaming agencies serving to maintain and perpetuate capitalist motivations, often keeping livestreamers beholden to exploitative contracts and unfair distribution of wages. With this, the hegemonization of neoliberal culture appears to have backfired, as forms of resistance have emerged within the phenomenon of livestreaming. The increase in competition has resulted in a lack of motivation and incentive to pursue neoliberal ideals, as a lack of job security and other opportunities have proven that working towards these goals does not guarantee individual success and well being. Even if one were to pursue these, what emerges is a rat race, where individuals are subjected to what has been characterised as an "emotional famine", as a result of longer work hours and a lack of opportunity to socialize. While this explains the allure of livestreaming to its audiences, the emergence of the *yingyo* internet subculture in South Korea stands in defiance to these expectations: what is exposed is a yearning for an alternative to the currently imposed system of capitalistic and neoliberal exploitation. Despite this, it is likely that forms of biolabour will only continue to evolve and its industries expand as a result of capitalistic motivations for perpetual growth. With this, it is critical to be mindful of the ways in which our online presence and consumption replicates neoliberal ideals and, in turn, helps proliferate neoliberal culture.

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