Women gamers: Gender performativities in female eSports consumption

Mulheres *gamers*: Performatividades de gênero no consumo feminino de eSports

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RAM does not have information about the existence of open data regarding this manuscript.
RAM does not have authorization from the authors and/or evaluators to publish this article's review.

Abstract

Purpose: Women's increasing interest in eSports is an emblematic phenomenon. However, they have been facing discriminatory sexist practices based on a discourse focused on establishing gender inferiority. Thus, the present research aims to investigate how gender performativities are produced in eSports consumption by women gamers.

Originality/value: Due to a lack of discussions about female eSports consumption, the current study explores gaps in consumer culture research literature based on theoretical and epistemological concerns. Butlerian concepts of performativity are used to help better understand the conduct produced in discussions about female eSports consumption.

Design/methodology/approach: An interpretive content analysis (ICA) of 44 interviews was carried out to help better understand women gamers' perception of their experience in games, and in the cultural scenario itself, the eSports consumers' social network is formed by both practitioners and game enthusiasts.

Findings: The current analytical effort identified two dimensions: "Fight like a girl!" and "Girls just want to have fun!". It was possible to perceive that even gender performativities with different interests work as gender discourse reproducers and spreaders in both dimensions when they take place without due diligence. Ultimately, this is a complex market dispositif capable of leading the eSports scenario to a patriarchal system among its consumers.

Keywords: women gamers, eSports, gender performativity, marketplace dispositif, interpretive content analysis

Resumo

Objetivo: O crescente interesse das mulheres pelos eSports é um fenômeno emblemático. Contudo, elas vêm enfrentando práticas sexistas discriminatórias baseadas em um discurso associado ao estabelecimento da inferioridade de gênero. Assim, o objetivo da presente pesquisa é investigar como as performatividades de gênero são produzidas no consumo de eSports por mulheres gamers.

Originalidade/valor: O presente estudo explora lacunas na literatura da abordagem cultural da pesquisa do consumidor, com base em proposições teóricas e epistemológicas, devido à falta de discussões que recorram aos conceitos butlerianos de performatividade para ajudar a compreender melhor as condutas produzidas nas discussões sobre o consumo feminino de eSports.

***Design*/metodologia/abordagem:** Foi realizada uma análise de conteúdo interpretativa (ACI) em 44 entrevistas de modo a compreender a percepção das mulheres *gamers* sobre sua experiência nos jogos e no próprio cenário cultural – as redes sociais de consumidores de eSports é formada por praticantes e entusiastas de *games*.

Resultados: O esforço analítico permitiu identificar duas dimensões distintas, a saber: "Lute como uma garota!" e "Garotas só querem se divertir!". Foi possível perceber que mesmo as performatividades de gênero com interesses distintos funcionam como reprodutoras e propagadoras de discursos de gênero em ambas as dimensões quando ocorrem sem a devida diligência. Em última análise, trata-se de um complexo dispositivo de mercado capaz de conduzir o cenário dos eSports a um sistema patriarcal entre seus consumidores.

Palavras-chave: mulheres *gamers*, eSports, performatividade de gênero, dispositivo mercadológico, análise de conteúdo interpretativa

INTRODUCTION

The gaming industry has been legitimized as one of the main sources of entertainment for contemporary consumers; thus, it is becoming as relevant as the most traditional popular culture media, such as movies, music, and television (Buchanan-Oliver & Seo, 2012; Flegr & Schmidt, 2022). Competitiveness encouraged among players stands out among the ways of consuming games; it was so that this process ended up allowing to name electronic sports: eSports (Chou et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2023; Seo & Jung, 2016).

eSports is the name given to sports practiced and consumed through electronic media (Abbasi et al., 2023; Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Adams et al., 2019). Its exponential relevance as a media product is pointed out as one of the most fruitful economic phenomena (Forbes, 2022). However, this product's massive growth worldwide remains different between male and female practitioners and consumers (Darvin et al., 2020; Rogstad, 2022). Although the female audience accounts for almost half of eSports consumers, this segment faces different issues and deals with prejudice when it tries to intensify their consumption practices (Darvin et al., 2021; Harrison et al., 2006; Jang & Byon, 2021; Menti & Araújo, 2017).

Men account for the overwhelming majority of professional athletes in eSports (Ribeiro et al., 2023), whereas women are seen as a minority that must constantly prove their skills and capacity to deal with cyberbullying (Huston et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2021). Thus, barriers to women's access to eSports consumption corroborate the perception that marketplace environments where consumers of popular culture products get together are often sexist and treat practices, such as harassment and perjury, as natural events (Jenkins & Cassell, 2008; Harrison et al., 2006; Jang & Byon, 2021; Rogstad, 2022).

If, in the past, such asymmetries could limit and inhibit women's participation in consumption communities, most recently, women who are part of social arrangements focused on consuming objects linked to popular culture have been articulating on this topic to promote female identity projects in the market context (Mansvelt et al., 2015; Moura & Souza-Leão, 2019; Schelfhout et al., 2021). It is possible to see how gender concepts can be expressed in the process to outspread or challenge discourses that have been perpetuated by the market logic (Arend, 2016; El Jurdi et al., 2022; Stokes, 1998).

Since certain market practices (*e.g.*, consumption) help form and spread discourses that are not limited by logic (Cova & Cova, 2012), it is natural for

them to express subjects' positions about, and resignifications attributed to, this topic (Andéhn et al., 2020; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Among the reinterpretations working as destabilizing social norms, the concept explored by Butler (1993, 2016) describes gender as a possibility to promote discourses capable of deconstructing the aforementioned ideologies through performativity.

Performativity combines discursive and non-discursive practices through the positions taken by individuals who produce transformative effects on power relations in their lives in different spheres (*e.g.*, ideological, material, social, and technological). It is a subjective strategy, according to which individuals resist social paradigms through self-expression, in order to meet immediate demands that do not cover their singularities, although they promote transformations capable of reversing domination conditions in the long run (Butler, 2016).

These expressions made the concept of performativity eloquently addressed to reveal identities and vice versa (Scaraboto, 2015; Tissier-Desbordes & Visconti, 2019). According to Butler (1993, 2016), performativities are formed by gender-related discursive practices adopted by individuals to form identities. Identities are transitory and can be replaced, whereas performativities are adjusted and generated from historical discourses. Performativity brings many performances together; gender, in its turn, defines how this concept is produced and adjusted to a systematic relationship structure, which was referred to by Butler (2016) as an heteronormative matrix. Ultimately, gender is a concept produced by social positions linked to the sense of sexuality (Butler, 1993).

Thus, it is worth accessing the Butlerian concept of performativity to investigate the conditions experienced by eSports women gamers. This is an opportunity to fill theoretical gaps since previous investigations on female eSports consumption seemed to have avoided engaging in an interpretive discussion about how consumption practices reflect the understanding of broader social theories. Consequently, the current research aimed to investigate how gender performativities are produced in eSports consumption by women gamers.

In order to do so, the present study investigates consumer conduct established through digital marketplaces to reproduce and likely expand social structures into online environments. Thus, it proposes a discussion to expand Tang et al. (2021) understanding of notable similarities and differences in the motivation leading both men and women to engage in eSports. On the one hand, male audiences consume eSports as an opportunity to

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watch and play fun contents. On the other hand, women associated eSports with escaping from issues faced by them in their daily lives.

The originality of the current research lies on its adherence to Butlerian proposals at the time to interpret consumption practices, mainly those of massively mediated products associated with the entertainment industry. Thus, it updates discussions about the female space in the eSports community and gives voice to women gamers in one of the major entertainment consumer markets (*i.e.*, Brazil) worldwide. More specifically, the current study contributes to the hypothesis that women gamers' experiences in eSports (re)produce gender performativity during their consumption practices.

Broadly speaking, the current proposal aligns with studies that understand the gaming culture as an inhospitable and toxic scenario for women (Darvin et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2006; Jenkins & Cassel, 2008). It also assumes that the marketplace environment where eSports gamers get together works as a fandom (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018; Qian et al., 2022) since it brings together practitioners (*i.e.*, players), enthusiasts and the audience of a given media sport (Moura & Souza-Leão, 2019; Tang et al., 2021; Whannel, 2014). According to this assumption, fans' interaction provides the conditions to perform, express, and maintain social matters that represent consumers' performativity arena (Seregina & Weijo, 2017).

Finally, the current study expands epistemological and theoretical discussions in the literature about consumer culture theory (CCT) by investigating performativity produced through consumption practices (Arend, 2016; Thompson et al., 2018). Based on concepts proposed by Judith Butler, the present research explores arrangements by guiding consumer practices based on social adaptations. As an epistemological effort, it aligns with discussions about the production and maintenance of gender roles and experiences associated with market relationships (Harju & Huovinen, 2015; Joy et al., 2015). In theory, it helps better understand complex performativity, according to which market meanings overlap sociocultural norms; it is done by inserting consumers in political dispute arenas that encourage them to express their agency (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Thus, gender roles observed in consumption interactions are a process focused on establishing social status or discussing the importance of participatory actions to inhibit political inequalities associated with this topic (Bode & Kjeldgaard, 2017).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Consumers' performativity highlights complex interconnections among market meanings, consumer practices, and sociocultural norms, according to which individuals – either unintentionally, consciously, or even encouraged to – are part of the political dispute arenas they need to position themselves in (Bode & Kjeldgaard, 2017; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Based on consumption practices, it is possible to elaborate and maintain positions to promote or subvert social structures capable of affecting consumers' personal lives (Andéhn et al., 2020; Tissier-Desbordes & Visconti, 2019). Consequently, previous studies have held interesting discussions about consumers' performativity production process (Hein & O'Donohoe, 2014; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015) or even about the association between performativity and the transformation of gender roles through consumption practices (El Jurdi et al., 2022; Schöps et al., 2020; Seregina & Weijo, 2017).

From a similar perspective, the previous literature about eSports suggested that it was an environment where women players were subjected to harassment (Darvin et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2006; Huston et al., 2023; Jenkins & Cassel, 2008). Recent studies have only pointed out that the female audience is attracted to this content as a way to escape everyday issues and as a space to establish social relationships, although without interest in competitiveness aspects (Tang et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2022) or, yet, a way to discuss the importance of manifesting female identity despite the social impacts caused by successful women gamers' achievements (Cullen, 2018; Schelfhout et al., 2021). According to Rogstad (2022), studies on eSports and gender roles address three main topics: games as a masculinity construction environment, online harassment, and gendered expectations' negotiations.

Although these studies are quite enlightening, they lack interpretation of performativity produced in the eSports marketplace environment. Thus, the present study aimed to expand the discussion about consumption performativity based on eSports experiences lived by women gamers. In order to do so, the study initially explored Judith Butler's concept of performativity and its relevance to the interpretation of both consumer issues and phenomena. Next, it presents eSports as the marketplace environment, allowing consumers to watch and play its content associated with social structures and gender roles. It proposes that these dimensions occur in the consumption context, based on a mutual influence dynamics, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Theoretical framework
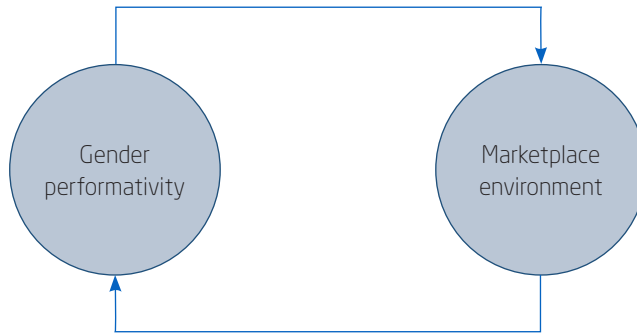
Performing gender performativity through consumption

Performances linked to consumers' gender have been explored among those manifesting identities, according to Judith Butler's thoughts on how individuals are able to shape social perceptions in legitimate ways – or not – based on consumption choices (Joy et al., 2015; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). According to Butler (1993), identities are performances according to which individuals incorporate discourses that see them as subjects. More specifically, investigating how gender works as a range of performances evokes the existence of a dominant heterosexual matrix, according to which it is necessary to renew the role played by genders in it constantly.

Gender is a compulsory arrangement of performances since acting in non-compliance with heterosexual standards simultaneously leads to ostracism, punishment, and social violence against subjects, besides producing a sense of pleasure in the existence of such a prohibition (Stokes, 1998; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015).

Avoiding gender roles – as social representation immanent to routine practices, such as consumption – is a personal and cultural challenge if one takes into consideration dominant groups' interest in defending their economic and social privileges. Dealing with gender means pursuing a habitable life of self-acceptance, even through hedonic consumption experiences, and it allows for avoiding passive conformity rooted in the process of maintaining the social contexts people live in. Nevertheless, gender seems to be even kept by those who politically fight against such representations for a mix of affective, communal, and historical reasons (Kapoor et al., 2020; Tissier-Desbordes & Visconti, 2019).

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According to Butler (1993), gender is a range of performances that allows further performativity: subjects can constitute use of what they seem to express. Thus, a power effect through which performativities can be established. However, the concept of performativity should not be mistaken for performance since they are not synonymous. Performativity lies on reframing terms discursively established through positions that support other discourses.

Performativity comprises reinterpretations capable of destabilizing social norms (*i.e.,* gender), and it can promote subjects' reflective awareness since institutionalized or ideological concepts are less fixed and more contestable in performativity than in how subjects express their perceptions about aspects of their lives (*e.g.,* consumption practices) (Andéhn et al., 2020; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015).

The analysis of consumers' performativity reveals strategies adopted by individuals who feel vulnerable before pressing market concepts (*e.g.,* norms, power structures, space, and time, among others) (Joy et al., 2015; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). From this perspective, the aforementioned concept allows consumer research to observe the purposes underlying these strategies, which seek both to meet individuals' immediate problems (*e.g.,* political, communal, affective) and needs (*e.g.,* hedonism, will, desire) and to reverse and transform domination conditions in the long run (*e.g.,* historical, economic) (Kapoor et al., 2020; Scaraboto, 2015; Tissier-Desbordes & Visconti, 2019).

According to Butler (1993, 2016), performativity can subvert or corroborate ideologies that are not limited to the context of practices capable of propelling it (*i.e.,* marketing, social, and family). By observing how linguistic and non-linguistic practices adopted by individuals reproduce norms and establish positions towards conduct, it is possible to understand how they can transform pressing logic. Furthermore, discourses already in place in society are the only possible way to identify performativity. Thus, the aforementioned author resorts to Foucault's (2014a) concept of power dispositifs, which guides subjects' lives and is intrinsic to discourses perpetuated in society. Thus, it is based on the Foucauldian concept of power relations that Butler (2016) indicates that, although gender is discursively produced, it is much more a complex power dispositif.

Gender leads individuals' lives based on pre-determined roles linked to sex and sexuality, and that is formulated through the combination of social meanings (*i.e.,* discourses) assumed by sex in different cultures. Therefore, sexuality does not belong to subjects; instead it belongs to social practices

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that are part of their daily lives and to the culture they are inserted in (Butler, 1993).

The way most gender clashes are dealt with is based on the gender distinction discourse that, originally, promotes differentiation between men and women (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015; Tissier-Desbordes & Visconti, 2019). From this perspective, the existence of gender-related concepts presupposes discursive practices. If, in the past of Western history, bodies were "docilized" to guide individuals' lives (Foucault, 2014b), nowadays, society is governed by the process accounting for determining genders in promoted discourses (Butler, 2016).

These discourses form the epistemes found in ideologies promoted by power dispositifs. Consequently, the gender trouble is not limited to those who actively struggle to change historical perceptions but to society as a whole (Butler, 1993). Moreover, gender performances should be carried out in their fullness and with caution since there are natural pitfalls in the debate about gender in contemporary society (Butler, 2016).

On the one hand, the social emancipation of historically constructed concepts is done by evoking discourses denied by it. On the other hand, attempts to change the gender discourse naturally divide those who engage in the cause and those who do not; this process eclipses the attention of both parties and society (Butler, 2016). According to Butler (1993), it is essential to deconstruct the discourse that substantiates the power dispositif that led us to a patriarchal society. Moreover, the gender issue cannot only be addressed by activists but also by society as a whole. This matter not only calls patriarchal domination into question, but it is also, and more intensely, the way individuals socially identify themselves.

eSports: marketplace environment

Consumption is a cultural practice capable of leading consumers to experience a state of impotence due to social asymmetries perpetuated by market interactions (Baker et al., 2005; Henry, 2005). This issue is quite evident in the way women who consume games are treated since it reproduces gender-related ills and hostilities towards other popular culture consumer arrangements (Harrison et al., 2006; Jenkins & Cassel, 2008).

However, these same asymmetries perpetuated in market relations have driven the manifestation of gender identities through intense relationships between consumers and objects of popular culture (Mansvelt et al., 2015;

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Moura & Souza-Leão, 2019). Broadly speaking, identity projects performed through consumption reflect broader matrices of cultural conventions, rules, symbolic distinctions, and expectations that regulate consumers in socially constructed practices through marketplace performances (O'Leary & Murphy, 2019; Thompson et al., 2018).

The marketplace environment is a cultural consumption space guided by a market logic, according to which consumers can interact with each other and co-produce performances – either through conflict or engagement with other marketing agents who represent their own values (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Elsharnouby & Maher, 2023). According to Kozinets and Jenkins (2022), social construction enabled by consumer performances is the way fans tend to converge and interact about what they consume. Based on this process, they invariably manifest and elaborate positions associated with the social structures they are part of.

Fans are specialized consumers who intensively and continuously connect to objects produced by the entertainment industry and their peers (Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018; Guschwan, 2012). Fans' context and participatory practices are often evoked – in a conceptual manner – to address one of the main cultural products consumed nowadays, namely games (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018).

As a cultural product, games became a highly profitable industry at a global scale: they are mostly categorized as a form of entertainment, besides being seen as a lifestyle that works as a cultural activator for many individuals (Abbasi et al., 2023; Huston et al., 2022). Games refer to a playful practice that, based on the technological appropriation performed by players, allows them to hedonically consume experiences through different aspects associated with the product itself (*i.e.*, graphics, narratives) (Buchanan-Oliver & Seo, 2012; Heere, 2018). This factor explains how, back in the 1980s, the game industry stood out as a market capable of combining and adapting objects deriving from the entertainment industry (*e.g.*, movies, cartoons, comics), as well as expanding individuals' opportunity to consume fictional universes (Borowy & Jin, 2013; Taylor, 2012).

The continuous technological evolution and popularization of internet access have consolidated both the games industry and its consumers: the cultural product reached the *status* of sports practice (Flegr & Schmidt, 2022; Seo & Jung, 2016). These games were called eSports and started to be consumed in an organized and competitive way that has enabled players to improve their skills by appropriating different technologies (*e.g.*, computers,

smartphones, video games) with access to the internet (Chou et al., 2023; Seo & Jung, 2016).

Therefore, eSports consumers are associated with the fan culture since they continuously seek to improve their skills as players and strengthen their relationships with peers in order to mark their position in this group (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Qian et al., 2022). According to Abbasi et al. (2023), eSports consumers are naturally engaged in practices that promote what is consumed by them (*e.g.*, purchase intention, co-production, commitment to the community, word of mouth, and recruitment). Gamers believe that cultural exchanges help them express their commitment to expanding other people's interest in the media consumed by them.

More specifically, eSports competitiveness has become so emblematic that players' mental capacity started to be interpreted as sporting performances, whereas gamers themselves started to be seen as cyber athletes (Huston et al., 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2023). Thus, the increasing number of organized competitions, broadcasts, and players allows stating that eSports are legitimized, simultaneously, by what Whannel (2014) points out as sports practice exclusively relevant for its players and as media formatted and produced for the audience. However, expanding eSports' reach to new audiences still reproduces the long-lasting gender discrimination observed in sports (Huston et al., 2023; Kraft et al., 2021) and game markets: women who try to launch themselves as players are often the target of perjury and harassment since broadcasts are often filled with misogynistic comments (Harrison et al., 2006; Menti & Araújo, 2017).

Regardless of the growing female interest in games, the way their practitioners and enthusiasts interact seems only to be aimed at the male gender. Not surprisingly, this aspect is pointed out as one of the factors inhibiting women's greater interest in, and public manifestations about, the cultural product consumed by them (Jenkins & Cassel, 2008; Shaw, 2011). Recent studies have indicated that the female audience prioritizes affective relationships between peers (Yu et al., 2022; Huston et al., 2023) or uses these media products to escape daily life issues (Tang et al., 2021).

Consequently, three major perspectives can explain the small space given to women in eSports. On the one hand, there is a barrier that keeps inhibiting female interest in eSports. Male gamers experience hostility between peers, whereas women gamers are discriminated against (Darvin et al., 2021; Huston et al., 2023; Darvin et al., 2020). On the other hand, it is possible to change this scenario since the success achieved by women

gamers sets the conditions for female identity expressions in eSports (Cullen, 2018; Schelfhout et al., 2021). Furthermore, Rogstad (2022) has indicated that the inference of female roles with eSports is assimilated to male assertion. Thus, eSports appears to be a space for gender struggles that reproduce social structures.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The current study followed the indications of Arnould and Thompson (2005) about how the CCT can be understood as the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action. Accordingly, it reinforces how the expansion of the alternative tradition of consumer research focused on exploring cultural relationships can be achieved through interpretive approaches (Borraz et al., 2021; Hollebeek & Belk, 2021; Rokka, 2021).

Semi-structured interviews, based on the combination of naturalistic consumer research techniques (Kozinets, 2010; Moura & Souza-Leão, 2019) and interviews (McCracken, 1988; Weinberger et al., 2017), were herein selected among the alternatives available to implement the aforementioned approach. These interviews reflect a combined effort between interviewer and interviewee, who actively participate in a creative interaction to produce a conversation that represents the context or cultural phenomenon to be investigated (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Moisander et al., 2009).

The alternative version of an analysis established between marketing studies was herein selected for data analysis purposes, namely interpretive content analysis (ICA) (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2021; Souza-Leão et al., 2020). Moreover, if one takes into consideration that constructs are subjective, using an interpretive approach to analyze contents allows coders to infer meanings arranged in the individual-content relationship that answers (alone) can rarely expose (Milani, 2019; Neuendorf, 2011). Thus, the following subsections present data collection and analyses carried out in the current research.

Data collection

Researchers performing the current study adapted the concept of cultural *entreé* proposed by Kozinets (2010) after identifying how eSports gamers interact in major social networks (*i.e.*, Facebook, Instagram). At this research stage, they sought to understand and become familiar with

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different levels of the investigated phenomenon (*i.e.*, its culture, communities, and members). Two of them are Brazilian eSports practitioners and enthusiasts since the 2000s, whereas the others are enthusiasts of other popular culture segments.

Thus, as an axiological aspect of the current research, it is valid to emphasize that the aforementioned researchers act as acafans of the investigated phenomenon (*i.e.*, individuals who acknowledge their intense consumption relationship with the object of popular culture addressed in the current study). Cristofari and Guitton (2017) categorize this researcher's ability as a beneficial source to research: firstly, because it is a familiarization process that enables capturing and analyzing the investigated phenomenon; secondly, because it requires greater sobriety from researchers at the time to adopt research quality criteria.

The herein conducted interviews were carried out by the same female researcher to make the conversation more comfortable for interviewees. It takes effort to establish trust with interviewees and to make them feel more willing to disclose details and personal experiences about the investigated phenomenon (Arsel, 2017; Seregina & Weijo, 2017). Moreover, the aforementioned interviews were conducted online, using information and communication technologies (ICT) to get closer to the eSports environment and minimize physical limitations (Dean, 2019; Reid & Duffy, 2018). For ethical reasons, the current study followed the suggestion by Lo Iacono et al. (2016) about asking for interviewees' permission to record, store, transcribe, and use the collected information for research purposes.

Weinberger et al. (2017) suggested starting the interviews with a broad and reflective question herein, followed after the interviewees' identification data collection was over. This approach was used to encourage participants to share their experiences and personal stories associated with the investigated consumption practices, as well as to establish a trust and complicity relationship between researcher and interviewee.

Then, six guiding topics were developed by following the aforementioned suggestion, to meet the aim of the current study. Table 1 presents these guiding topics and a protocol with a list of possible questions, which, in turn, represent attempts to approach each topic during the conversation with the interviewees.

Table 1

Interviews' guiding topics

Code	Guiding topic	Protocol questions
GT1	eSports' importance in her trajectory as a gamer	How did you become an eSports player, and how important are games to your life?
GT2	eSports' influence on social cycles and affective relationships	Does your family know and support you as an eSports player? Do you have friends who are also interested in eSports? Do your friends know you are an eSports player? Have you made friends in eSports matches?
GT3	eSports-related discussion on social networks and digital platforms	Do you often use social networks to get information about eSports? Are you part of an eSports forum or community? Do you identify yourself as a woman in eSports discussion forums?
GT4	eSports' shame(less) as female player	Do you identify yourself as a woman during eSports matches? Do you have contact with other players during eSports matches? Do you have preferences in teaming up with women to play eSports?
GT5	eSports' barrier (or harassment) to female players	Have you ever been harassed by interested eSports players? Are you the target of prejudice for being a woman among interested eSports players? Are you comfortable with the way women are portrayed by eSports characters?
GT6	eSports' space for Brazilian female players	Do you consume eSports content on Brazilian women's social networks? Do you follow or like any Brazilian eSports player? How do you see space for eSports players' professionalization in Brazil?

As previously mentioned, a broad question focused on exploring the interviewee's relationship with the investigated phenomenon (GT1) was the starting point of the interviews. The conversation reached other topics depending on the answers provided by the interviewees. Thus, two blocks guided the course of the interviews. One of them addressed interviewees' experience as women talking about eSports in broadcasts and events (GT2 and GT3), whereas the second addressed self-affirmation issues associated with women gamers (GT4, GT5, and GT6). However, it is worth emphasizing that some questions have stimulated responses that met the aim of more than one guiding topic. Therefore, only few questions were asked in some interviews since each guiding topic already had answers.

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In total, 44 online interviews were conducted through ICT between March and October 2020, based on using verbal (Skype, WhatsApp) and textual (Instagram, Email) techniques. The social network Instagram was used to find women who publicly declared themselves eSports gamers in content posted on their profiles. This social media platform was used to reach participants from all five Brazilian regions (Table 2).

Table 2

Interviewees region

Brazilian region	Number of interviewees
Northern	4
Northeastern	13
Midwestern	2
Southwestern	18
Southern	7
Total	44

It is worth highlighting that the ages of the interviewed women gamers ranged from 18 to 30 years; moreover, they declared themselves as beginners (*i.e.*, the ones consuming eSports for less than one year), well-ranked players, and even as ambassadors of media objects (*i.e.*, digital influencers). Interviews were conducted by a female researcher and organized in single-spaced documents written in Times New Roman 12-point font, based on the transcription of verbal techniques and on the copy of textual techniques. In total, 29,354 words, distributed on 106 .doc pages, composed the analyzed research corpus; each interview took from two to eight pages, on average.

Efforts herein made to find participants and build the research corpus to be analyzed have adapted Seregina and Weijo's steps (2017) to conduct interviews with popular culture consumers since the current study sought to heterogeneize interviewees' profiles by considering the investigated consumption ethos. Moreover, the current study followed Fontana and Frey's proposal (2005), according to which the depth of interviewees' answers is the factor enabling the validation of interviews conducted based on the interpretive approach. Nevertheless, the data collection process conducted here also agreed with Kraft et al.'s suggestion (2021) to conduct online interviews in investigations dealing with sports consumers' digital habits.

Finally, the current study sought to meet two criteria set to build the research *corpus* in order to define the number of interviews to be carried out, namely saturation and representativeness (Döringer, 2021; Guest et al., 2006). Saturation took place around interview n. 35, likely due to two issues: the heterogeneity of interviewees' local context (as shown in Table 2) and the fact that some answers were relatively short and made it hard to reach saturation. At this point, it is worth pointing out that some interviewees could provide long answers to some of the explored topics, whereas most of them used few words to report simple events; they were not forced to provide longer answers to avoid making them feel uncomfortable talking about sensitive topics. Thus, a complementary effort was made to meet the representativeness criterion and to reach 44 interviews.

Data analysis

ICA was performed to address data collected during the interviews and to better understand the meaning(s) of the interviewees' statements (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). This data analysis method can be used to qualitatively describe and interpret collected data by classifying the research elements into codes, categories, and dimensions based on the researchers' objectives (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). According to Neuendorf (2011), it allows researchers to capture institutionalized gender aspects in sociocultural practices.

As an alternative to traditional approaches for content analysis, ICA adopts a quite sensitive epistemological perspective to investigate explicit and contextual aspects (Souza-Leão et al., 2020). Consequently, it appears to address Milani's concern (2019): performativity-related exercises should be investigated through analytical approaches that take into consideration the combination of factors, such as context, to enable both the production and maintenance of Butlerian performativity.

Guidelines introduced by Paiva et al. (2011) about the quality criteria of qualitative research were followed to qualify the herein performed data analysis. According to Paiva et al. (2011), the analysis process must comprise data transcription to enable complete observation of the collected content, as well as capturing and interpreting any particularity of the research *corpus* in descriptively and orderly presented results. ICA steps and quality criteria met in the current study are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

ICA steps and quality criteria

ICA steps

Quality criteria
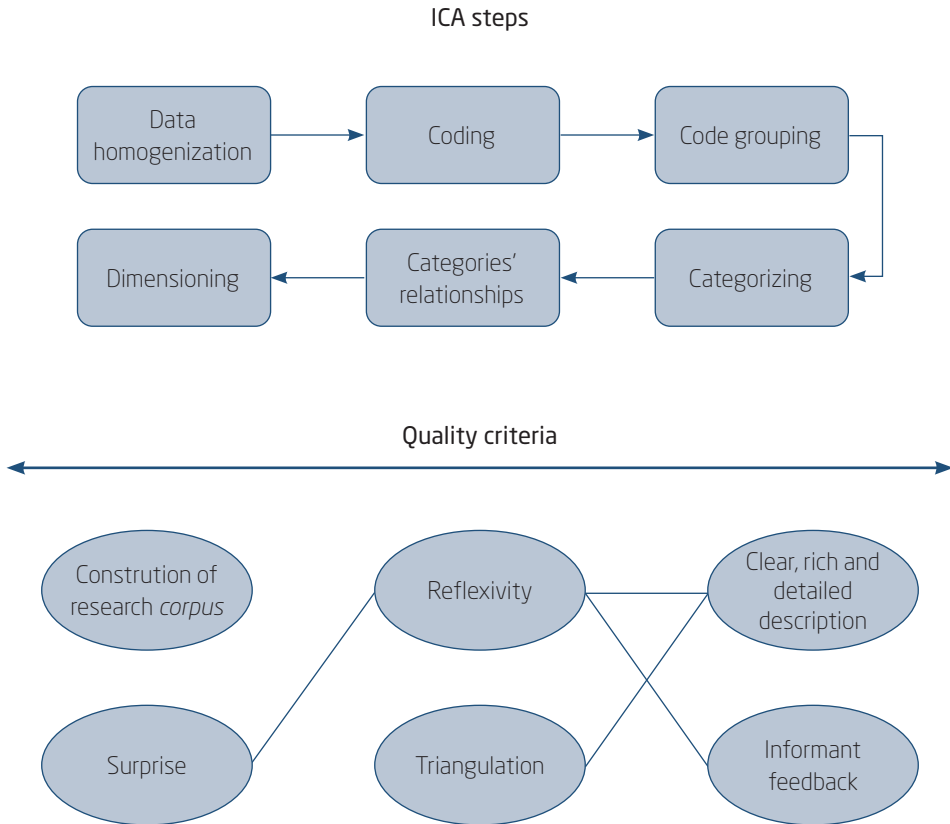
Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Paiva et al. (2011).

As previously mentioned, all 44 interviews carried out between March and October 2020 were transcribed and organized to make the analyzed data homogeneous. The initial reading was performed to generate a preliminary coding capable of representing the signs found in the stored content. Both procedures enabled the construction of the research *corpus*. Codes were reviewed at the end of the first reading to investigate the closeness between their contents and to check whether there was any duplicity in them. At this point, they were grouped, leading to surprising results concerning their reflection and triangulation by the authors. This validation process allowed proposing categories that, like the previous level, were similar to the others;

thus, it was possible to identify relationships between categories. A new round of reflection and analysis validation by researchers (*i.e.*, triangulation) was carried out so they could suggest interpretations to reflect the signs observed in the results. These dimensions were elaborated to be presented in a clear, rich, and detailed description of the results (see section below) and sent as feedback to interviewees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the herein adopted analytical procedures, it was possible to identify two dimensions representing gender performativities experienced by female eSports players. Thus, the first section describes these dimensions based on their articulations with categories and on the codes defined in the analytical procedures.

The following section addresses how these dimensions set an interpretation to answer the research question. The present theoretical contribution is summarized here by taking the eSports marketplace as an environment capable of producing gender performativities during women gamers' consumption experiences.

Results description

It was possible to identify 19 codes during the interviews' transcription, organization, and reading processes. Researchers have proposed forming groups in a second round of analysis to reflect on the meaning of the codes and the process to refine them; these groups turned out to form five categories.

A further analysis procedure – similar to the previous one – defined the relationships between categories into two dimensions: "Fight like a girl!" and "Girls just want to have fun!". These dimensions correspond to the two gender performativities identified in the current study. Table 3 presents the syntagmatic association among the identified codes, categories, and dimensions.

Table 3

List of codes and categories

Codes (Cod)	Categories (C)	Dimensions
Inappropriate attitudes towards women gamers (Cod01)	Harassment to women gamers (C1)	Fight like a girl!
Downgrading women gamers (Cod02)		
eSports' connivance with insistence from male gamers (Cod03)		
Lack of space for women gamers (Cod04)	Fight for women gamers' space (C2)	
Lack of female representatives in eSports (Cod05)		
Lesson given by women gamers (Cod06)		
Women inspire other women to be gamers (Cod07)		
Opportunities for women gamers (Cod08)		
Gamers who virtually declare their gender (Cod09)	Women gamers' support (C3)	
Gamers who socially declare their gender (Cod10)		
Support among women gamers (Cod11)		
Family support for women gamers (Cod12)		
Women gamers prioritize fun (Cod13)	Active participation of women gamers (C4)	Girls just want to have fun
Disclosure by gamers (Cod14)		
Gamers do not see gender (Cod15)		
Gamers in harmony with everyone (Cod16)		
Comfort in being a gamer (Cod17)	Irrelevance in being a female gamer (C5)	
Ashamed to promote herself as a gamer (Cod18)		
Lack of interest in promoting herself as a gamer (Cod19)		

The first two subsections descriptively address the research results: dimensions, categories, and codes. Categories represent the reflection of signs found in the interviewees' speech, which were assimilated into interdisciplinary readings about the investigated phenomenon. In contrast, the codes are an adaptation of gamers' speech, presented in excerpts from the research *corpus*.

Fight like a girl!

This dimension deals with women gamers' actions and positions regarding the fight for an eSports scenario that does not discriminate against them due to their gender. One of its categories addresses how women gamers feel harassed (C1). Interviewees' reports have evidenced their discomfort about how they are individually and collectively treated in the eSports scenario. Thus, it is possible to identify three codes associated with harassment against women gamers in eSports.

Based on the first code, women gamers point out that they are often the target of inappropriate actions taken by players (Cod01). They are usually asked about their personal life and their knowledge about games during eSports matches or interactions on social networks about this topic. A gamer's speech reflects this aspect when she reveals that she has already experienced negative situations during some matches:

> I usually play with friends; we have groups on discord to chat while we play. Sometimes, they end up inviting other people to play together and things like that. Not so much today, but in the past, when someone new arrived and discovered that there were women on the call, their tone of voice changed completely. It ranged from bad jokes to insinuations. One event that struck me happened when I achieved a higher rank in a game, and I was automatically accused of being an elojob (*i.e.,* a player who pays for a better rank) because they did not accept that women can play well.

Similarly, women gamers feel like they *are inferior* (Cod02) to male gamers just because they are women. Among the experienced uncomfortable situations, one finds reports of times when women gamers are attacked through discourses focused on emphasizing their "inferior" role in society. As an example, it is worth emphasizing the answer of a woman gamer about how she feels about being a woman in the eSports scenario:

> [. . .] I still find several sexist people, and it makes me a little uncomfortable. This is not always the case, but when it happens, it is either the infamous "send a nude" or "go back to the kitchen." So, I never know how to feel. It is uncomfortable, and we never know what can happen.

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Accordingly, there is the perception of normalized attempts to seduce women (Cod03) due to the way women gamers are constantly approached and often harassed by male players interested in having affective relationships that go beyond the eSports environment. The following excerpt presents the answer of another participant about having experienced a bad situation during the matches just because she was a woman – it illustrates this code. "Besides being humiliated with the comment that because I am a woman, I should be washing dishes rather than playing, other mega disgusting annoyances take place in several online matches."

The next category presents the way women gamers constantly fight for a larger space (C2) in the eSports scenario. In this scenario, they understand that a more outstanding presence of women gamers is the way to mitigate the disparity between men and women. Thus, they need to increase female participation in this scenario to conquer their space. This category is formed by five codes.

The first one refers to why there is a lack of space for women gamers (Cod04) who practice eSports. They perceived a lack of interest, both by the gaming community and the game culture, in equalizing how women and men are treated and acknowledged in this environment. One participant provided the following answer when she was asked about the factors encouraging her to play:

> The graphic is good, the proposal to have different characters from different ethnicities is great [...]. But there is over-sexualization of female characters and, oftentimes, their standardization for male gamers, rather for the female one.

Likewise, there is the feeling that women are missing from eSports (Cod05), whether in terms of the number of participants in matches and interactions in online communities about the topic or how they position themselves to influence players to respect other women. An interesting ascription by one of the interviewees reveals this aspect:

> Because, although they say they are mixed championships, they hardly select women for the team. And when they do it, it is very demanding; there are not many accessible or big female competitions. I even tried to assemble a female LoL (*i.e.*, League of Legends) team, but it was also hard to find girls who want it.

The following code refers to how women need to impose respect when they use their skills/performance in matches to teach a lesson to gamers (Cod06) who demean them because of their gender. The following answer about uncomfortable situations experienced by women gamers during the matches stands out:

> Yes, several times. In one of them, a boy took me down for being a woman. I just kept my mouth shut because ignorance speaks, and intelligence makes no guesses [...]. And I showed him that I can overcome all challenges, regardless of my gender.

Another code indicates that the presence of women gamers is an inspiration for other women (Cod07). When female players realize that they are not alone, they feel more encouraged to keep playing and participate in online discussions about eSports. In addition, there are reports on how important it is for women to become professional gamers. Consequently, this code is correlated to the one that celebrates the growing opportunity for women in eSports (Cod08). According to players, seeing other players succeed in this scenario is a positive and important factor. The two codes above can be exemplified in an interviewee's speech about a gamer she admires in the eSports environment:

> Well, there is a team on YouTube that I admire a lot; its name is LOUD. Many women gamers are part of that team, and I get a lot of inspiration from it. I admire LOUD Babi a lot; she is a professional player. She is important for me because she is a girl and because she plays eSports. It encourages me just to watch her live broadcasts (*i.e.*, gaming on social media).

The other category expresses support for women gamers (C3); the way they discuss how to make public that they are women and eSports practitioners is an extra factor in expanding their space and participation in this environment. Although women gamers acknowledge the gaming culture-related issues in welcoming women, they feel that the support from third parties, regardless of whether they participate in the eSports scene, gives them the strength to face such adversities. Thus, four codes were associated with this category.

The fact that women gamers virtually declare their gender (Cod09) attests to the importance of signaling to individuals taking part in online

communities and matches that they are dealing with a woman who wants to be treated with respect. Likewise, women also feel that they must declare themselves as women gamers in social relationships (Cod10) in order to gain respect for their nerdy practices. The answer to how a gamer feels about being a woman in eSports provides clues to these two aspects.

> I feel very happy to participate in a group that has been growing and gaining visibility, but I am also upset about having few opportunities to compete in championships or to create teams, besides the strong discrimination against us in online games […].

The code referring to how women gamers support each other (Cod11) reveals that they seek female companies to have better experiences in eSports. The following excerpt presents the answer given by a participant who was asked if she knew other women gamers: "Yes, my line (*i.e.*, the lineup of gamers to start) is formed by six girls and, soon, we will be seven. Apart from my guild (*i.e.*, clan gamers gather in), we are approximately 35 girls, and, soon, we will be 50".

Moreover, women gamers acknowledge that family support for eSports is essential (Cod12). According to them, the encouragement of relatives and the security of doing something with them was the factor encouraging them to join or remain in an inhospitable environment towards women. This aspect is emphasized in the speech by two interviewees who explained how they relate to eSports.

> I had a PS3 and played Call of Duty all the time; when it was launched in a mobile version, I downloaded it right away. I am the only girl in the family, and I was always among uncles and cousins who played games a lot. Not exclusively CoD mobile, but several others.

> I usually do it. No one understands that, but my cousins and my brother do, so we have a lot in common about it.

Girls just want to have fun!

This dimension expresses how women gamers reproduce social habits that perpetuate gender differentiation in the eSports environment. Its first category represents the active participation of women gamers (C4) who consider themselves equal to other members of the eSports environment.

They account for promoting and improving the culture they are part of. Four codes support this category.

The first code indicates how women gamers prioritize fun (Cod13). According to some women gamers, pure leisure is why they join the eSports environment. The way women gamers understand how they need to disclose eSports (Cod14) regardless of their gender is an aspect close to those above. The way two interviewees view other players' streaming illustrates these perceptions.

> I play mostly for fun, leisure, and entertainment, so I don't care about winning or losing. I play for myself, not for others, so I do not broadcast it because it does not matter who is watching it; the important thing is who is there playing with me in that match. So, outsiders do not matter to me, but I think it is interesting when people broadcast (*i.e.*, streaming) and I play with them. I feel with them, I live that experience with them.

> No, I play just for fun. I don't follow much of a game or male influencer; I have different tastes, and maybe the reason is not to compete.

Another perception about this particular element is that some women gamers do not see gender (Cod15) as a relevant factor in eSports. They believe that the relationship with players is established based on individuals' ability to play, not on players' gender. Similarly, they promote harmony between genders (Cod16) since they believe it is the best way for eSports to keep on evolving. One interviewee gave clues about these two codes when she was asked about her relationship with male players:

> Yes, I spend all day calling them (*i.e.*, her male friends she plays with) via Discord. If I spend 1 hour without talking to them, my life is not the same [laughs]. I will live with some of them at the game house from the next month onwards; they are my family.

According to the last category, there is no relevance in politicizing the fact that they are women gamers (C5). Although women gamers acknowledge the practice of gender differentiation between men and women in the eSports scope, they believe that it should be used for the sake of fun or even ignored. The current study identified three codes associated with this category.

One of the aforementioned codes reveals certain comfort in being a female player (Cod17) when it comes to the way some gamers use their gender to be helped in or to benefit from the eSports environment. One interviewee reported her experience of being a woman in this scenario and took the opportunity to tell how she has already seen odd situations; one of them exemplifies the aforementioned aspect:

> If we show our face or any part of our body, they will give something to us as a gift. For example, in LoL (*i.e.*, League of Legends), it can be a skin, or in other types of games, gold can be a reward the game allows to be transferred to other gamers. I do not know, like an artifact, a weapon, clothes, to our avatar. If they want us to do something for them, it involves sexualization, you know?

On the other hand, there is also a preference for not declaring oneself as a female player (Cod18). It happens because women understand that they do not need to disclose their gender in order to play since this information often has negative impact on their experiences. Therefore, they hold this information to ensure a better experience in eSports. An interviewee's speech exemplifies this code quite well.

> Besides being minority in eSports, when women talk about a game classified as a boy game, men end up treating them with ulterior motives or insulting them. That is the reason why I use Nicks that do not define my sexuality. This way, I can play in peace.

Finally, there is a lack of interest in promoting oneself as a female gamer (Cod19). Some women believe that it is not even necessary to inform others that they are women or tell their friends and family that they practice eSports because they see this practice as a hobby. The answer of one of the interviewees about whether she usually tells or talks about eSports with her social group outside the gaming scene illustrates this aspect: "Not always. I don't think it makes any difference to me to represent myself with any female character."

Results discussion

Understanding the structural neglect in the eSports scenario and how players treat women enabled identifying different gender performativity

forms. Women gamers' speeches have emphasized the perception that they try to establish an equal environment between genders. Consequently, this perception is reframed by disparate positions: the first one reinforces the importance of providing emotional and social support for female practitioners in a marketplace environment that is mostly dominated by men. The other one states that prioritizing political movements distorts the original purpose of becoming involved in this scenario; thus, engaging in gender issues is not valid.

Although the aforementioned positions deal with two dimensions that present otherness to each other, they are united by the dynamics of multiple influences. Thus, it is possible to say that the findings in the current research meet the proposal of the theoretical framework (see Figure 3) since they represent different gender performativities experienced through the consumption of a single marketplace environment (*i.e.*, eSports).

Figure 3

Theoretical framework reviewed based on research findings

"Figth like a girl!"

Gender performativity

Marketplace environment

"Girls just want to have fun!"
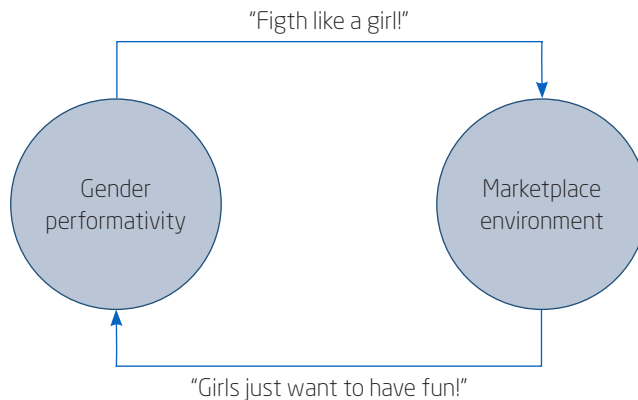
On the one hand, the dimension "Fight like a girl!" shows how consumer experiences can represent a more political character, and it starts from gender performativity to change the market environment in which they operate. On the other hand, the dimension "Girls just want to have fun!" highlights the hedonic features of consumption as the main factor encouraging individuals to engage in eSports (*i.e.*, marketplace environment). However, this environment invariably needs to deal with gender issues (*i.e.*, performativity).

Thus, both empirical dimensions allow inferring that women eSports gamers' experiences reflect exercises in gender performativity production.

Consequently, these two dimensions enabled reflections based on Judith Butler's theoretical concepts. Extrapolating this reflection enables the establishment of answers to the current study and the proposal of contributions to meet the theoretical gap defined as research purpose.

Gender performativities in the eSports environment

The first three-dimension category, "Fight like a girl," attests to elements that inhibit women's interest and participation in the eSports marketplace. The combination of complaints against harassment (C1), fight for female space (C2), and support between women (C3) indicates that, despite having their space limited, women gamers have been fighting against this paradigm.

Movements against harassment in eSports (C1) reflect how fan communities founded by men often make sexism natural among its members. More specifically, downgrading women, based on the strong sexualization of images and actions of female characters, is an action significantly encouraged among gamers (Harrison et al., 2006; Jang & Byon, 2021; Jenkins & Cassel, 2008). Therefore, it reflects remarkable vulnerability experiences through consumption practices described by Baker et al. (2005) as the way consumption can lead to a state of impotence due to an imbalance in market interactions or product consumption.

The fight for female space (C2) is an effort according to which consumer practices are appropriate and reframed to promote female identity emancipation as long as they enable resistance to dominant social meaning structures (Mansvelt et al., 2015; Moura & Souza-Leão, 2019; Rogstad, 2022). According to Henry (2005), it is natural for consumers to express their desire for empowerment and disempowerment experiences based on their own experiences, which reflect social disparities and differentiated access to material and economic resources.

Moreover, it is necessary to promote support between women gamers (C3) since typically male sports practitioners sustain the disparity in encouragement provided to women (Huston et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2021). Women, then, end up seeking peers to support themselves in harsh environments like eSports (Harrison et al., 2006; Shaw, 2011). According to Valentine (2007), the game consumption process naturally segregates those who do not fit the mainstream profile; thus, it is necessary to understand how these groups articulate with the game content and simultaneously organize themselves to set a relationship with the culture they want to be part of.

Consequently, the dimension "Fight like a girl!" goes beyond the understanding that the presence of female players in the eSports environment is a mainstay for the expression of gender identity (Schöps et al., 2020) or the means to stand against gender discrimination (Darvin et al., 2021; Darvin et al., 2020; Huston et al., 2023). It can be interpreted as a political effort to establish gender performativities through consumption practices (Tissier-Desbordes & Visconti, 2019).

Thus, the first dimension herein observed exemplified Butler's (1993) understanding of the importance of reporting gender issues so that changes can be implemented. From this perspective, expressing social asymmetries capable of affecting women's practices is an exercise of resistance capable of changing the current social structure.

On the other hand, the other two categories indicate that politicizing eSports practices distort its fundamental purpose: having fun. Thus, both categories represent the other dimension, "Girls just want to have fun!" which either refers to the preference for participatory and ludic aspects (C4) or to female attempts to avoid playing gender roles (C5) that reflect how part of women who consume eSports are not interested in changing the paradigm of this marketplace.

The preference for ludic aspects (C4) indicates how eSports practitioners naturally deal with the constant validation of this practice as sporting and socially valid (Abbasi et al., 2023; Heere, 2018). Consumers often feel responsible for prioritizing the validation of practices seen as nerdy by society to maximize their consumption experiences (Booth, 2013; Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018).

Moreover, avoiding gender discussions (C5) reveals a lack of interest in establishing an equal space between genders in sports practitioner and enthusiast communities. Jones (2008) describes this category as an attempt to minimize issues since political struggles often have negative influence on consumption experiences. Therefore, it is common for some eSports players to decide to just browse their consumer experience, even in a systematically marginalized environment for women (Harrison et al., 2006; Huston et al., 2022; Shaw, 2011).

Thus, when "Girls just want to have fun!" female eSports players understand that the relationship between peers can be achieved exclusively for joy (Yu et al., 2022) or to escape routine problems (Tang et al., 2021). Moreover, it indicates how, despite prioritizing the hedonic aspect of consumption experiences, market relationships associated with gender roles inescapably lead to the (re)production of different performativities (Kapoor et al., 2020).

Consequently, it is possible to say that the second dimension illustrates Butler's (2016) warning about how the feminist agenda needs to consider that some women are not interested in changing gender asymmetries. This criticism reveals that it is necessary to propose alternatives to mitigate these asymmetries, as well as to guarantee affective relationships in a context that "genderizes" its members. It is important to remember that subversion via performativity is an exercise of resistance to produce a new context without denying or nullifying the previous one.

Likewise, for different reasons, it was possible to see that each positioning has evidenced the gender performativity aspects proposed by Butler (1993, 2016). Thus, two dimensions guide the interpretation that female eSports gamers exercise multiple and heterogeneous resistance types. However, the aforementioned resistances complete each other since they point towards gender performativities elaborated through their cultural consumption practices.

Extrapolating the game: playing gender performativity through eSports

Female eSports players revealed that being a female gamer is naturally associated with the constant struggle for a social space that does not distinguish individuals based on gender; this factor recalls the struggle described by Butler (1993) as the first level to deconstruct the concept of gender in society. This deconstruction materializes the active pursuit of increasing women's interest and participation in the eSports scenario. However, performativity is not limited to activism or a portion of gamers. If it is only performed at this level, it ends up recalling the existence of a gender-hierarchizing discourse that does not actually operate by deconstructing it.

According to Butler (2016), this activism is not limited to dismantling the inferior female role but the concept of gender, as well. If the gender issue is a matter to be addressed, both by the ones who intend to actively fight for changes and by the society they want to be part of, it is not limited to activists' practices. More than that, any concept regarding gender, such as that of performativity, recalls the discourse operating for gender positions. Therefore, it is necessary to play such performativity with caution to help deconstruct the idea of gender rather than perpetuating its concept.

On the other hand, women gamers have also indicated the omission of gender issues in the eSports environment. This omission is performativity, described by Butler (1993) as self-produced and perpetuated in gender-based

behaviors, and it represents the gender discourse observed in subjects' habits. The way subjects do not share their positions can be seen in the way women gamers prioritize a hedonic experience over the gender inferiority issue in the gaming culture. The lack of cohesion in subjects' positioning – as observed among women gamers – about the discourse assigning them gender roles in the social environment they are part of is a disservice to the process of deconstructing the concept of gender as a whole.

Still, by prioritizing the promotion of gaming culture to the detriment of gender issues in the eSports environment, women gamers prioritize the hedonic aspect over a social struggle position. Such a disposition both produces and reinforces the gender citational performativity indicated by Butler (1993) via habituation rather than by socialization. This rupture among minorities shows that the gender agenda needs to be revised. Misinformation, as well as lack of interest in and dialogue between activists and the rest of society, create disruptions capable of diverting one's attention from what keeps on leading individuals to the patriarchal scene through a complete power dispositif.

Thus, female eSports players invariably establish civic and political positions in their practices, even when they avoid such an attitude. The current understanding endorses Jenkins' (2012) perspective that the interaction between media product consumers is associated with taking civic or political roles towards their peers.

In broader terms, it is possible to understand that interactions between consumers can socially position them and produce political individuals who – either intentionally or stimulated – perpetuate or subvert the power relationships ruling them (Zwick et al., 2008). These exercises enable narratives to be explained based on the citation and reiteration of norms and conventions, among other cultural resources used to access, promote, or (re)signify marketing power relations (Mikkonen et al., 2011). Consequently, eSports consumption by women gamers works as the elaboration of their own roles in this marketplace through the citationality of social standards ruling the context they are part of.

According to Butler (1993), the citationality observed in exercises capable of elaborating on subjects indicates how power relationships are closely linked to the way individuals refer to themselves, their context, and the social agents they interact with. Consequently, the two perspective dimensions observed in eSports consumption by women gamers institutionalize the power relationships ruling them.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The current research has evidenced that female eSports consumption produces gender performativities in different positions where women gamers act, based on how this marketplace environment distinguishes genders. For different reasons, the herein identified gender performativities have pointed towards the existence of a discourse capable of generating subjects in contemporary society and of perpetuating the power dispositif leading to social asymmetries.

Consequently, the present study has emphasized the importance of addressing female eSports audience issues, as well as expanding this discussion to the Brazilian market. Therefore, it is necessary to remember the Butlerian concepts that explain the heterogeneity of resistance exercises practiced by women who deal with social asymmetries in their consumption practices.

Although the current study provided important insights to help better understand how gender performativities are produced through women's playing and watching eSports, results should be interpreted based on context. According to Butlerian epistemology requirements, social and cultural aspects establish the conditions for performativity productions.

Nevertheless, the present research has expanded the discussion associated with the understanding that women are attracted to eSports for noncompetitive purposes (see Tang et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2022). Its findings indicate that this population can be attracted to, and intensify their participation in, eSports by elaborating heterogeneous political or playful positions.

Moreover, the current study corroborated the understanding that the marketplace environment where consumers of popular culture objects get together (*e.g.*, fans and gamers) reproduces social asymmetries through the consumption practices that keep them together. Consequently, it presented a discussion to allow reflection about how different positions taken by a social minority are productive for this culture. By focusing on interdisciplinary objects (*e.g.*, fans, games, gender), it reinforced how consumer research can be extrapolated and contribute to other study fields (Harrison et al., 2006; Moura & Souza-Leão, 2019).

The limitation of the current study lies on the fact that the interviews focused on female eSports gamers who have made this practice public at some level. Incidental aspects comprised the selection of gamers who actively interact in social networks about eSports, and it meets the understanding that, at some level, they continuously act as media sports fans and practitioners

(Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018). Moreover, although eSports is a worldwide phenomenon and gender performativity has heterogeneous positions across cultures, the current research has only investigated eSports consumption within the Brazilian context.

Future studies focused on investigating gender performativity in social spaces capable of bringing together fans (*i.e.*, fandoms) or consumer communities of other popular culture objects (*e.g.*, movies, comics, series, music) can benefit from the current discussion. More specifically, further consumer research should focus on investigating how products consumed in this segment are tied to dominant gender-related cultures (*e.g.*, nerds, incels). Similarly, investigations focused on eSports practitioners who identify themselves with other social minorities (*i.e.*, racial, sexuality) can give continuity to what was herein developed. Finally, it is worth highlighting that using theoretical contributions from post-structuralist philosophers like Butler (*e.g.*, Deleuze, Foucault) is a fruitful way to reflect on the functioning of consumer practices linked to the entertainment industry.

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