WOMEN IN CONTROL: A STUDY ON BODY AND GENDER FROM A BRAZILIAN GAMER COMMUNITY

Catherine Moura
Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Brazil

José Messias
Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Brazil

Introduction

In games, the discourse often associates interest in games exclusively with men, reinforcing and reproducing gender stereotypes. Galdino and Silva (2020) point out that "if we look at the brief history of video games, it is clear that this male hegemony is due to the fact that the scientific and technological structure, the basis of the gamer industry, is based on patriarchal and androcentric power relations" (Galdino, Silva, 2020, p. 63). This discourse is usually accompanied by the hypersexualization of female characters, justified by the supposed interest of the target audience.

These female characters in games are not always synonymous with representation. They are often objectified, passive and rescued by the "game hero", being seen as disposable or as rewards for some action, with their bodies sexualized in costumes that highlight physical attributes. The way female and male characters are represented projects expectations about who can or should consume them.

Although the Pesquisa Game Brasil (PGB, 2024) highlights that, regardless of the platform, there was an increase in the female audience compared to previous years of the survey, when we expanded to the multimillion-dollar scenario of e-sports 4, a competitive modality of video games (Macedo, 2023), the male predominance is much greater, whether in amateur or professional championships. One of the factors that hinder the insertion of women in this market is the lack of investment and incentive from those who finance this segment.

The search for recognition makes the path of these women difficult; the fact of being a gamer, commentator or streamer with prominence in the e-sports scene does not mean that the path was easy. For this reason, the work carried out by collectives, communities and associations becomes increasingly important for their permanence, being an attraction for new members, given a strong support network in such a sexist community.

Despite the exclusion and/or invisibility that women face in digital games, this has not prevented them from developing a genuine interest in this medium. However, in response to the hostile environment, many women prefer to hide their gender, assuming a neutral pseudonym (Kurtz, 2019). Nicknames ensure that no interference influences the gaming experience, minimizing aggression in the online gaming environment. The focus of this work, part of a research carried out at the postgraduate level (Moura, 2024), is on the importance of these support networks for the permanence and encouragement of these female gamers in the online gaming scene, whether in the amateur or professional sphere, as a space of resistance and new sociabilities.

Methodology

To further problematize the methodological aspects of this study, we chose virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000; 2016) in conjunction with the principles of multi-sited/multi located ethnography (Hine, 2016; Oliveira, 2017), which establishes a relationship between the fields of Anthropology and Communication. Thus, it was possible to understand the virtual community as a whole, its structure and main activities that reinforce it as a space of resistance and sociability.

Discussion, analysis and results

Brazilian and foreign researchers in Game Studies have each pointed out, in their own way, the disciplinary nature of games: their educational bias as training and repetition of patterns (Amaral, Covalesky, 2015); economic and class issues (Falcão et al., 2020 a; Falcão et al., 2020 b) when dealing with the material, commercial, infrastructure and labor aspects of the games industry and the relationship with the player/consumer in platform capitalism; or even from a perspective of race, gender and/or sexuality (Goulart, 2017; Kurtz, Falcão, Macedo, 2021; Trammel, 2022;) that continues the policy of erasure and conformation and/or domestication/docilization of the subjectivities of the so-called coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005; Mignolo, 2011).

There is a concern to understand the limits of power relations as a conditioning factor for ways of life; the nature of this disciplinary power within different organizational matrices such as capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, whiteness and cisheternormativity. Even in an environment as marked by a neoliberal agenda of Western capitalism as the video game industry, there are also spaces of rupture or

search for a common ground through games (Messias et al., 2019).

In the specific case of Game Studies, an approach that contemplates these perspectives in a complementary way, based on studies of decoloniality or decolonial thought (Mignolo, 2011), understands that issues such as gender and/or race inclusion involve criticizing the capitalist system as a producer of systematic inequalities, and on the other hand, any attempt to criticize the form of production and development of the games industry must bear in mind how much it disproportionately affects women, black people, trans people and people with disabilities, as well as other subalternized groups.

Thus, video games, as playful technical objects, are also not dissociated from the scope of action of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005;). The disciplinary nature of this power relationship produces, when appropriate, a transition between invisibility or systemic erasures, vulnerable hypervisibilities, one-dimensional and stereotypical framings (colonial gaze), among others, thus generating a constant state of precariousness. This notion, different from the idea of oppression or domination, understands that there is a dynamic relationship that is not centered only on the subjects, the so-called social actors, but distributed across institutions, devices and all sorts of objects that can take the position of subject/agent in a given state of affairs. Misogyny is a structural element of the colonial and patriarchal project that feeds/informs the industry as a whole (Hicks, 2021; Gray, 2021).

Given this context, in search of a safe and pleasant environment, many women seek representative groups or communities to form teams or even to build their network of friends. Closed communities on Facebook for female gamers are an alternative found in order to avoid an environment that is considered toxic. To preserve the identity of the community, the research corpus will focus only on essential information for its construction, without disclosing the name and its members.

Created on December 25, 2015, the closed Facebook community currently has 9,944 members, according to its description, composed exclusively of women. The management has four administrators and six moderators who coordinate its main activities. Anyone can find the community through the search tool, however, only members can see what is posted. To join it, the user must have a profile that fits the community guidelines. The group is not about a specific game. The community aims to bring together women of different age groups who have an affinity and love for electronic games. In these interactions, they share gameplays, schedule gameplay sessions, share their experiences in online matches, as well as experiences and situations that happen in the life of a gamer.

Through their rules, they introduce members to the culture that shapes their community. In "Rules of the administrators for the community", six points are highlighted: Girls Only, Respect above all, Lives and Videos, Gamer/Geek Content, Disclosure and Spam, Rules and Terms. An important point that is worth highlighting is the positioning for new members and those who wish to join. "Only GIRLS will be

accepted into the group, fake profiles or those that do not have a photo of the applicant will not be accepted, as well as profiles created in the same week of the application". The word "girls" in all capital letters is full of meanings: First, "internetês", as the language used when talking informally on the internet is popularly called. The word written in capital letters has become conventional as an expression as a way of raising the tone of voice.

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