Original Article

E-SPORTS AND SPORTS CYBERCULTURE: PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL ACTORS IN THIS UNIVERSE

E-SPORTS E CIBERCULTURA ESPORTIVA: PERSPECTIVAS DE ATORES SOCIAIS DESSE UNIVERSO

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RESUMO

O presente estudo dedica-se a uma análise sobre os *e-sports*, compreendendo-os como uma maneira de expressão da cultura esportiva consonante ao paradigma social contemporâneo que implica a cibercultura. O objetivo principal deste estudo é analisar sentidos e significados da cibercultura esportiva para atores sociais implicados no universo dos *e-sports*. Assim, em abordagem qualitativa, empregou-se a técnica de entrevista semiestruturada com 2 ciberatletas e 1 *streamer* profissionais. Os resultados demonstram que a cibercultura esportiva é apropriada por estes atores sociais com expectativas para a construção da carreira, sobre o crescimento da modalidade e do público em meio às percepções e vivências de preconceitos. Conclui-se que a cibercultura esportiva produz e reflete práticas, atitudes e valores análogos ao modo tradicional de vivência do esporte, reproduzindo estereótipos e preconceitos, sonhos de ascensão social e perspectivas de profissionalização.
Palavras-chave: *E-sport*; Cibercultura, Ciberatletas.

ABSTRACT

The present study is dedicated to an analysis of e-sports, understanding them as a way of expressing sports culture in accordance with the contemporary social paradigm that involves cyberculture. Its main objective is to look into the senses and meanings of sports cyberculture for the social actors that make up the e-sports universe. Thus, in a qualitative approach, the semi-structured interview technique was used with 2 cyberathletes and 1 streamer, all professionals. The results show that sports cyberculture is appropriated by these social actors with expectations for career building, taking into account the growth of both the modality and its audience amidst perceptions and experiences of prejudice. It is concluded that sports cyberculture produces and reflects practices, attitudes and values that are similar to the traditional way of experiencing sports, reproducing stereotypes and prejudices, dreams of social ascension, and professionalization prospects.
Keywords: E-sport; Cyberculture, Cyberathletes.

Introduction

Sports, in the light of different sources of scientific interpretation, are characterized as a modern and eminently cultural phenomenon[1,2]. This means saying that culture is a fundamental quality of what sports are, and, with them understood in such a way, the properties of this phenomenon constitute them as a human production, among other productions, that make up a web of meanings[3]. The various cultural activities form, then, a fabric that is arranged in a complex, flexible, plural and articulated manner involving different dimensions of social life.

The perspectives of analysis on culture and sports have expanded from a theoretical-analytical point of view worldwide, especially throughout the 20th century, encompassing and mobilizing different types of knowledge from the Social and Human Sciences, such as Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology, Communication, etc. In general, such perspectives have converged to the understanding of sports as a phenomenon of socio-political and cultural relevance that is characterized as polymorphic and polysemic, in constant transformation[4].

Indeed, when it comes to their forms of expression, sports are endowed with characteristics that are configured and reconfigured in accordance with social and historical

dynamics that are established in different times and societies. As for the senses and meanings encompassed in them, sports go through processes of construction and ruptures, significations and varied appropriations, depending on the experiences of the subjects in the world. It is about the semantic elasticity of the phenomenon, according to the conceptual appropriation of Bourdieu[5] herein mobilized for the analysis of sports, which translates into different, opposite, and even contradictory possibilities the uses and significations of this social practice.

Thus, analyzing the sports phenomenon demands recognizing that its multiple forms of expression, its signification and re-signification, take place within an indissociable whole in which leisure, politics, economy, religion, education, health, media and technologies, among other aspects, are inter-related.

In the first decade of this century, there have been changes in the relationship between media, technologies and sports. Hutchins[6], for instance, pointed out that media, communication and information flows define the logic and structure of social relations, which affects all cultural activities and dimensions of life. The author then suggests that e-sports are constituted as a social and technological phenomenon typical of a global change in social relations. However, despite such reflections, as well as studies on the commercial potential of e-sports[7], there is a lack of research dedicated to learning about the perspective of people involved with e-sports, especially in Brazil.

Sports, media and technologies keep a close historical relationship that has spanned the centuries[8]. This relationship was boosted from the 19th century onwards, a context of consolidation of industrialized and modern societies. At the beginning of the 21st century, one more development of this symbiotic relationship between sports and media was witnessed. It is about the popularization and consolidation of the process of sportivization[2] of competitive electronic games. The so-called e-sports have been pointed out as the fruit of and arising from the long-standing relationship between media and sports, as a cultural expression of sports[6].

In a comprehensive way, the literature that deals with the relationship between media and sports is emphatic in underscoring that these phenomena develop simultaneously and symbiotically[9]. The printed media, cinema, radio, television and other advents corroborated with the popularization of sports and with the multiplication of the possibilities of experiencing them. At the same time, sports and their events have been directly impacted in their rules, institutionalization and specificities due to media and technological matters[9].

In the Brazilian academic literature, few reflections and theoretical articulations have focused on the cyberathlete as a social actor of sports cyberculture. Gama[10] indicated the emergence and potential of new epistemological frontiers that present themselves to sports and to human movement. The author addressed, in the context of these epistemological constructions, the concept of cyberathletes as subjects who participate, individually or in groups, in competitive digital games, on local devices or connected to the internet.

In a philosophical debate, Zoboli and Izidoro[11] present cyberathletes as ontological realities in the interaction between materialities of the human body and technology, which depend on each other in order to materialize. Coutinho Filho and Juang[12], in their turn, invested in research on the legal bond of cyberathletes as to the juridical treatment of their activities.

Although theoretical production on the e-sports topic has expanded in recent years, studies that investigate the perspective of cyberathletes, their understanding and appropriation of e-sports as an expression of the sporting phenomenon, are incipient. It is in this sense that this study seeks to contribute to the academic literature.

Indeed, as a dynamic phenomenon, one sensitive to paradigmatic changes in society and, at the same time, with intervening potential on such changes, sport presents itself as a cultural expression that requires constant analysis and interpretation, especially when understood as mimetic of life in society[13]. This study will endeavor to contribute to this set of interpretations about sports and social life.

The starting point of this investigation is that e-sports are a way of expressing sports culture in accordance with the contemporary social paradigm that involves cyberculture, as well as its set of values, concepts, perceptions and social practices. Levy[14] presents cyberculture with a set of practices encompassing intellectual and material techniques, ways of thinking, and attitudes that are formed and arranged amid the expansion of the cyberspace, referring not only to the material infrastructure of the computer network and digital communication, but also to the information that circulates in this environment and the subjects who produce, act and interact.

It is observable that this phenomenon has gained more and more market strength[7] and space in traditional media (with broadcasts by television channels), counting on a growing number of events, insertion in school and university games, among others[15]. The popularization of e-sports has resulted in greater academic-scientific attention to the phenomenon. However, few studies value the perspective of the subjects immersed in this universe.

The objective of this study is to analyze the senses and meanings of sports cyberculture for the social actors involved in the e-sports universe, specifically in the FIFA football modality. From the perspective of players and streamers (people who broadcast while narrating and commenting on e-sports), we seek to: identify and discuss the relationship established between the subjects and sports cyberculture; to learn the meanings of e-sports for these subjects; to identify the perceptions of these actors about stereotypes and prejudices related to the e-sports universe.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach due to the nature of the investigation, which is not primarily concerned with relying on numerically operable data, but seeks to present an interpretation of dynamic cultural phenomena[16]. In the qualitative approach, subjective processes of signification are valued in the description and exploration of phenomena, considering their nuances and underlays in the face of the social whole.

Procedures

The sampling technique was non-probabilistic – specifically, the so-called "virtual snowball"[17]. This technique consists of recruiting suitable collaborators for the research through referral by previously recruited people. Recruitment ends when the saturation point is reached in data sourcing; said point is determined when the researcher finds recurrences and repetitions through the data collection technique used, which, in this case, was semi-structured interview, as it allows the interviewer to have flexibility in the script of questions during the interlocution with the interviewee.

In the context of a broader project, data collection began with invited cyberathletes and streamers from different e-sports modalities, specifically those that emulate traditional sports. In this study, we focus the analysis on the social actors of football games (FIFA football), data collection stage that has been completed. Contact with the participants was made electronically, via e-mail and/or official social profiles of cyberathletes and streamers, inviting them to the semi-structured interview. The invitees who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research filled out the Free and Informed Consent Form, which was submitted electronically, in digitized format, and sent back by e-mail.

The interview was conducted through a digital platform (Google Meet) and included questions about previous experiences with e-sports, family support and encouragement, professionalization, significations of e-sports, experience and identity as a cyberathlete, interaction with the audience and social media, the subject's relationship with traditional sports,

learning acquired from playing e-sports, perceptions about stereotypes and prejudices in the experience with the modality, among others.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee on Research with Human Beings of the Federal University of Viçosa, under protocol No. 4.153.408. The interviews were carried out in September 2020. For the presentation of the results, the study participants were identified with alphanumeric codes, with the cyberathletes presented as CA1 and CA2, and the streamer, as ST.

Data analysis

In this study, integrative interpretations were built from the responses, identifying themes that emerged from the speeches, dissonances and complementarities among the data obtained from each participant. Integrative interpretation is understood as a non-linearity in the processing of data – in this case, the contents of the speeches. This content is grouped and crossed by inferences, which are based on the mobilized theoretical framework. As Patton[18] observes, the act of interpreting implies assigning meaning and sense to the findings, articulating them with each other in their thematic constitutions, and building explanations and tangible conclusions for the data, locating the perspective and context of the speeches.

Results

Two professional FIFA Football cyberathletes were interviewed: CA1 (female, 22 years old) and CA2 (male, 19 years old). Besides them, a professional streamer (ST) of FIFA games exclusively (male, 37 years old) was interviewed.

Analyzing the perspective of similarities between e-sports and traditional sports, all interviewees state that traditional sports were part of their initial interest in e-sports. Traditional sport has always been part of their lives, when, for example, they go to football stadiums or watch sports on television. All say that they follow sports on television these days, especially football.

However, the FIFA cyberathletes mention that engagement in traditional forms of sports is no longer part of their daily lives, due to difficulties in reconciling schedules with online work. CA2 and ST claim that they stopped playing traditional team sports, such as indoor football or volleyball, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but that, before so, they used to play sometimes. The interviewees state that:

> CA1: I played indoor football for my high school and elementary school. So, like, I've always had contact with football and watched Corinthians's matches. It's my hobby.

> CA2: I'm a big fan of normal sports and that's why I got into e-sports, because I didn't have the talent to (sic) get into any traditional sports, so my talent was video games, so I built this career. I watch a lot of football, of course, also because it helps my development as a FIFA player. I watch volleyball, handball... and tennis, which I really like... I used to play, of course, before the pandemic, I used to play football and volleyball.

> ST: I watched a lot more when I was younger. Today, due to lack of time, I hardly watch. I follow football basically, which is my business. Football, basketball and American football are the ones I follow the most.

The insertion of cyberathletes in the medium of digital games was different among them. The female cyberathlete started out playing video games with her brother, but he liked to play

other types of games. Their mother was very fond of watching football on television, and this sparked her curiosity about football, so CA1 started playing video games that explored this modality. CA1's journey alludes to paradigmatic changes, in a process concerning the possibilities for women in sports. In 2021, she became the first woman in the world to play in the FIFA football's elite division and was signed by one of the biggest e-sports clubs in the world.

CA2 had contact with the game by watching the FIFAe Nations Cup with friends. He reported being impressed with the event, and that got him interested in e-sports in a more serious way than when he had fun with family and friends. Today, the player is part of a Brazilian professional team and competes in international championships. The streamer, in his turn, reported his first experiences with this work as follows:

> ST: The first experience I had was a competition that some content creator friends and me came up with. It was a long time ago. There was no such thing as a professional FIFA player, but there was the content creator, which is what I still am today. So, we brought together several of these content creators and organized a championship among us, which worked very well. It was awesome! We made some edits and managed to broadcast to, if I'm not mistaken, we reached 25 thousand people watching us at the same time there.

Initially, when discussing e-sports in a professional universe, it is common for streamers and cyberathletes to have the idea that e-sports represent an activity they treat with seriousness, preparation and training, although in Brazil this professionalization is incipient and little encouraged or understood, as is evident in the following statements:

> CA1: Here in Brazil it's not seen as a job, it's seen as if you were playing video games. Sometimes people ask during the streams things like: "- Oh, do you work? " People still don't understand that this is a job.

> CA2: People still think this is not a job, you know (sic). So, that's where people's prejudice start, when they say "Oh, what do you do for a living?" And I answer, "I'm an e-sports athlete". They say "- But what do you really do for work? What do you produce?"

The interviewees make it clear that they consider their involvement with the modality something very serious, organized, divided into hours of training for each specificity, which reinforces the professionalizing sense assigned to e-sports. ST reports that, during FIFA's launch season, he works a total of twelve hours a day to succeed in the job he proposes to do. ST reported:

> FIFA, it's cyclical, it starts from the launch, which is now in October, to May, June, let's say. Then, from October to January, it keeps growing. From January to May, it's stagnant. From June to September, October, it declines. So, in this growing phase, I can easily say that it's 12 to 14 hours of work a day. The problem is that it's not 12, 14 hours a day playing. It's 12 to 14 hours a day dedicated to this. There's the period I play, there's the period I post on social media, record a video, edit a video. So I do this and that... There's all the things involved, the time you spend talking to person A, to B, to C, so there's all of that. In this times, I'd say it takes 12 to 14 hours. Then it's around 10 hours, and when it's in the decline period, I'd say it's about 6 hours a day. And I'm (sic) trying to reorganize myself about it because it's a lot of time, it's a lot of time doing the same thing and, mainly, it's a lot of time sitting!

The FIFA cyberathletes highlighted the broad way of experiencing the game, taking on various roles, with a set of skills that involve general technical-tactical perceptions of the modality (defense, attack, midfield) and perceptions specific to e-sports, such as decision-making time and joystick actions. They schedule the hours of the days to train positioning, skills, analyze matches, correct mistakes, and, when there is an upcoming competition, they dedicate more time so that their results meet the expectation. The cyberathletes say:

> CA1: I train about eight hours a day. It's up to me. I have a coach who gives me tips: train more finishing, train more ball possession, linked to my team.

> CA2: Today I train an average of 3 hours a day. It depends on the time of the year. When we have more tournaments, I'm much more strict and I have more hours of training, but when there's less pressure like that, then I organize my routine myself.

When asked about the concept of e-sports and what they understand about this modality, the answers diverged and, at the same time, complemented each other. Whereas CA2 compares e-sports to the commonalities of traditional sports, ST talks about the professionals involved and the dreams of the athletes, as seen below:

> CA2: E-sports are like sports, they bring emotion, they bring euphoria, they bring fans, they unite people, so, for me, it has a very good meaning, which is the meaning of union. Mainly union between older people with younger people, distant people who can unite through video games, so that's it.

> ST: Despite all this money thing involved, the people who work, despite all these values involved, it's about you being able to grow, the main thing about e-sports still is that you're moving people's dreams forward.

CA1, in her turn, mentioned the importance of not looking at e-sports only as a modality, but as a profession. All interviewees mention networking as essential in order for them to be sponsored and signed. They also pointed out that the online world favors contact with people from anywhere on the planet, with exchanges of experiences that add to the technical level, to socialization and to cultural perception of the phenomenon. Reporting on his interaction with other cyberathletes and its audience, CA2 states:

> CA2: So, I get along with everyone, I'm pretty cool about it, and it's even better with the audience, we interacted a lot this year, when I started living streaming on Twitch. So, I created a really nice audience.

CA1 highlighted communication with people from all over the world and the vast potential for exchanging experiences. CA2 stressed the learning of other languages. ST pointed out persistence, dedication and studying as the greatest lessons learned from the work to which he is dedicated.

The interviewees often linked their experience in e-sports with traditional sports, mentioning connections to the world, the persistence that an athlete needs, in addition to dedication, a lot of studying and not giving up on dreams.

CA1 and ST perceive the reproduction, in the digital environment, of stereotypes that are present in society in general, highlighting gender issues. The female cyberathlete states that: "unfortunately, they still have that idea that a girl cannot play football, or that you had to be (sic) doing or playing something else"[19]. While ST ensures:

> ST: For a woman, no matter what she plays, how good she is at the game, you see the same stupid, dumb jokes that you see on the street, they are taken to the internet by young people, like: you had to be (sic) doing some laundry, cooking... wow, so hot, show your boobs!

ST's perspective is broader on this topic, and this may be related to the fact that this professional has a broad contact and pays more attention to the audience's comments. The streamer also mentions ethnic-racial prejudices during game streams. He said: "Apparently, only those who are straight, white men are accepted, that's exactly it. The most common insults with our neighboring countries here, Chile, Argentina... if you're Brazilian, it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman, you're a monkey and that's it"[19]. Additionally, he mentions prejudice about sexual orientation and states that he has never seen an electronic sports player declare their homosexuality, and, according to him, it would be, "statistically speaking, impossible not to exist at least one"[19]. He mentions:

> ST: We're (sic) talking about football, which, of all the sports we have in Brazil, I think it's the most sexist. So we're (sic) talking about millions of players and I don't know how many thousands or even hundreds of thousands of content creators, but so far I haven't met, (...) I haven't publicly seen a FIFA content creator coming out as gay, whether man or woman. It's statistically impossible that there isn't any content creator that is gay, the numbers don't add up. There is! And I know that there is because, in some cases, I know who they are. I really like this person and I know why they don't open up, because the market doesn't authorize it, the market doesn't authorize this expression. The community doesn't authorize! So there's a lot of prejudice, I don't know how far it goes, or when it changes, if it would ever change.

When thinking about the difficulties that e-sports professionals in general may face in this environment, interviewees CA2 and ST present basically the same conceptions. Both mention financial difficulties, that the necessary materials are expensive, lack of sponsorship, and the need to be an excellent player, to stand out and to win over viewers. They report:

> CA2: For (sic) me, the main difficulty is the same that we find in normal sports, in traditional sports. It's just that, for (sic) you to gain nice visibility, for (sic) you to get an income from it, you always have to be at the top of the top. So, if you have a bad season, you're kind of forgotten by the audience, so you always have to work really, really hard, because, if you're off the top, nobody cares about (sic) you basically.

> ST: Difficulty in accepting the people who are involved, difficulty even in having the equipment to compete... in addition to having the basic, which is the video game, the joystick and the TV, then there's all the stuff behind it, you need to have internet , and that's basically it, the internet, the video game and the TV, then (sic) as you're getting experience and competing, you see all that. It'd be nice to have a headset to communicate with people, it'd be nice to have a computer to watch and produce content, it'd be nice to have a faster internet, it'd be nice to have a faster monitor, it'd be nice to have a better joystick. So, as you consider these other things, it gets more expensive, so there's is a difficulty for those who want to start.

For CA1, in her turn, the difficulty she faces when she is involved with games and work online is the internet connection in Brazil, especially when she is competing with international

players. She mentions:

> CA1: For me, it's the connection. Because, for example, in the case of FIFA, it doesn't have many servers here in Brazil. So, the connection, when you play with someone who's, for example, in Bolivia or Argentina, when you play with someone who's (sic) in another country, the connection gets really bad. So, for example, when you press the button for your player to do something, your opponent is a few seconds ahead of you, so you have a delay. So this makes it difficult for you to play against them.

Discussion

Many e-sports modalities share similarities with the so-called traditional sports in the way they are organized and developed, beyond the game itself. The interaction with an audience, mediated by streaming platforms, for instance, generates a crowd. Furthermore, the activity involves a performance, narrators, athletes, teams, regulation and bureaucratization, investors, sponsorship, etc.[20] This is, of course, a peculiar expression/form of sports culture.

Hemphill[21] discussed the possibility that digital games could be considered as sports at a time when the academic debate still addressed the matter with some tension. Indeed, although there are conceptual limits to dealing with the status of sports in the literature in general, there are perspectives and models of knowledge that can encompass these manifestations, especially in line with the philosophical, sociological and anthropological discussion of the cyberspace[14] as an expression of life.

In Physical Education, there are concepts of traditional sport such as that of Betti[22], for instance, which have a scope big enough to cover e-sports. The author defined sport as a social action that has representative institutions, conventions and rules, involving competition between two or more opponents or against nature, with the objective of comparing performances, designating the winner and/or registering marks and records, the result of which is determined by a set of skills and strategies, providing intrinsic and extrinsic gratification.

When conceptualizing the phenomenon of e-sports, Macedo and Falcão[23] argue that they are a legitimate sport modality, since the competitor connects to a machine that performs part of the work, but any modality demands skills and strategies from the competitor. Competition, just as in conventional sport, determines winners and losers, mobilizes an audience, organizations, performances with physical and cognitive skills.

Jensen[24] states that, in recent years, e-sports have been treated by the media with more seriousness and importance, but, in other social spheres, this practice is still not considered a serious sport, mainly due to the lack of physical activity in muscle groups and the physicality inherent to concepts of traditional sports. Indeed, in the interviewees' speeches, there was a clear difficulty in claiming oneself a professional in the face of other social subjects, although the argument of physicality has not emerged in these reports in the case of the present study.

Physicality is oftentimes brought up in the argument that engagement in e-sports is just a moment of distraction and fun, devoid of other senses. The issue of physical inactivity has been considered a reductionist view of the phenomenon, based on imperatives of a healthy lifestyle, which is understood in a limited way as to the organic functioning of the body, broad muscle actions, and technical exercise or demonstration of motor-physical skills. This limited perspective on sports performance neglects, as pointed out by Gama[10], the whole set of sensorimotor maneuvers and even the educational potential of e-sports, and their biopsychic and cognitive demands.

A study conducted with 115 cyberathletes in Finland showed that more than half of them (55.6%) incorporate a physical exercise program into their daily routine, and, to this, they relate an improvement in their performance at digital games[25]. In other words, the simple assumption that e-sports are directly related to physical inactivity and a sedentary lifestyle is

precipitous. According to the data of the present study, one interviewee's reason for taking a break from physical activities was the pandemic context. In this sense, specific studies searching for associations between playing e-sports and physical inactivity are required. There is also a demand to consider the health perspective among e-sports players beyond the biophysiological components.

The professional perspective on e-sports is still quite strange to non-players or the public to which this phenomenon is alien, but not to the social actors of this universe. This data converges with those of Kauweloa and Winter[26], who studied the perspective of twelve cyberathletes from high-school sports teams in a North American city. The players participating in that study recognize the seriousness of their activity as being professional, perceiving themselves within a highly organized structure with goals to be achieved, with discipline and respect for the work of their coaches. The cyberathletes even reported trouble balancing training with studies, a fact that we can allude to as symptomatic of the professionalization of traditional sports as a whole.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the violence motivated by prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes, common social problems that also manifest in the cyberspace. Menti and Araújo[27] found that the violence suffered by women in e-sports is very frequent, leading female players aspiring to a professional career to often use male pseudonyms in order to avoid discriminatory, sexualized comments, and other types of attacks in the digital environment. This violence reveals traces of a sports culture that is faced with reflections of bigger social problems and that need to be investigated in the various modalities, as well as in a comparative way between different modalities and/or cultures regarding violence against women in e-sports.

Hussain et al.[28] reinforced that the literature on women and e-sports is incipient and stress the need for further analysis of the intersection between being a woman and her specific cultural contexts (regional, religious, cultural, etc.). In the research in question, the authors aimed to understand the motivations and lived experiences of Muslim women playing e-sports. In that context, despite several attempts by the Pakistani government and radical Islamic groups to try to stop the growth of e-sports, there was an increase in the level of interest of the country's population. In the study, the authors recruited, using the snowball sampling technique, nine Muslim women between the ages of 19 and 29, who participated in regular competitions for games such as Defense Of The Ancients (DOTA), TEKKEN 7 and Street Fighter. The interviewees reported that they use e-sports to escape the collectivist culture and repressive social norms imposed on women by their country's standards. Moreover, social and psychological factors composed the participants' motivations in their perspectives of perceiving e-sports as vehicles of liberation and freedom.

Converging on this issue of liberation, there is a study in Brazil that addresses the logic of consumption of digital games by Brazilian women as a way of dealing with oppression[29]. Playing is, therefore, a way of resisting and claiming that e-sports are another social space where women can enjoy their right to leisure activities, sports and professional opportunities.

The issue of sexuality also manifested itself in the themes brought up by the interviewees. Homophobic behaviors express the heteronormative logic as an imposition of the heterosexual cisnormative man as a standard in society. These behaviors are embedded in traditional sports culture and well documented in the literature on gender and sexuality in sports, as seen in the research by Camargo[30]. Homophobia ranges from social inferiorization and delegitimization of homosexual people to physical and psychological violences, etc. In studies that approach the theme within sports and e-sports, the focus of the questioning is oftentimes based on the logics of masculinity in which the homophobia topic is only underlying[31].

Ethnic-racial, socioeconomic and identity issues have emerged in intersectional debates in the analysis of the sports phenomenon, but they are rare in e-sports. In the search undertaken

for this analysis, it was not possible to find any Brazilian study whose title, abstract and keywords revealed the focus of its analysis on the ethnic-racial issue in e-sports. Macedo and Kurtz[32] touched on the theme of coloniality in the scenario of digital games, addressing the social hierarchies that are reproduced in the cyberspace. Internationally, the thematization is also incipient. One of them[33] investigated racial dynamics in e-sports by contrasting Eastern and Western perspectives on the game StarCraft II and concluded that, in the globalization context, the participation of Asian players signals a counter-hegemony in the Western dominance of sports culture.

Other factors to be considered and that are interconnected to this debate are the socioeconomic ones, especially regarding how they impact the access to and engagement in e-sports. In the professional sphere, it is a highly profitable commercial sector whose bureaucratic configuration replicates other social and sports spheres, with a predominance of white men belonging to the middle and upper economic classes[34]. Consequently, the presence of Black people in the professional environment of e-sports is impacted by neoliberal logics that do not encompass the democratic sense of participation in games, which, according to Fletcher[34], taking North American culture as a context, is one of the reasons why black individuals are virtually absent in e-sports modalities. Added to this are the stigmas that e-sports carry as to the public perception of them being an activity meant for fun and not for work[34], which, for Black players, acquires even more stereotyped significations. It is clear that these socioeconomic factors impact and present themselves outside the professional sphere, regarding the very opportunity to learn about and play e-sports, considering the price of electronic equipment, one paying for their own internet access, etc. This niche also lacks research.

In addition to cyberathletes and their coaches, streamers and entrepreneurs in the sector, the audience that follows e-sports constitutes dynamics from which gender, class and racial issues emerge. The interactions in chats during e-sports streams reveal serious problems in the behavior of the audience that consumes these games. A number of reports of racism, xenophobia and homophobia make the e-sports environment hostile on streaming platforms, as observed in a study by Fritsch, Garcia and Aurelio[35], who highlight anonymity on the internet as a problem, as well as a lack of safety policies for the cyberspace that can provide for and apply punishments to users who commit such acts.

An intersectional-perspective study[36] analyzed e-sports advertising campaigns during the pandemic on Indonesian websites. The analysis showed that the framing of the narratives about the players contained elements that perpetuated problems as to the modes of representation of class, gender, and racial issues, denoting and reinforcing stereotypes and social hierarchies.

Other social markers of difference and their implications in the cyberspace lack attention and analysis in the specific literature on Physical Education. The intersectional perspective has great potential, insofar as it demands a dialogue with other fields of knowledge in the Human and Social Sciences, as well as theoretical-methodological appropriations that allow grasping the senses, meanings and paradigms manifested in this social phenomenon.

Conclusions

This study analyzed the perspectives of social actors in sports cyberculture (FIFA football) in relation to e-sports. The results showed perspectives, appropriations and meanings of sports cyberculture that were similar to what is known about traditional sports, in terms of the understanding of what being an athlete is, career expectations, perceptions of prejudice and stereotypes (including gender and ethnic-racial issues). It is important to point out that FIFA football emulates the most popular traditional sport internationally, mobilizing languages, technical gestures and references that, compared to outcomes obtained in other e-sports games,

can result in distinct and contradictory appropriations, considering FIFA football's non-tangible specificities.

In the relationship established between the conception of e-sports and professionalization, the FIFA football cyberathletes and streamer reported problems regarding people's lack of understanding of this practice as a serious activity, despite the hours dedicated by them to training and/or or content production.

When asked about learning acquired from e-sports, CA1, CA2 and ST answered in a consonant and complementary way, reporting a connection with the whole world, learning of other languages, teamwork, exploring persistence, dedication and involvement with the modality with much study.

This research did not choose a specific theme *a priori* to address the perception and perspective of cyberathletes on e-sports. In this sense, it highlighted elements that emerged directly from the interviewees' speeches, such as gender and sexuality issues, professionalization, and ethnic-racial issues. Thus, this text presented a broad panorama of the experience of these social actors in the cyberspace with e-sports, a dynamic and complex universe in which each theme offers a wide potential and repertoire for future investigations that explore other methodologies such as netnography (immersion into networks to observe the phenomenon) and other e-sports interlocutors in the various existing modalities.

Each modality demands investigation in the face of processes that can be very unique to each one of them. There are comparative possibilities as one invests in the construction of a collection of scientific production that takes e-sports as its object. The discussion about the possibility of including e-sports competitions in traditional organizations, such as the International Olympic Committee, spans resignifications and representations worthy of attention, in addition to reinforcing the power of this theme. E-sports are a social and technological phenomenon typical of a global change in social relations, which are dynamic and demand attention and analysis. Physical Education, as a field of knowledge, has many theoretical-methodological resources to interpret this phenomenon and its developments at the professional level, in school and university realities, in leisure, etc.

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