



Gendered Geographies of Online Gaming:

a Brazil/UK comparative case study of gendered
spatial practices of inclusion, exclusion and agency
in the MOBA League of Legends

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Declaration of Autorship:

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

The digital, a complex assemblage of ontics, aesthetics, logics and discourses (Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski, 2016), is now ingrained in geographical inquiries. Computer and videogames, genuinely geographical objects, appear at the vanguard of technology development, by connecting sophisticated works of art to entertainment and communication systems, arousing industries and markets around the Western world. Nevertheless, inequalities still haunt the access and advancement of digital technologies, creating absences and obscurities across the spaces of the digital, and that includes the realm of games. Scaffolded by a feminist standpoint, this research explores some aspects of digital inequalities by attending to how gendered spatial practices of inclusion, exclusion and agency are manifest within online gaming spaces. To examine these dynamics in their socio-cultural context, the massive online battle arena (MOBA) League of Legends was chosen as instrumental case study, where two different communities of players in Brazil and the United Kingdom were investigated. To answer the research question, a mixed-methods approach encompassing online surveys and semi-structured online interviews, informed by supportive participant observation, has provided rich quantitative and qualitative data.

Abductive analysis, sustained by a multifaceted disciplinary conceptual framework, comprised descriptive statistics, content and thematic analysis. As a result, this research illuminates the nature of the gendered relations at play in the production of digital spaces of League, as well as the formation of homosocial spaces within the game. This innovative study has thus evidenced the gendered character of League of Legends' spaces by unearthing the complex entanglements of identification and belonging, articulated and disputed through practices of antagonism and rapport enacted through online misbehaviour, homosociality and friendship. These findings have advanced the field of digital geographies by employing a feminist purchase to the production of digital spaces while expanding the contextual focus of game studies to Northern Europe and Latin America.

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Science has been utopian and visionary from the start; that is one reason "we" need it.

Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* (1988, p. 585)

Chapter One: Welcome to the Fields of Justice

1.1. Research problem and question

Since their rise in the 1970s, computer and video games (CVGs) have been at the forefront of digital technology development. The advent of the world wide web (henceforth *web*) added new layers of complexity by connecting computers in a network, facilitating the online gaming¹ era. Now, computer games evolved from being a solitary leisure fixed on a physical place, to a dynamic, collective activity attaching people across the globe through an ethereal – but very concrete – net of connections.

Notwithstanding the early image of the Internet and other connected communication networks as unified and unifying global villages, development and enjoyment of digital technologies are marked by inequalities, to which gender inequalities – in access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), availability, and freedom of speech and participation – are summed. The dawn of the twenty-first century has also witnessed the rise of the fourth wave in feminist thinking and praxis, which has highlighted gendered bias in IT. As reaffirmed by feminist geographers across time and space, gendered inequalities are structurally and discursively connected to how all geographical categories are delineated from space; in a world revolutionised by digital technology, gendered relations within digital arenas are a prime concern for those seeking social, spatial, and technological justice.

¹ Not to be confused with gambling, which is a risk-taking practice of playing games with odds betting, which includes participation in lotteries (Phelops, 2008; Porta and Last, 2018).

Research Problem

How are gendered dynamics of exclusion, inclusion, and agency manifest within and across the online spaces of the MOBA League of Legends?

The key aim of this research is to identify and examine gendered spatial practices and power relations within online gaming spaces through the intersection of digital and gender geographies. In this project, one computer game classified as a massive online battle arena (MOBA) was dissected as a cluster of intersecting geographical sites, where social, cultural, and economic dynamics are recreated and replicated in the form of digital space. The core of the research problem lies in how gender dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and agency are manifest within and across the online gaming space of League of Legends (henceforth League). The project examines two samples in a binational comparison, focusing on four research questions:

1. Are League spaces gendered? If so, in what ways?
2. Are there any gendered homosocial spaces inside League? Why were they created and how are they organised?
3. What are the nature of gendered relations and gendered agency in the digital spaces of League?
4. Comparing players' experiences and attitudes in Brazil and the UK, are there any differences in gendered relations within national/regional spaces of League?

The problem is addressed within a multifaceted disciplinary approach (detailed in Chapter Three), drawing on socio-spatial practices, gender and feminist geographies, and digital geographies, positioning this thesis in the intersection of three subfields (see Figure 1). Deeming research as a cycle, an in-depth literature review has helped defining the research question and continued to be further developed alongside data collection and analysis.



Figure 1: Positioning the thesis

The findings and implications of this study transport the key geographical concept of spatial practices to the digital realm, with added critical purchase of gender as the main analytic category. In providing a geographical exploration of online spaces and their gendered construction, this innovative research aims to provide a more thorough understanding of the social construction of digital spaces, laying conceptual foundations for the future development of geographical theories of the digital. In investigating online gaming arenas, this research contributes to uncovering the iterations between digital and material places. This study has also sought to contribute to the development and discussion of digital methodologies for geographical inquiry, including ethical challenges, especially regarding the use of games for data collection (either as a locus or instrument).

The comparative nature of this study also sought to highlight the importance of national contexts (e.g. gender equality levels, range, and quality of access to ICT's, ICT literacy) to human experience within the same virtual arena. The results enhance the understanding of gendered relations in material arenas wherein the digital practices are embedded.

Given that most published studies on MOBAs are of global scope (see systematic review by Mora-Cantalops and Sicilia, 2018), this research is original in its bi-national comparison, providing a precise focus to local experiences. Most research is conducted

in Asia and North America, leaving an important gap hampering deeper analysis in other parts of the world; in focusing on South/Latin American and Northern-European gamers, this study seeks to reduce this lacuna. Finally, since League is understudied in comparison to other successful Massive Multiplayer Online games (e.g. World of Warcraft), this research adds to this existing body of work by employing novel geographical discussion of gendered space and place. The following section introduces the context of this investigation, as well as the rationale and motivation behind it.

1.2. Rationale and Motivations

As a digital geographer, fascinated by and involved with games, I acknowledge the importance of my positionality to the design of this research (Rose, 1997; Valentine, 1998; Harding, 2015a, 2015b; England, 2006; Valentine, 2008; Morrow, Hawkins and Kern, 2015; Larsen, Lobo and Maddrell, 2019). Growing up amid social disparities has fuelled my interest in addressing social inequalities, especially regarding gender; nevertheless, my Brazilian nationality, my working-class background, and my Black ethnicity have always highlighted the interdependence of these identities and their co-constitution with my womanhood. My positionality has drawn me to investigate the digital as a non-neutral phenomenon, with equally strong potential for eradication or maintenance of socio-economic and cultural injustice.

1.2.1. Analytical Category: Gender

Gender (concept is discussed in-depth on Chapter Three) is a central identity axis produced by enduring social structures, and through human performance which changes across time and space. In being produced by and exercised through power, gendered relations are pivotal to the understanding of the production of space (McDowell, 2013). Moreover, Gender bears a uniquely embodied relationship to, and profound impact on culture, economy, and politics; when unpacking the labels imposed upon people, gender relations explain power through the discussion of hierarchical relationships, and the mechanisms devised as resistance to those hierarchies. Nevertheless, this category has been historically overlooked outside feminist academic circles, which underscores the obscuring of everyday practices of social exclusion, the struggles in response to it, and the processes of agency through which oppression is challenged.

As discussed further in Chapter Three, technology development and consumption are marked with contradictions intrinsic to socio-cultural difference. Positioned as a feminist work, this study thus utilises gender as a core theme and analytical lens through which relational practices of spatial production can be revealed. This category magnifies often small-scale (and nevertheless potent) spatial practices which, left unaddressed, work on the maintenance of historical injustices

This category relates to the culturally-, spatially- and historically-inflected roles attributed to people depending on their biological sex, being central to feminist discussions; however, as an identity marker, gender is co-constructed with other axes (see Chapter Three). Indeed, everyday life is messy, and its many aspects are impossible to circumscribe in detached categories (Connell, 2002). Anyone's experience of gender is underscored by their experience of class, race, religious affiliation, age and wellness, as well as of connectedness and use of new media technologies (van Doorn, 2011). Single approaches are thus not adequate for a critical analysis of power morphologies in space and time (Wright, 2010), being less effective for any political change. Intersections of identity and power relations change with place; Geography thus needs to value the 'variability of experience (...) across space' (Wright, 2010), avoiding overshadowing other central categories, such as race, by gender, which often privileges already favoured standpoints (Hopkins, 2017). Consequently, although the choice of gender as the scaffolding category was a strategic one, it could not (and would not) be isolated from other categories. It is thus important to unpack the rationale for employing, although to a lesser extent, other theories of difference in this study.

Intersectionality, thus presented as a structuring approach to the analysis of sociocultural inequality and agency, denounces the erasure of people at the intersections of marginalised identities, and the power relations in which they are implicated. By focusing on the gendered character of race and the racial character of gender, intersectional approaches facilitate exploration of the entwinements of identity categories. In being derived from Black feminist theories and praxis, intersectionality is a political tool for discussing how identity categories constitute and change social reality. Here, other categories were included to provide depth to the existing 'multidimensional interactions' (Longhurst, 2002, p.547), thus moving away from a single-sided view, and taking a stand against any theoretical orthodoxy. Intersectionality enhances theoretical and philosophical debate about identity categories while bridging scholarly and activist feminisms (Davis, 2008).

Since gender is established within imposed standards of desire and relational performance, othering and marginalisation of non-normative desire are fundamental to the Western production of space. Spatial processes occur in between material and discursive practices (Wright, 2010); thus, the synergy between gender and sexuality (alongside other identity markers such as ethnicity and class) is key to unveiling the production and maintenance of power relations at all scales. Sexual orientation and non-normative sexual identities as here understood as co-constitutive of gender and place, fundamental to understanding gendered relations in their broader context, while highlighting contradictory and exclusionary practices beyond gender binarisms.

The choice to include sexuality in a work about gendered relations is also strategic, since ‘only through a combination of queer interrogations of normativity with feminist and postcolonial questionings of subjectivity can knowledge of power develop into political practice’ (Wright, 2010, p.61). Moreover, the experience of trans*² and gender-fluid subjectivities challenge the poorly (if at all) acknowledged cis privileges over the production of space, and destabilise identity categories, while denouncing the universalisation and homogenisation of trans* experiences³ (Johnston, 2015). Used often in this thesis, the expression ‘women and LGBTQI+ people’ encompasses woman-identifying people who are categorised by their gender identity, and LGBTQI+ people categorised by their sexual orientation and/or their position outside the hetero-norms. The latter group includes cis- and transgender women, and lesbian women, thus the categories are not mutually exclusive. Notwithstanding the awkwardness (or inadequacy) of the expression, it was chosen as a short phrase to point to historically marginalised people positioned at different points in intersecting identity axes, either due to their gender, or their sexuality, or both.

Race and ethnicity are also embodied social constructs based on otherness; racialisation is a geographical issue in which ethnic and racial segregation follows unequal processes of identity negotiation, expressing itself spatially. The racialised production of space results from long-lasting, embedded systems of oppression which are founded on ideologies of difference and serve specific purposes in the maintenance of hegemonies, including in academia (Fanon, 2008; Alderman and Modlin Jr., 2014;

² The asterisk is utilised to mark the relationality of gender variant identities positioned inside and outside the binaries (i.e. including trans-male and trans-female, but also transvestites, *travestis*, genderqueer, genderless, etc). The glyph indicates that trans* is fundamentally not a prefix, but an identity umbrella for all those in the diverse non-cisgender community (see Stryker, Currah and Moore, 2008; Killermann, 2017).

³ Notwithstanding the flawed, binary, Western categorisation of non-conforming bodies and identities as trans*.

hooks, 2014b, 2014a; Esson *et al.*, 2017; Pulido, 2015; Tolia-Kelly, 2017; Bonds, 2019). Although seemingly inconspicuous due to the perceived invisibility of race in online gaming arenas, race appears as a strong intersecting axis modulating the understanding of certain forms of human interaction in the web (Alderman and Good, 1997; Alderman, 2017; Elwood, 2020).

In acknowledging race and ethnicity as power-inflecting of gendered relations, this study seeks to approach an intersectional stance, thus honouring a Black and intersectional feminist tradition of looking into oppression from a more complex platform. Simultaneously, this study invites Queer stances on sexuality as a fundamental axis of gendered performance, acknowledging the intersectionality of gender as a product and producer of space. By modulating these three fundamental axes, other identity markers (e.g. age and class) come to highlight the complex ways in which oppressions interact in the lives of subjects, thus exposing fundamental flaws in legal, political, economic and cultural frameworks (Brown, 2012). Although this research, due to the nature of its design, cannot be claimed to be a ‘fully’ intersectional work, race and sexuality are here investigated with more emphasis, alongside other identity markers, as power axes which play different roles in fracturing and shaping gender relations as spatial practices. This approach takes shape in how design, recruitment and analysis are performed, where markers are not isolated, but considered as co-constructing identities and practices.

1.2.2. Digital Geographies

The evolution of digital geographies as a field is entangled with technology’s evolution. As new collaborative mapping platforms, social networks and data processing technologies arise, new networks are born, deeply touching and modifying the places (Batty, 1997). Digital geographies are interested in the feedback cycle of material and immaterial nodes and nets, and the social, political, and economic phenomenon woven in and across the digital.

Contemporary digital geographies now seek to overrun the early, narrow frame proposed by Castells (2009) in his three major themes: users, technicalities and content production. The production of digital places, as well as the drawing of its limits, is often discussed by contrasting the potentialities of technology and access to them (or lack thereof); accordingly, unequal access to ICTs around the world also influences this creation and draw new places in the material world, evidencing the

permanent relationship between virtual and physical spaces. Power is a decisive concept in digital geographies as the very access to technology is a form of power, with conflicts and power relations constructing digital and material places (Carter, 2005; Costa, 2012; Crutcher and Zook, 2009; Dornelles, 2015; Santos, 2008b; Warf, 2007). Territoriality is renewed through the intensification of communal attachment to place afforded by the new ICTs, which gives new nuances to sense of place (Breindl, 2010; Dodge and Kitchin, 2001; Drissel, 2011; Mesch and Talmud, 2010; Paiva, 2015).

Popular online mapping tools and their combination of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and voluntary geographical information are changing the face of cartography. The Digital Earth creates a new digital layer to physical places, while user-generated data create online representations of physical places (Craglia *et al.*, 2012; Das, van Elzakker and Kraak, 2012; Graham, Zook and Boulton, 2013; Shelton *et al.*, 2014; Zook, Graham and Shelton, 2011). Moreover, observing and contrasting nations and sovereignties' approach to digital technologies can enhance the understanding of digital places and societal conditions behind their construction. The transposition of practices from physical to digital places is marked by the adaptation of forms and bodies, from material to digitalised versions, using cultural devices such as language as a bridge between physical and digital spaces (Maddrell, 2012). Far from being opposite, digital, and physical spaces act like extensions of each other.

Online places are normalised and regulated by social discourses (official or vernacular) originated in a given socio-cultural context, embedded in material places (Maddrell, 2012). As a result, digital places are overlapping, permeable, flexible spaces, punctured by embodied experiences marked by socio-cultural-economic factors, mimicking, and augmenting offline practices to create new, online performances. Although the idea of cyberspace as a simulacrum is present in literature since the 1990s, spatial metaphors, in fact, cease to exist while 'lobbies' and 'rooms' become actual lobbies and rooms due to the meaning, value and practices underlining them (Paiva, 2015). Online arenas are then confirmed as space, thus validating Dodge and Kitchin's (2001) view of cyberspace as 'the *conceptual space* within ICTs' (authors' emphasis).

Computer and Videogames

As discussed in Chapter Three, online gaming arenas are the epitome of online spaces due to their production as a complex assemblage of social arenas and code/spaces

mediated by a digitally inflected ludicity. A geographical focus on computer and videogames, as proposed by this study, provides a rich insight into how these emotional spaces are produced by embodied intentionalities that go beyond visual and sensory representations. Through the lens of gender relations, spatial practices are revealed in online gaming worlds, resulting from power struggles of inclusion, exclusion, and agency. Moreover, these practices of generating, using and perceiving space (Lefèbvre, 1992) are bound to places' cultural significance (Paiva, 2015). As discussed in Chapter Three, spatial practices are debated in material places of all scales, but little discussed in digital spaces.

Chapter Three discusses the gendering of technology and the creation of social rifts due to power imbalances in its production and consumption. Technology is stamped as a masculine domain, and this ideology, born out of socio-historical processes of gender production, is reinforced and disseminated through ideological apparatuses (Wajcman, 2004). Domination and control of technology is a form of power which does not eliminate other axes, especially those of identity. For this reason, access to technology does not solve time-old discontents; gender is thus fundamental to understanding online spaces in their socially complex production, revealing often ignored, albeit fundamental power dynamics.

Indeed, as a significant part of technology enterprises, CVGs reflect, both in their production and consumption, the social processes underlying masculine issues of control, power, and domination. Games development follows technology development in its thirst for the domination of nature, time and resources, and mastery of techniques (Wajcman, 1991). To envisage a combat game is to reflect these ideologies. Likewise, youth socialisation to CVGs is markedly gendered; ten years ago, at least three-quarters of boys between 11 and 17 years of age used to play at least weekly, whereas no more than a third of girls the same age engaged with this hobby (Octobre et al., 2010). Boys tend to play more as they grow up, while girls tend to play less, probably due to different patterns in peer socialisation, as gaming starts to be associated with masculine culture, especially when stratified into legitimate and illegitimate games (thus forming the stereotype of the 'true gamer' – see Chapter Three) (Coavoux, 2019). Even now, when more women actually play CVGs, and more advertising is tailored to women as consumers, this marketing carries traditional expectations about home and leisure balance, often essentialising gendered roles, and tokenising or ghettoising women who play (Chess, 2011).

League is currently the most popular MOBA in the world. More importantly, it is an complex assemblage of global and local identities, digital subcultures, and complex, ideology-loaded codes. Still, although well explored in other fields such as psychology and game studies, this game is very understudied in the burgeoning field of geographies of videogames, a branch of digital geographies. Due to its intricate entanglement of places, practices and cultures, League is a privileged site for uncovering the production of digital spaces through their co-creation with physical and embodied-psychological spaces (Maddrell, 2016). For instance, the materiality of game servers placed and organised around arbitrary geographical delimitations (see subsection 1.3.3) speaks about the limits of corporate power over the construction of online communities, expressed in more or less material (but very concrete) ways across the various spheres of the game.

Simultaneously, the organic production of League's social arenas reveals the porosity of boundaries between practices of/in the physical and the digital. As expanded later in this chapter and the following, League is infamous for the prevalence of antisocial behaviours, especially of a misogynistic nature. These manifestations are lenses through which gendered relations can be unearthed and decoded within context, illuminating the practices of inclusion, exclusion, and agency through which the game's sites are socially produced in a permanent exchange between physical and digital arenas.

1.2.3. Binational Comparison

As with phenomena manifested in exclusively physical domains, the analysis of digital practices cannot be alienated from their context. Following this study's aims to understand the impact of contextual indexes of human development (anchored in physically manifested practices) upon digital socio-spatial practices, the binational comparison is a tool for contrast through highlighting. This study picks two sovereignties with highly contrasting cultural and historical backgrounds (to which the researcher has access either due to nationality or to immersion), and variable levels of social development, especially regarding gender equality.

As unpacked in Chapter Two, Brazil is a profoundly unequal country where gender equality is the distant goal of a struggle encountering everlasting barriers – e.g. widespread and naturalised gendered violence, and inequitable gendered socialisation.

Contrastingly, people in the UK have achieved significant victories positioning the nation higher in the equality ladder, although still with gaps to be narrowed. A comparison between both countries thus illuminate convergence points where Brazil and the UK are at similar states of gender equality while underscoring the role of the marked inequalities within and across the two.

Likewise, both countries see significant levels and forms of digital divide, a phenomenon documented as being regionalised, classed, gendered and racialised in both countries. Even so, statistics still show Brazil as much more unequal, with significantly fewer people having Internet access and most people doing so in precarious ways. Despite its precarity on Internet access, Brazil is one of the most important markets for online gaming, and more so for League, which arouses questions about the relationship of that people with the game, as opposed to that of British people.

Lastly, the striking socio-cultural and historical differences between both countries are paramount for uncovering the role of language in gendered relations taking place in online spaces where social practices are mediated by written and spoken words. League's popularity in Brazil has, as shown in subsection 1.3.3, led Riot Games to open a large quarter in that country, following the opening of a dedicated game server for Brazilian players. Contrarily, British players do not have an exclusive server, being positioned within a larger Western-European server which encompasses other nationalities and languages. This important distinction between servers leads to questions regarding whether the arbitrarily drawn server exclusivity (and thus certain cultural segregation) plays any role in how social spaces are negotiated in League.

The presented context evidences a series of gendered spatial practices worth being addressed at the crossroads of gender and digital geographies, opening discussion about the political dynamics working within cyberspace and the impacts upon relations of inclusion, exclusion, and agency. As further discussed in Chapter Three, scholarly literature contrasts with a lively public debate about sexism within online spaces; nevertheless, gender and video games are constantly interlinked in these debates.

The next section introduces the case study. The presentation is accompanied by a feminist critique to the game's languages, values, and ideologies. While this critique examines the (seemingly inconspicuous) gendering of the game, it does not accuse League's creators and players of intentionally reflecting masculinist values in the

game's products and practices. Indeed, a central issue is how games such as League become gendered, and more so, how technological undertakings reflect masculine power in the first place (Wajcman, 1991).

1.3. A field trip to Runeterra: presenting the case

League is a 3D, third-person MOBA developed and administered by the American company Riot Games, based in West Los Angeles, California, USA. The game is available for Microsoft and Mac operational systems. The company claims to have served 200 million players since the game's release in 2009, currently having a monthly player base of 100 million people, 27 million playing daily (Tassi, 2016; Volk, 2016). Twenty-one languages are officially spoken and written throughout worldwide League's servers (see section 1.3.3), and several other languages are also used, amalgamated with game jargon and users' patois. League's gameplay, structure, organisation, and institutionalisation are complexly developed and intertwined.

Runeterra, the digital world created within a classic fantasy narrative, is home for League's characters and battles. Built by Riot's creative team, League's lore is constantly developing, and Runeterra is depicted as a planet in exploration, of which Valoran and Shurima are the only known continents thus far. With seas, oceans and islands, Runeterra's lands are depicted as having unique characteristics and histories that ultimately lead to legendary class rivalry (Riot Games, 2019a). Up to the moment of this thesis' closure, League's universe was divided into eleven regions spread across the continents and the islands, as shown in the artistic map in Figure 2. Contrary to open-world massively multiplayer online games, League does not present an explorable or modifiable virtual world; instead, Runeterra is only depicted in the game lore, and in artistic portrayals of the game's locations and characters controlled by players.

Riot Game's website presents League's lore and places in richly illustrated pages featuring a backstory, demography, political system, ecosystem, architecture, technology level, attitudes to magic, and local legends, as illustrated by the screenshot presented in Figure 3. The detailed lore enriches the gamer's experience by providing great visual cues to the characters' development and the battles' locations and meanings.



Figure 2: Riot Games (2019). Official Map of Runeterra. Source: <https://map.leagueoflegends.com>



Figure 3: Riot Games (2019). Freljord - Official Map of Runeterra (detail). Source: <https://map.leagueoflegends.com/>

As a genre, medieval fantasy is built upon and provides important insights into dominant ideologies. While it provides pleasant escapism and unites people as a powerful, shared interest, the genre transmits and reflects traditional beliefs between its writers and readers; for instance, the most central axis to fantasy is the binary of good and evil (Ruppo Malone, 2016). Following this tradition and sustained by a continuous process of othering (see Chapter Three), League's backstory tells of historical animosities between peoples and races, and the presence of evil spirits justify the constant war between nations.

1.3.1. The Champion and the Summoner

A common characteristic of MMOs is the possibility of creating characters, usually known as avatars, with which the player navigates the virtual world; League differs from that standard. Runeterra has its own population of beings – the *Champions* – characters with unique personal stories, attributes and abilities, with backstories related to one or more places in the planet, and whose innate set of attributes helps define their in-game positions (Riot Games, 2017). As with other cultural products within the fantasy genre, League's champions represent different facets of existing character archetypes, usually divided into positive or negative, with specific roles within that world. Officially, champions are separated by their classes and subclasses, being either (Riot Games, 2017):

- Tank – a champion that resists extreme damage and disrupts the opponent's game.
 - Vanguard – offensive tank with significant power to start battles, displacing the opponent and opening space for their team's attack.
 - Warden – defensive tank, protects the allies and keeps opponents at bay.
- Fighter – champions that work at the heart of the battle through melee attack.
 - Juggernaut – champion with low range but great strength for attack and defence.
 - Diver – fast and light champions with low defence but rapid and strong attack.

- Slayer – melee champions focused in agile damage.
 - Assassin – specialised in infiltrating enemy lines for a targeted attack.
 - Skirmisher – better defence and lower attack power, focused on more sustained damage.

- Mage – also known as ability power carry⁴, these offensive champions have strong magical powers used for attack or support, although lacking defence and mobility.
 - Burst mage – usually work by blocking the opponent and attacking from short range.
 - Battle mage – with short combat range, these mages inflict area damage for a sustained period.
 - Artillery mage – very long-range attack that compensates for the very low damage resistance.

- Controller – also known as Support, offensive mages protect allies and create opportunity for attack.
 - Enchanter – improve allies’ abilities and protect them from harm, with very low potential for harming others or defending themselves.
 - Disruptor – with very low defence skills, disruptors work with allies to create blocking zones in the battlefield and delay opponent’s attacks.

- Marksman – also known as attack damage carry, refers to a champion with great resistance to physical damage in the long run, and good ability to destroy fixed obstacles (see next section) from long range. Weak in defence, marksmen are usually accompanied by a support and rely on improvement items.

Most champions do not fit neatly in one class, often having a primary and a secondary role according to their abilities. League’s champion pool is constantly updated, and new characters are added; up to the moment this chapter was written, the pool constituted of 141 champions (Riot Games, 2016a). As shown in Figure 5, each

⁴ ‘Carry’ refers to those champions who, when mastered, are extremely effective towards the end of the match, despite being weak at the beginning.

champion's profile in the official website constitutes of a snippet of the character's artistic depiction, a description of their attributes, a short introductory video (where available), text and video description of their abilities, and artistic depictions of the released skins. When available, the profile page also redirects to the champion's lore in League's broader storyline.

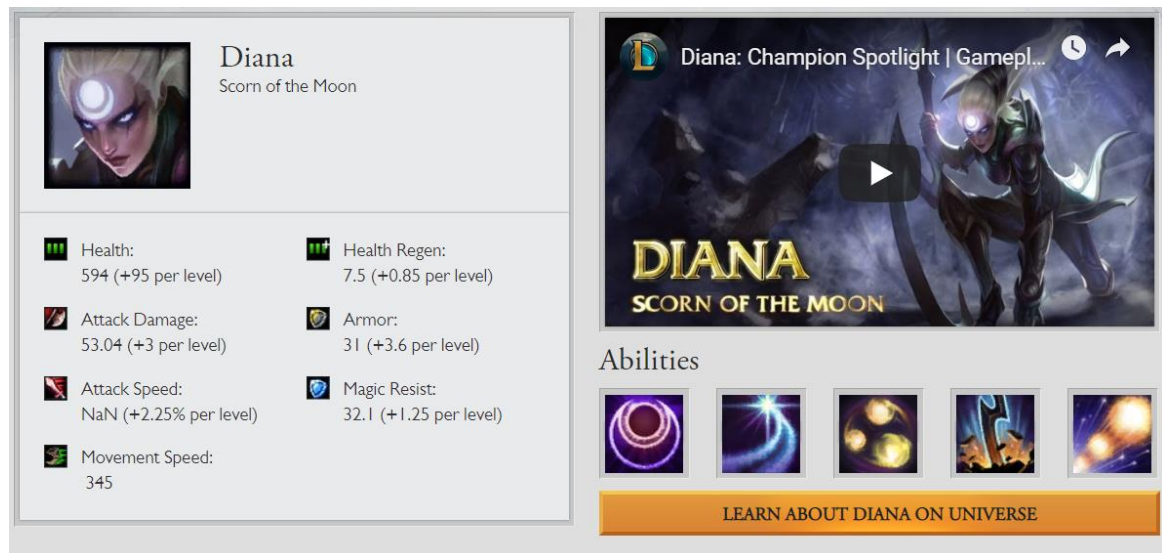


Figure 4: Riot Games (2019). Snapshot of champion Diana's profile page. Source: <https://euw.leagueoflegends.com/en/game-info/champions/Diana/>

In League, each player assumes the identity of an invisible *Summoner* with a unique in-game name (IGN, or nickname), keeping their offline identities undisclosed. Prior to each match, the player picks a champion; this choice is based on (but not limited to) individual play level, individual or team strategy and personal affinities. Although many users have one favourite, main champion, it is common for a player to have more than one character in their personal pool; as discussed further in the next subsection, ranked and professional gameplay complexifies champion choice for a match.

League is free to play, but internal microtransactions are an important source of income for the company; known as *freemium*, this format is popular in online games (Hamari, Hanner and Koivisto, 2017). The player can use official currencies to purchase several non-essential items, and most do it for social (gifting, social distinction, visual authority), hedonic (novelty, aesthetics, reciprocity, self-gratification, character dedication) and/or utilitarian reasons (Marder *et al.*, 2019). Purchased items are usually graphic files dedicated to customising or changing the

champion's in-game appearance (i.e. skins) or the summoner's profile picture, and neither of these has any practical use in improving performance.

Avatar and character representation in games is a frequently explored subject in scholarship and activism, and studies seek to understand the relationship between player and character, as well as the importance and impact of visual representations to the gaming community. Champion's visual representation somewhat impact on player's choice, for players tend to be more loyal to friendlier characters, those perceived as agreeable and attractive, and less aggressive (Li *et al.*, 2018). Shaw (2015a) argues, however, that a person's identification with game characters is not necessarily related to the representation of identity markers in the game. That does not acquit problematic (and intensely explored) representations of gender in CVGs, which historically rely on sexualisation, stereotyping or invisibility (Ivory, 2006) – although less prevalently in casual games in comparison with AAA⁵ and 'hardcore' games (Wohn, 2011). In League, a third of champions are female, so there is a pool (although low) of playable female characters. However, female champions are mostly humanoid, presenting the standard White, thin body, rarely depicted as monstrous or intimidating (Kurtz, 2019). Sexualised, voluptuous, and semi-nude female champions are the standard, as stressed by Riot Games' designers, who justify the design on the basis of what makes sense in terms of lore (Hernandez, 2016). Clearly, the ideologies through which League builds what 'makes sense' for champions are patriarchal and reproduce established ideals of femininity and gendered power.

While League presents more or less plural options regarding the ethnicity of champions (as opposed to diversity - see Shaw, 2015a), the depiction of different races and (often conflicting) cultures by the game's champions reveals a deeply colonial and racist background, not different from that exhibited in classic fantasy texts (Ruppo Malone, 2016). As argued by Sengün and colleagues (2019), champion design and lore are frequently discussed by the community, being often weaponised through hate speech against non-White players. For instance, despite the fictional character of the game's background story, a dark-skinned champion presented as a 'bomber' carries a strong meaning for all of us who are immersed in an Islamophobic culture.

⁵ Games produced and distributed by major developing companies, usually yielding higher revenue.

1.3.2. The Fields of Justice and Game Mechanics

In League, the three battle arenas are known as the Fields of Justice (FoJs). These game maps (shown in Figures 7, 9 and 10) present unique terrains, game conditions, and specific aims (Ferrari, 2013). In all maps, League's main battle goals are threefold:

- Slaying the enemy's armies – each team comprises several summoners and their champions, backed up by non-playable characters (NPCs) known as *minions*. Successful killings earn in-game currency (this process is also known as *gold farming*) used for champion improvement. Self and team-defence are paramount since the opposing team makes points when inflicting damage on champions (for this reason, damage-taking and dying are known as *feeding*).
- Demolishing the enemy's protective structures while progressing in the map lanes – each map presents a few rows through which the player must advance according to their in-game role. Throughout the lanes, the player finds fixed, protective structures (Turrets, or Towers), that must be destroyed to weaken the opponent's defences and earn points and gold. Allied structures are used to protect allied champions from attack.
- Destroying opponent's Inhibitors and Nexus (crystal-like structure shown on Figure 6) – when reaching the opponent's base, the final goal is to destroy their Inhibitors, life-spawning structures in which armies are raised. In doing so, the opponent team is severely weakened and loses their armies. The Nexus, main life-spawning structure at the bases' centre, is the most important and final structure to be destroyed.



Figure 5: Riot Games (2019). Team base on Summoner's Rift.



Figure 6: INVEN E-sports (2016). Summoner's Rift Map - Season 4. Available on <https://www.flickr.com/photos/invenphotos/27712494451>. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Located in Frejlord, Summoner's Rift is the most popular map, comprising three lanes (top, middle, bottom). On each extremity of the diamond-shaped map (Figure 6), teams find their base, comprising a structure that serves as a shop, three Inhibitors (per team), and the Nexus. In this mode, also known as 5v5, each champion in a team of five is positioned to battle according to the summoner's abilities and team's strategies, ready to progress throughout the lanes. While advancing, each player proceeds to farming according to their role in the battle. When slain or weakened, the summoner teleports back to the allied Nexus to replenish health and mana, and spend acquired gold on improved armours, weapons, and consumables. While playing, the summoner also acquires experience, used to improve their battling powers, and unlock new ones as their champion advances in skill. After destroying the turrets along the lanes, the whole team gathers around the opponent's Inhibitor, attacking the opponent's champions and structures until finally reaching and destroying the Nexus. Figure 8 shows a screenshot of Summoner's Rift during a match, in which a turret is approached by purple-coloured minions on the left quadrant, while four champions brawl close to the jungle in the right quadrant.

On average, one match in Summoner's Rift lasts one hour, and it is not possible to pause the game. The complex 5v5 match also features the jungle, a neutral area where one summoner per team is dedicated to slaying fierce monsters – Baron Nashor, Elder Dragon, Rift Herald, and smaller, neutral jungle monsters. Each of these creatures has a different spawn time in the match and yield specific benefits when slain. The Jungler's work is solitary but paramount for the team's progress, since each monster's killing yields significant bonuses and rewards for the responsible team, facilitating the battle. Summoner's Rift is where professional competitive play is based, hence its popularity.



Figure 7: Riot Games (2019). Screenshot of Summoner's Rift during a match.

Located in Runeterra's Shadow Isles, Twisted Treeline (also known as TT, or 3v3, shown in Figure 9) is a smaller field comprising only top and bottom lanes, and the jungle, on which three players battle in each team⁶. There are two inhibitors, one in each extremity of the eight-shaped map, aside from two Altars, structures that yield bonuses to the occupying team. Instead of the Baron, Twisted Treeline's jungle features the Vilemaw, a spider-like evil deity, whose death also provides the team with bonuses. Like in SR, summoners must slay the enemy army and destroy turrets and inhibitors prior to destroying the Nexus, also being able to teleport to the base for recharge and improvement.

The last map, Howling Abyss presents "All Random, All Mid" (widely known as ARAM) mode, where two teams of five summoners battle along a single lane resembling a bridge (see Figure 10), each controlling a randomly assigned champion. Only one inhibitor is present in this field placed in Frejlord; on ARAM, players are not allowed to return to their base unless slain. Aside from that, all other mechanics apply to ARAM, making it the map of choice for players who intend to practice with new champions and test in-game communication strategies and devices. There is no jungle.

As with other map-based CVGs, League's maps convey spatial stories (Edler and Dickmann, 2017), although with less freedom of exploration during matches. Indeed, CVG maps can be drawn follow actual geospatial data and emulate existing physical places in a digital environment, or borrow from existing places to build entirely new, imaginary locations (Ahlqvist, 2011; Chądzyńska and Gotlib, 2015). In League, the fantastic world is not explorable nor modifiable, but serves the purpose of providing background for the lore and setting the atmosphere for the match. Nevertheless, the idea of a world under exploration, with uncharted continents conveyed by Runeterra reflects Western, colonial ideas of a world, while allowing for the hope of new futures – Runeterra is ordered by civilisation and otherness, just like Earth.

⁶ Twisted Treeline was retired from the game shortly after this thesis' submission (November 2019). Other maps have been available since the game's launch in 2009, being also repurposed or disabled after some time (e.g. Crystal Scar).



Figure 8: Artistic depiction of Twisted Treeline. Retrieved from mobafire.com (unknown author). Available at <http://www.mobafire.com/league-of-legends/build/the-general-guide-to-league-of-legends-195826>



Figure 9: Artistic depiction of Howling Abyss. Retrieved from millennium.org (unknown author). Available at https://uk.ign.com/wikis/league-of-legends/Starter_Guide.

In all maps, in-game communication happens through text chat and an alert system. The former refers to a transparent window usually placed at the bottom left of the screen, where players communicate via typed text; the chat window can be muted or removed by the player. League's alert system comprises five visual and sound alerts activated through associated keyboard shortcut and point-and-click. The alerts (widely known as pings), visually mark one area for allies, according to need and intention. Communication via ping is used for rapid, focused actions (Riot Games, 2019b), whereas the chat is used for strategy adjustment and socialisation.

Every new summoner starts at level 1 and evolves to level 30 by engaging in increasingly complex matches and purchasing new champions. Upon reaching level 30 and purchasing at least twenty champions⁷, the player may choose to engage in competitive games and climb a rank ladder known as League System⁸, which organises and matches players with similar skill levels, allowing them to compete or join each other in matches. Skill level is computed through League Points, accumulated in matches and monitored through the player's profile. Depending on their skill level, players are positioned within one of nine system tiers⁹, each divided in four, in which the player evolves upwards from IV to I until their promotion to the next higher tier.

Players can engage in Solo gaming (i.e. solo queue) and be randomly assigned game partners or gather an ad-hoc team for Group matches. As the Summoner advances in-game, game types and maps are unlocked (Riot Games, 2017):

- Tutorial: the first game type available to new players, it is played on the ARAM map and aims to teach new players the rules and basic mechanics.
- Co-op Vs. AI: a team of similarly-skilled human Summoners play cooperatively together (hence co-op) against an artificial intelligence (AI) team. Available in 5v5 and 3v3, it is usually recommended for beginner and intermediate training.

⁷ New champions can be acquired for free through the accumulation of Blue Essence, an in-game currency that can be obtained through levelling up. However, players complain of the long time commitment necessary to amass the value, which is often better replaced by real money expenditure (O'Brien, 2019).

⁸ The League System replaced the Elo rating system in 2012. Some users still refer to the ranked system by its old name.

⁹ From lowest to highest: Iron, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond, Master, Grandmaster, Challenger (Riot Games, 2019)

- PvP: available in all three maps, in the *person versus person* mode, the two teams are formed by human summoners fighting in Solo or Group matches. Team formation follows two modes:
 - Normal Matchmaking uses an automated matchmaking system to pair teams of similarly-skilled players against one another.
 - Ranked Matchmaking is available to players upon reaching account level 30. It uses a similar system as Normal Matchmaking; however, pre-made teams must be of comparable level on the League System, so expert players and weak players are not allowed to team together in Ranked. After playing ten or more Ranked games, accounts are given a public "rank" that correlates with their skill level.
- Custom: allows for a customisable combination of human or AI players in any map or mode.

Matchmaking is further complicated by the champion-pick system, an option available to players from level 30:

- Blind Pick: the two teams select their champions simultaneously. Players only learn the champion selections of the opposing team when the match begins. It is available on Summoner's Rift and Twisted Treeline for regular person versus person, and Co-op vs AI.
- Draft Pick: each team may ban five champions (a total of ten champions banned), removing them from the match. Teams then take turns selecting their champions while being able to see the selections of the other team. It is available for Summoner's Rift ranked person versus person.
- Random Pick: randomly assigns a champion to each player. Players accumulate re-rolls by playing multiple matches, which they can use to select another champion for that match randomly. It is available on ARAM.

As argued by Hinnant (2013) and Crosby (2016), and illustrated by the game mechanics and objectives, League's text fosters and explores neoliberal economic values by demanding an individualistic, meritocratic and instrumentally rational use of technology. Indeed, the very business model employed by Riot Games, which focuses on a *freemium* model based on player retention (Demediuk *et al.*, 2018) also

raises questions as to whether a player's success in the game relies exclusively on meritocracy. The colonial beliefs exhibited by League's champions (see section 1.3.1) are also present in the company's business model, where the revenue – generated through the deeply unequal engagement of worldwide users with the game – is transferred to shareholders in the Global North.

Allied with the perceived difficult mastery of the game, which drives players towards enduring severe tests and undivided dedication, League's focus on heroic and entelechial (Soukup, 2007) dedication to violent in-game practices is part of a wider Western culture of hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter Three) (Wajcman, 1991). Consequently, the game (perhaps inadvertently) feeds traditional ideas about femininity and the unsuitability of women to the game, despite the physical disembodiment of online gaming. Moreover, League is an exceedingly competitive and violent game (hence the ranked format and the perceived hardship involved in the pursue of kills in exchange for currency). Regardless of how the player, individually and collectively, chooses to engage with the game (and they often engage with it in ways that challenge its ideology – see Hinnant, 2013 and Crosby, 2016) its script gives insight into embedded ideologies of otherness and marginalisation.

1.3.3. World Regions and Servers

Following an impressive growth in reach, Riot Games organised regional areas with dedicated servers to reduce connection lag and its hindrances to gameplay (e.g. significant delays in the queue, holdups, and cut-offs during the match). When creating a profile, the player is usually directed to their appropriate server through their IP number; however, it is possible to open a profile and play through any server, regardless of location (apart from the possible connectivity issues that may occur). League is currently distributed through ten regions where a server computer is physically located (see Table 1).

Region name & abbreviation	Countries Served	Release Date	Language(s)	Server Location
Brazil (BR)	Brazil	09/2012	Portuguese	São Paulo
Europe Nordic & East (EUNE)	Norway Sweden Finland Czechia Greece Hungary Poland Romania	07/2010	Czech English Greek Hungarian Polish Romanian	Frankfurt, Germany
Europe West (EUW)	Ireland UK Portugal Spain France Germany Italy Netherlands Belgium Switzerland Austria	07/2010	English German Spanish French Italian	Amsterdam, Netherlands
Latin America North (LAN)	Mexico Cuba Haiti Dominican Republic Belize Guatemala Honduras El Salvador Nicaragua Costa Rica Puerto Rico Panama Colombia Venezuela Ecuador Peru	06/2013	Spanish	Miami, USA
Latin America South (LAS)	Bolivia Paraguay Uruguay Chile Argentina	06/2013	Spanish	Santiago, Chile
North-America (NA)	United States Canada	10/2009	English	Chicago, USA
Oceania (OCE)	Australia New Zealand	06/2013	English	Sydney, Australia

Russia (RU)	Russia Kazakhstan Uzbekistan Turkmenistan Mongolia	04/2013	Russian	München, Germany
Turkey (TR)	Turkey	09/2012	Turkish	Istanbul, Turkey
Japan (JP)	Japan	03/2016	Japanese	Tokyo, Japan
South-East Asia (SEA – SG/MY, PH, ID, VN, TH, TW) (managed by Garena)	Singapore Malaysia The Philippines Indonesia Vietnam Thailand Taiwan	07/2010	English Thai Bahasa Malaysia Bahasa Indonesia Vietnamese	Singapore
Korea (KR)	South Korea	12/2011	Korean/Hangul	Seoul, South Korea
China (CN) – (managed by Tencent)		Unknown	Mandarin Chinese, Simplified Mandarin Chinese	Shanghai, China

Table 1: League Regions. Adapted from leagueoflegends.fandom.com

Riot Games has reorganised the world around its servers, trampling on existing understandings of national identity, language, and culture. Ho (2017) suggested that the formation of League Regions is tied to decreased nationalistic feelings between users towards their regions, especially in the North American and European servers. This forced merger of cultures is stressed by the opposite situation encountered in the Chinese and Korean servers, where players and fans should encounter fewer barriers in communication and emotional bonding than in Europe with each other and their server. British players congregate in a merged server (Europe West), while Brazil has an exclusive one, which highlights the influence of contextual, cultural standards on practices employed by players in both countries.

1.3.4. Professional Gameplay

With a steep growth in popularity and revenue (figures presented in Chapter Two), several countries have established legal frames to include competitive videogaming – e-sports – in their traditional sports law, thus regulating its organisation and commercialisation. Although the classification of organised, professional videogame

play as a sport is riddled with controversy, recent research argues that e-sports' structure, organisation, competition and institutionalisation correspond to those of traditional sport (Funk, Pizzo and Baker, 2017).

As with traditional sports, e-sports comprise amateur and professional players, who organise in teams that compete, in seasons, within their appropriate league. Typically, a League professional team comprises eleven players (six of them making the reserve team), one player for each game role. Top-level players are recruited to professional teams in their respective top league, usually divided by server/area: in China, Tencent League of Legends Pro League (LPL); in Korea, League of Legends Champions Korea (LCK); in the US, Riot-owned League of Legends Championship Series (LCS). Major professional leagues like these are the means to qualify for the annual League of Legends World Championship (Worlds). In Brazil, the eight best professional teams dispute the Brazilian League Championship (CBLOL) to achieve international tournaments. All leagues in professional gameplay in League are corporate-owned and managed.

Professional League matches take place in tournament arenas especially adapted for electronic sports, usually with enough seating for a public of hundreds or thousands, as shown in Figure 11. Dressed in distinctive uniforms, players sit on typical gaming islands with superior equipment (computers, headsets, and other peripherals), while the audience watches the match develop through theatre-size screens. Matches are also broadcast online or on television, and professional commentators narrate the game.

During training periods, professional players are based in training centres known as gaming houses; while living together in these physical sites (like the one depicted in Figure 12), players are offered a range of state-of-art equipment and services necessary to hone their individual skills as well as the team's strategy.



Figure 10: Yunker (2013). LoL World Championship 2013 - Los Angeles, California. Los Angeles, USA. Available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/chris-yunker/10128389754>. CC BY 4.0

Jenson and de Castell (2018) argue that the shift from leisure to labour propelled by the e-sports phenomenon has transformed the production of subjectivities through the production of a division between pro-gamers and spectators, expressed in the e-sport industry's outstanding financial outcomes. Nevertheless, the authors critique the profound, albeit often occluded, gendering of the phenomenon, further discussed in Chapter Two. In addition to looking at the striking gender imbalance in the e-sports industry, it is important to take notice of the significant pay gap between female and male pro-players, and the ubiquity of slanderous misogynistic attacks characterising a significant part of e-sports subjectivity. These issues, which are part of the wider employment of hegemonic masculinity strategies to assure e-sports status as legitimate sports, persist, despite growing efforts to increase a certain 'diversity' in e-sports. In 2016, League e-sports saw the first participation of a woman as an athlete in a professional team; from the moment Maria 'Remilia' Creveling entered the North American Championship Series, she became a target for sexist and transphobic attacks questioning her adequateness as both a woman (for being transgender) and as a gamer

(for being a woman). Remilia's short career and tragic life afterwards¹⁰ starkly exemplify how League's community employs violent tactics for policing and punishing non-conforming bodies in defence of the hegemonic masculinity which defines CVGs as masculine and heterosexual, whose gendered boundaries are perceived as permanently at risk by the introduction of marginalised people (Janish, 2018).



Figure 11: INTZ e-Sports (2018). Partial view of the gaming house 'Quartel General', belonging to INTZ e-sports club, located in São Paulo, Brazil.

1.3.5. Streaming

A common activity among League players and audience is live streaming; content creators – usually high-skilled players or commentators – broadcast matches, strategy building debates, and other related subjects, using several strategies to foment an interactive relationship with the viewer. Figure 13 is a screenshot depicting a typical League streaming session, where the creator (in the picture, the British League streamer MissBaffy) shares her computer screen in which the live match (or other activity) is shown; in a smaller, detached window, she shares the view from a camera

¹⁰ Maria Creveling died suddenly in December 2019, aged only 24 years old, after stepping back from professional gameplay due to enduring online abuse (Valentine, 2020).

positioned in front of her, which captures the gamer's face and body, usually seated at a gaming chair, using a microphone and/or headset.

Streaming communication is an intricate activity that demands expertise in multiple skills, including content creation and curation, community building, public speaking and high-skilled, performative play (often including careful crafting of the streamer's physical appearance) (Pellicone and Ahn, 2017).

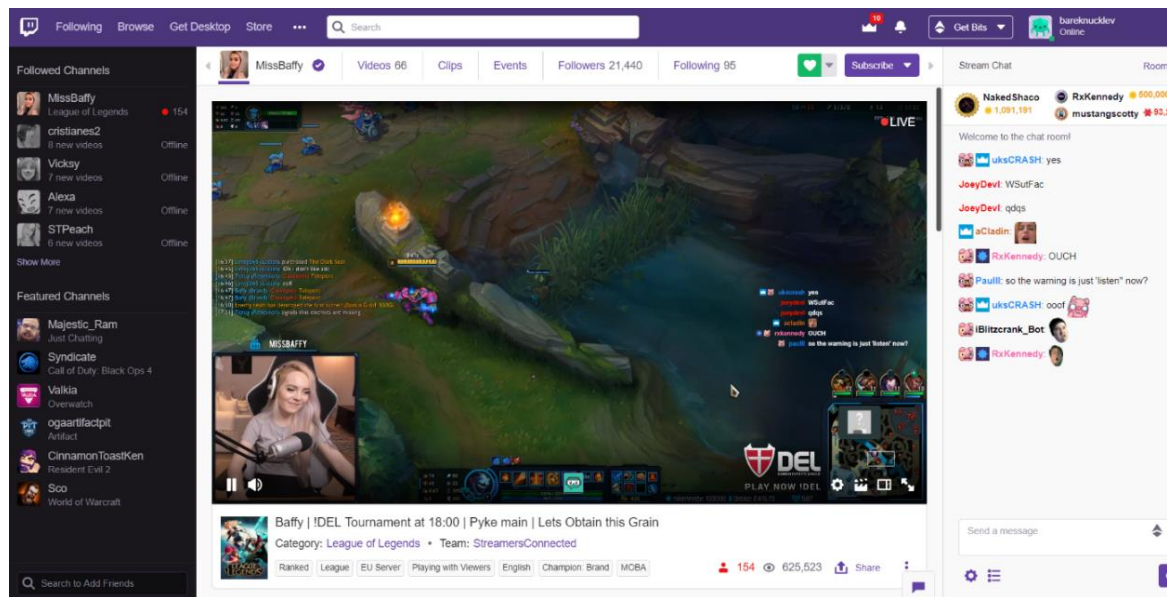


Figure 12: Screenshot of www.twitch.tv during MissBaffy's live streaming of a League match

On the right-hand side of Figure 13, the stream chat screens the audience's textual communication with the streamer and fellow watchers. On platforms like Twitch.tv, the synchronous communication between viewer and streamer is much valued. The audience shares their thoughts and wishes towards the streamer expecting a response, either via voice or via actions in or off-game, thus contributing to content creation in real-time (Yu *et al.*, 2018). Watchers can gratify the streamer by donating a certain amount in virtual currency, previously purchased with official money through the website. For instance, Twitch.tv streamers receive a 'cheer' from their fans, each manifestation containing a certain amount of Twitch 'bits'; Twitch then transfers part of this revenue to streamers, in official currency (Twitch.tv, 2019). To attract more donors, some streamers publicly acknowledge current paying viewers by mentioning or displaying their names on the screen (but only those who pay beyond a minimum quota), thus increasing audience participation and their revenue; alternatively, content creators can provide alternative means for audience donation (e.g. online

retail wishlists, online payments account for cash transference, for instance, PayPal). Successful streamers often get international careers with high visibility, earning significant income through audience donation and participation in advertisement and marketing; videogame streaming enjoys outstanding viewership, but its profitability for individual streamers relies on the increased audience interaction for live content creation (Yu *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, both gift-giving and chatting are means of expressing and improving the audience's relationship with the streamer, reflecting the inherently social nature of video streaming in all genres, including video gaming (Yu *et al.*, 2018).

E-sports intersects with streaming; a significant portion (34 per cent) of competitive videogaming's audience in the US uses online streaming as their viewing site of preference; of these platforms, YouTube is the most popular, followed by Twitch.tv. The typical e-sports viewer in the US is a male, between 25 and 44 years old, with children in their household, and of higher income (EMA, 2016). Thirty-one per cent of UK gamers watch online videos on the topic – less than the 59 per cent of Brazilians who do it. Twelve per cent of Brazilians aware of e-sports watch video content (including streaming) – about double the Britons doing the same (Newzoo, 2018a).

Streaming platforms are popular and flexible, opening opportunities for agency. Albeit male-dominated, game vlogging and streaming are privileged sites for the construction and challenging of hegemonic and *geek* masculinities (see Chapter Three) as they allow the construction of specific gendered performances that shift from traditional masculinities present in physical sports, for example (Maloney, Roberts and Caruso, 2018). Likewise, Gray (2017) underscores that Black streamers appropriate tools like Twitch.tv to challenge (sometimes unintentionally) the expectations of racialised online behaviour, while faced with racist attacks which undermine their potential as content producers in online spaces.

Nonetheless, these platforms still operate within a neoliberal framework which, disguised under contemporary discourses of aspirational labour (e.g. 'do what you love' and 'digital nomad' tropes), rearrange exploitative and consequently marginalising practices (Jenson and de Castell, 2018). In this sense, there is some criticism of performances of womanhood on streaming, comparing the most sexualised instances with explicit adult broadcasting (i.e. *camgirls*). Notwithstanding the problems with this comparison, the negotiation of gendered identities in these highly interactive platforms raises questions about the commodification of gendered

performances, the sophistication of misogyny through technology, and the power shifts enabled by the use of streaming (and gaming) as a tool for gendered agency (Bleakley, 2014). This critique is especially timely when faced with the reality of widespread practices of sexual harassment against women in the platform, which is underscored by the visibility of their bodies. Often dismissed as banter or trash talk, this practice is centred on the questioning of public, feminine performances of gaming, and doubles by legitimising streaming as a valid gaming activity (which cannot, in turn, be perceived as feminine), and as an effective way of policing women's bodies away from these spaces (Ruberg, Cullen and Brewster, 2019).

1.4. Thesis Structure

This thesis reports the research process by structuring it with concepts and presenting the results of a methodologically rigorous investigation. Chapter Two explores the context of both compared countries, providing statistics of gendered (in)equality vis a vis gendered digital divides and imbalances in the gaming industry. In Chapter Three, the conceptual framework articulates gendered relations and spatial practices in the realm of digital geographies. Chapter Four presents the research design and methodologies, and ethical frameworks, after a brief presentation of the researcher's feminist ontological and epistemological positions. Chapters Five and Six present integrated results and discussion around the thematic areas highlighted from the dataset, interwoven with reflexive pieces and implications for theory. The thesis ends with Chapter Seven, which presents a summary of the findings, implications of the study, contributions to scholarship and future recommendations.

Through a discussion of the Gender Gap Index for Brazil and the UK, the next chapter clarifies the background for this study and the rationale for the binational comparison. The chapter discusses the state of gender equality in both countries, weaving the legal frameworks and current gender rights statistics with economic, educational, political and health indicators. Later, it discusses the digital divides in Brazil and the UK, presenting figures of the gendered imbalances in the technology sector, moving on to more particular issues within League, thus grounding the debates explored later in the thesis.

Chapter Two: The State of the Game

As discussed in Chapter One, League was chosen as a case for study due to its absence from geographical works, despite its current popularity. The institutional organisation of the game's servers across the world calls for a look into the social, economic, political, and cultural issues at play in the game's production and consumption, and how issues like gender equality impact the production of gaming arenas. Finally, the choice of countries for comparison is based on their significant cultural, economic, and political contrasts, especially regarding indicators of gender equality. These contrasts are exposed in the Global Gender Gap, a multitemporal and cross-sectional framework developed to track and monitor gender disparities around the globe, calculated yearly by the World Economic Forum (Schwab, Klaus *et al.*, 2019). Intersectional socio-cultural cleavages fracture digital access and literacy in both countries, and these contrasts show how markedly gendered is the digital divide.

This chapter presents the state of gender equality in Britain and Brazil, providing both the context of the study and the rationale for the binational comparison. The compared statistics and debates regarding gendered disparities in the digital and beyond are fundamental for understanding this study's results in context, and for exploring the contextual meanings of spatial practices shaping League's digital spaces. Moreover, the text provides an overview of gendered inequalities still to be addressed should Brazil and the UK aim at becoming fairer countries.

Scaffolded by the indicators used to calculate the Global Gender Gap, this chapter positions both chosen countries in their current movement towards gender equality. To better unpack the rationale behind the chosen binational comparison, and to highlight how this comparison intends to contribute to advancing knowledge in the field of feminist digital geographies, this chapter discusses the gender digital divides in Brazil and the UK, and the contrasts between two populations of gamers engaged with the same game.

It is essential to highlight, however, the binary social norms employed by national and supranational statistics authorities which, regardless of advances in knowledge of gender and sexuality, tend to enforce and reinforce outdated notions of sex and

gender. As a consequence, some statistics obscure non-conforming experiences and needs, while negatively influencing public policies and media portrayals of entire populations (Westbrook and Saperstein, 2015; Bittner and Goodyear-Grant, 2017). Moreover, the indexes of female participation utilised in the calculation of the Gender Gap do not correspond to undisputed prescriptions for gender equality. Structural, non-structural, and symbolic forms of sexism and heterosexism ingrained in socio-cultural norms (see Chapter Three) are likely to jeopardise advances even in the most legally equal of places. The next section places the socio-cultural context in Britain and Brazil and compares economy and health factors before discussing indicators and policies against gendered violence in both countries.

2.1. Gender Equality and Digital Inclusion in a Cross-Cultural Context

Structured by four sub-indexes based on several variables, the Global Gender Gap index enables comparisons between women and men:

- Economic Participation and Opportunity
 - Labour force participation rate (per cent)
 - Wage equality for similar work (survey, 1-7 scale)
 - Estimated earned income (in purchasing power parity, int. \$)
 - Legislators, senior officials, and managers (per cent)
 - Professional and technical workers (per cent)
- Educational Attainment
 - Literacy rate (per cent)
 - Enrolment (per cent)
 - primary education
 - secondary education
 - tertiary education
- Health and Survival

- Sex ratio at birth (per cent)
- Healthy life expectancy (years)
- Political Empowerment
 - Women in parliament (per cent)
 - Women in ministerial positions (per cent)
 - Years with a female head of state (in the last fifty years), share of tenure years

These variables provide useful indicators of the countries' human development in relations to economic and political indexes. As part of the wider socio-cultural development of nations, however, the attainment of gender rights happened at different times in each of the compared countries, as seen in Figure 14.

200 Years of Gender Rights

Brazil and UK

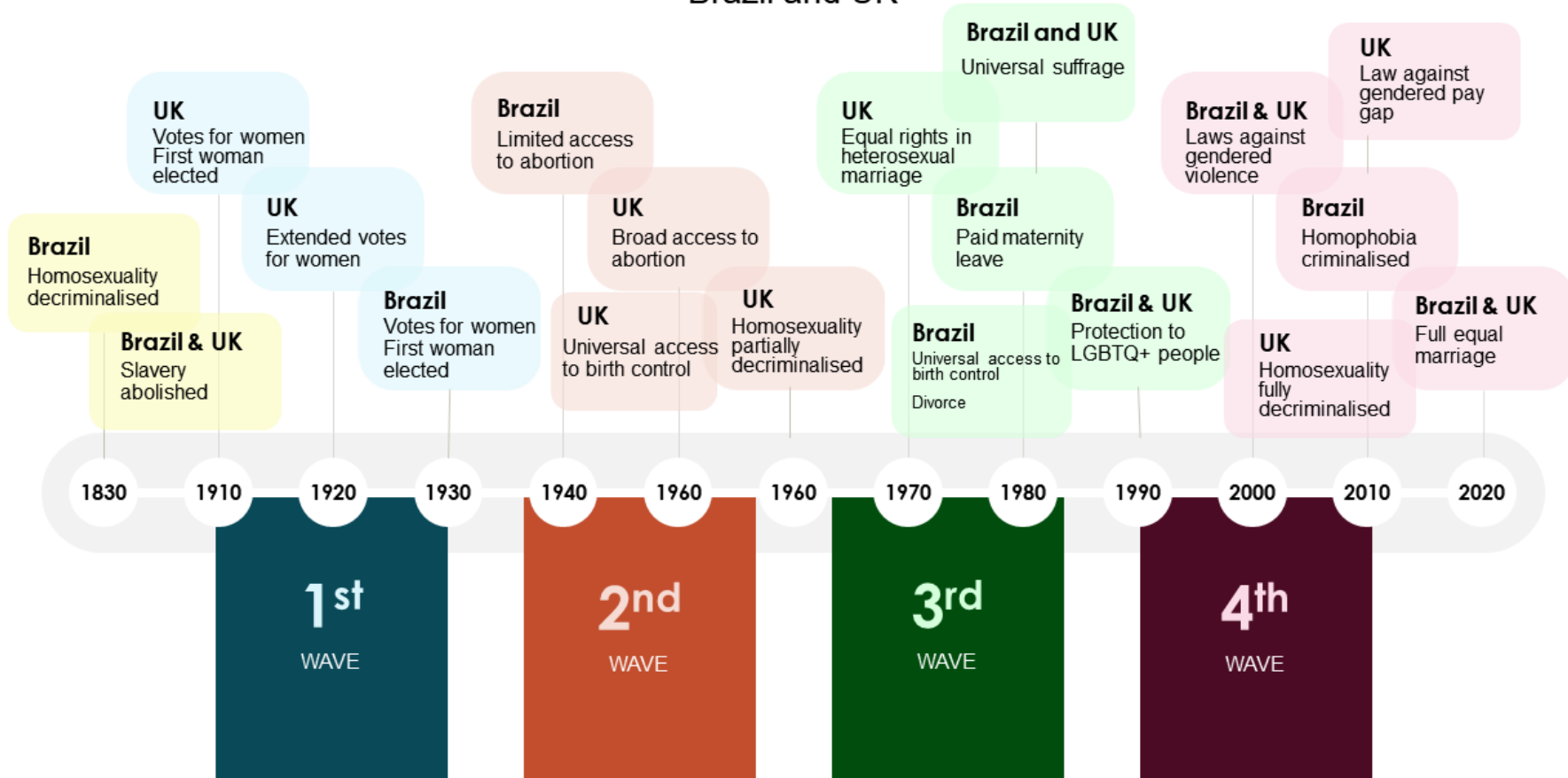


Figure 13: Timeline of 200 years of Gender Rights in Brazil and the UK, per decade, along the four waves of feminism (reference list at the end of the thesis).

2.1.1. Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors

The United Kingdom of Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) and Northern Ireland (plus the dependencies of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands), is located in the north of the European continent. The union totalises 66.5 million inhabitants (ONS, 2019i). Brazil is physically located in South America, and culturally positioned as part of Latin America; it has a population of 210.1 million inhabitants scattered across 26 states and the Federal District (IBGE, 2010).

Figure 15 shows UK's and Brazil's rank and scores for the Gender Gap compared to those of Iceland, the benchmark country with the narrowest gap in the index. As seen, Brazil and the UK are similar for having nearly closed the educational and health gaps. However, the UK has better scores in economic and political equality compared to Brazil, even though it is still a deeply unequal country in terms of both variables.

Brazil is highly ethnically mixed, and more than half of its population is Black or Black-mixed¹¹ (Figure 16). In England and Wales, ethnic and national identity is still mostly White British (Figure 17).

¹¹ The category Pardo/a positions one's physical appearance (skin colour, hair texture and facial features) in a spectrum between White and Black, regardless of ethnic-cultural origin (Petruccelli and Saboia, 2013).

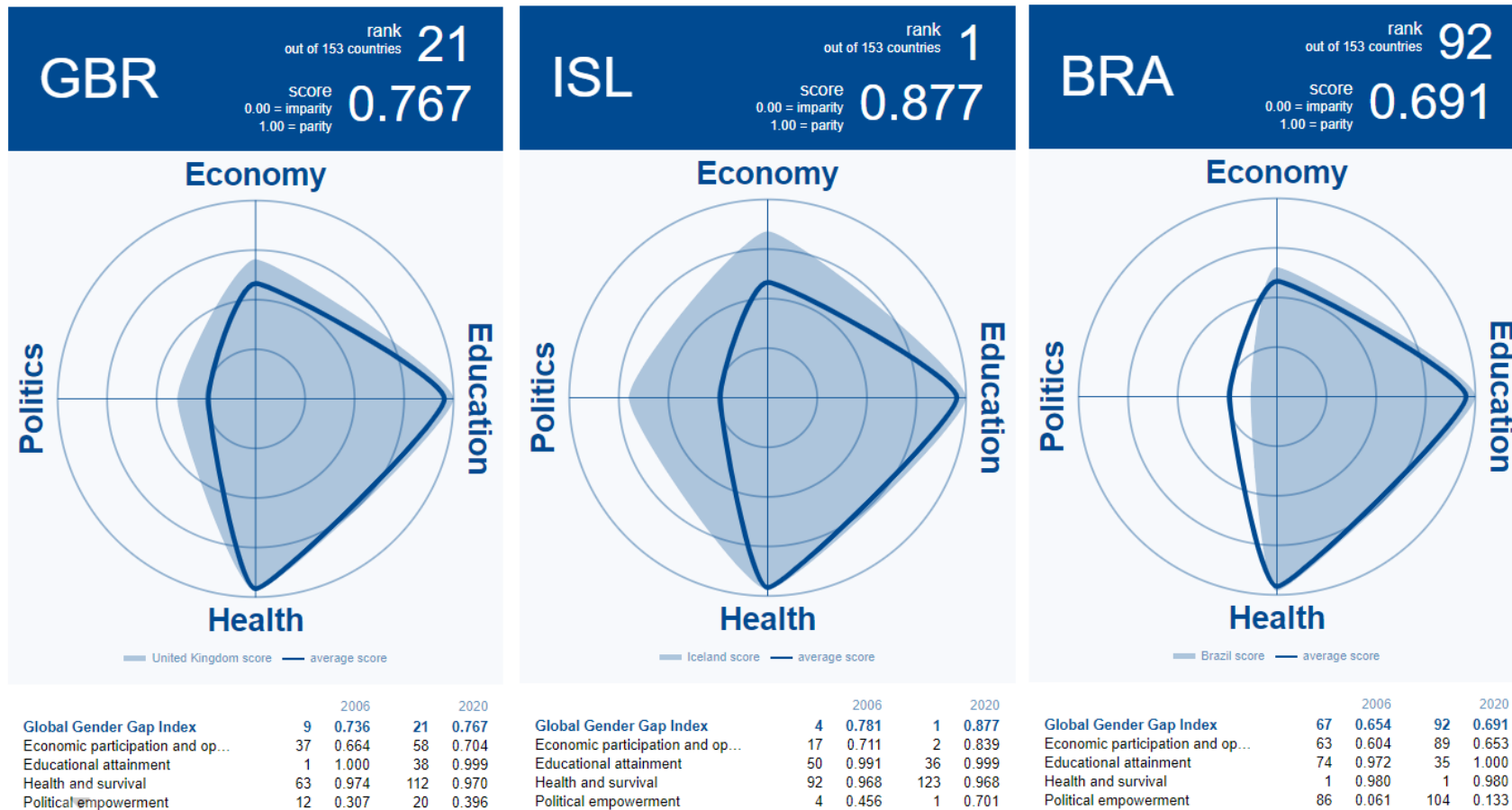


Figure 14: United Kingdom and Brazil scores in the Global Gender Gap Index, in comparison with Iceland (Schwab et al., 2019). Source: reports.weforum.org.

Figure 16: England and Wales - Distribution of the resident population, per ethnic and national identity (per cent) (2011)¹³ (ONS, 2012)

Both countries have a balanced sex ratio, as shown in Figure 19. There are no official statistics on the percentage of those identifying as transgender either in Brazil (which relies on data produced by social movements – see Benevides and Bonfim, 2020) or the UK. The inclusion of trans* as a category in the Brazilian census was requested by public defender offices (DPU, 2019), so far been refused by the government. The British Office for National Statistics (ONS) has pledged to introduce gender identity in the next census (expected to happen in 2021) (ONS, 2019c).

As shown in Figure 18, the British population is mostly self-declared heterosexual. Brazil does not collect data on sexuality; the estimated LGBT population was of 20 million people in 2017, roughly 10 per cent of the total population (ABGLT, 2020), a higher proportion than the 2.6 per cent in Britain.

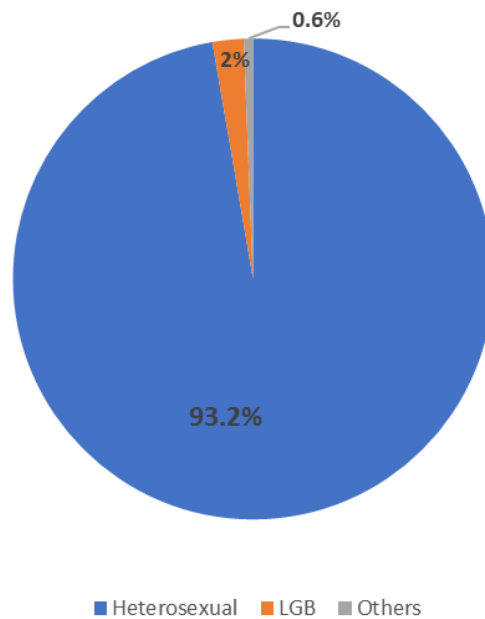
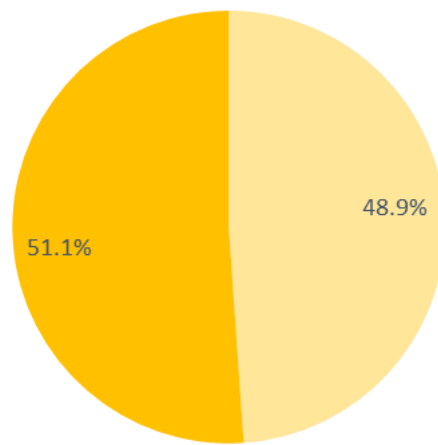


Figure 17: British population by declared sexual orientation (per cent) (ONS, 2019j)

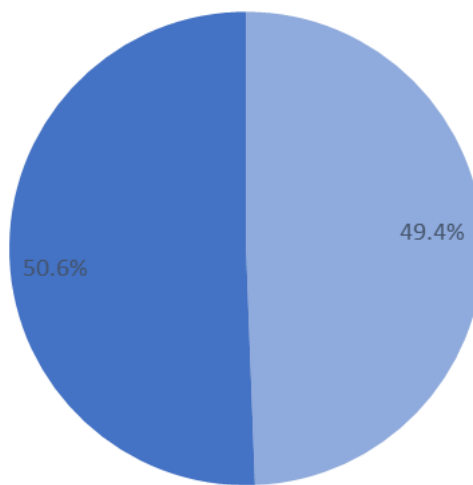
¹³ White (including White British, Irish, Gypsy/Irish Traveller, and Other White); Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups (including White-mixed Black Caribbean, Asian, Black African and Other Mixed); Asian/Asian British (including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Other Asian); Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; and Other Ethnic Group (which comprises Arabs and any other ethnic groups) (ONS, 2012a).

Brazil



■ Men ■ Women

UK



■ Men ■ Women

Figure 18: Comparison: Sex Ratio in Brazil and the UK (per cent) (IBGE, 2019a; ONS, 2019h).

2.1.2. Economic Participation and Opportunity

As of 2019, Brazil ranked 89th place in economic participation and opportunity in the Gender Gap Index, 31 places behind the UK, which ranked 58th place (see Figure 20).

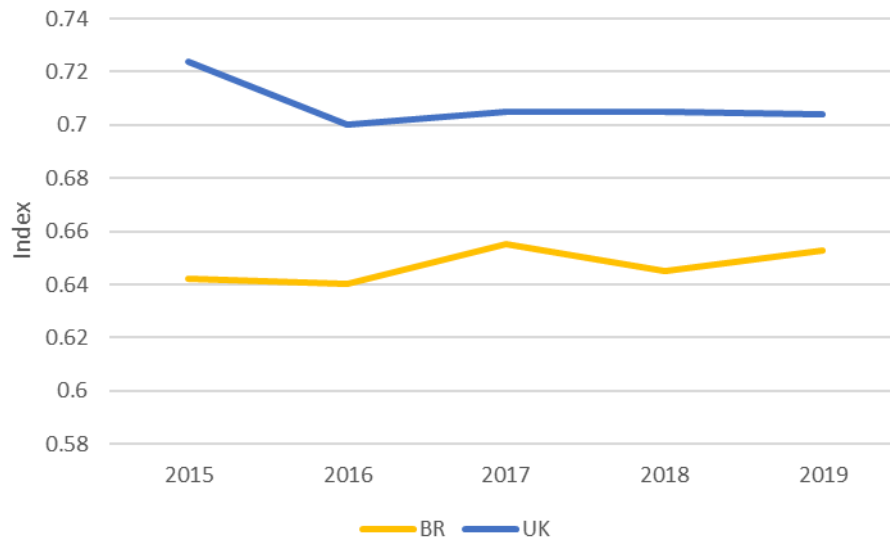


Figure 19: Gender Gap Index - Economic participation and opportunity between the years of 2015 and 2019 (per country) (Schwab et al., 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019).

Access to fair and decent work is a human right, essential for people's wellbeing, and dignity. Nevertheless, there are significant, intra-, and inter-country inequalities in labour policies and practices, to which women are especially vulnerable. As shown in Figure 21, Britain has a higher total employment rate than Brazil. Nevertheless, men dominate the workforce in both countries, highlighting the persistence of gendered inequalities in access and attainment of paid work by women. That sums to other important inequality issues in the labour force – for instance, Brazil is still to eliminate child labour (not currently criminalised in that country), which victimises more than a million Brazilian children, most of them Black (71.8 per cent) and between 5 and 13 years old (54 per cent) (IBGE, 2017), a result of historical racial discrimination.

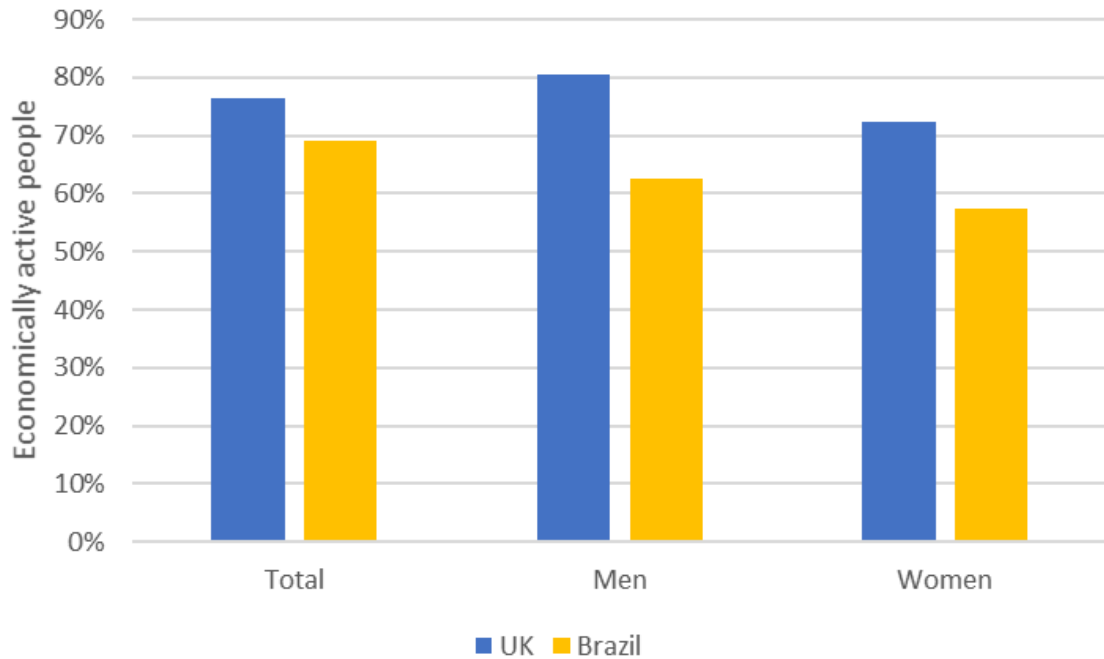


Figure 20: Comparison: Employment rates in Brazil and the UK per gender (per cent). (IBGE, 2019b; ONS, 2019a)

Pay for women is lower in Brazil than in the UK. Currently, the UK has an overall gender pay gap¹⁴ of 8.9 per cent, being larger among women from 40 years of age, and very low among younger women (ONS, 2019d). In 2017, the gender pay gap in Brazil was more unfavourable to women than in the UK at 15 per cent (Observatório da Diversidade e Igualdade de Oportunidades no Trabalho, 2019). The Equality Act 2010 (coming into force in the UK on April 2017) is an attempt to change this by enforcing regulations, requesting mandatory reporting of data on the gender pay gaps of companies and public bodies with 250 employees and over (The Equality Act, 2010). Brazil does not yet have a similar initiative.

Paid maternity leave in Brazil is guaranteed by law, but unequal between both parents; in the UK, parental leave in is equal for both parents (two mandatory weeks for mothers), and most regular pay is ensured (Addati, Cassier and Gilchrist, 2014). Private childcare is plentiful in Britain (pay exemptions apply to low-income families) (House of Commons Treasury Committee, 2018); conversely, childcare is free and universal in Brazil, but of hampered availability, especially for impoverished families in rural and urban areas (Cintra, Schipani and Borges, 2018).

¹⁴ Referring to median hourly pay rates (excluding overtime). The pay gap varies with area of occupation.

2.1.3. Health and Survival

The Global Gender Gap on health and survival indicators is nearly closed; Brazil has reached near-parity, and the UK has closed nearly 97 per cent of its gap (see Figure 22).

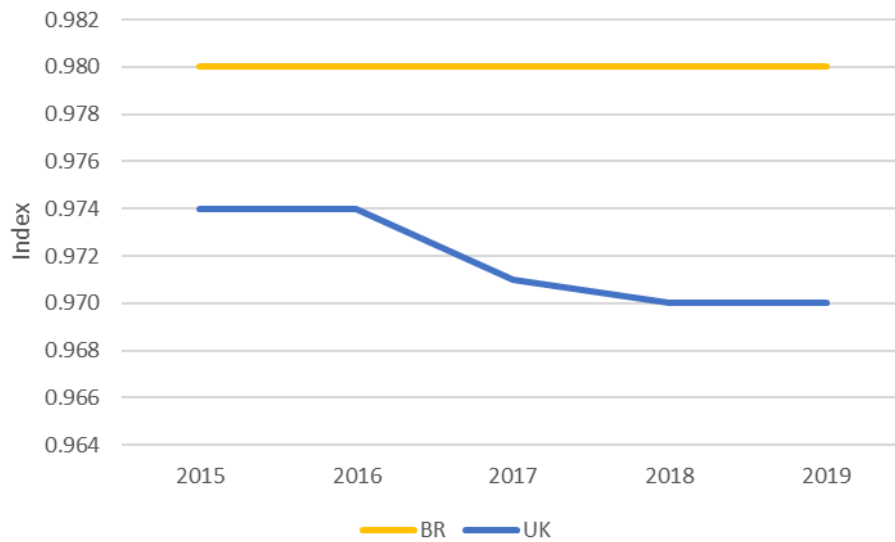


Figure 21: Gender Gap Index - Health and survival between the years of 2015 and 2019 (per country) (Schwab et al., 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019).

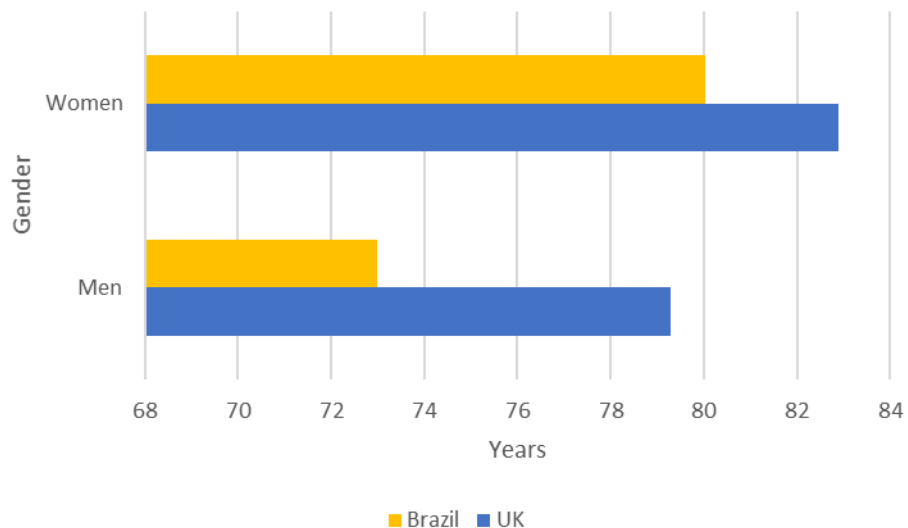


Figure 22: Comparison: Life Expectancy (years) in Brazil and the UK, per gender (in years). (IBGE, 2019a; ONS, 2019e)

In both countries, life expectancy and health vary markedly by class, ethnicity, and region, reflecting differences in economic wellbeing. In Britain, as in Brazil, women live significantly longer than men; however, Brazilian men are expected to live strikingly shorter lives compared to British men (Figure 23).

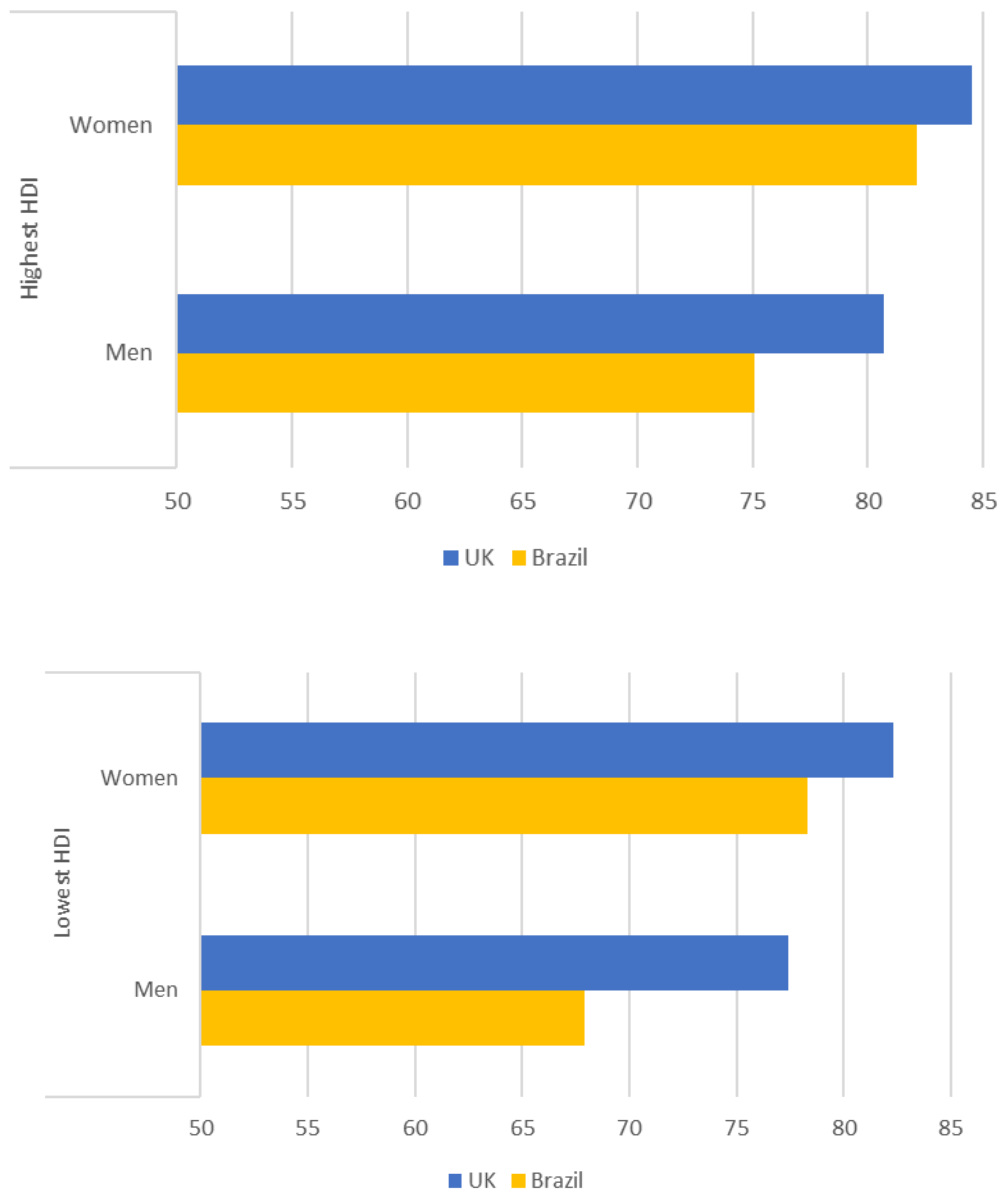


Figure 23: Comparison: Life expectancy at birth in the regions with the highest and the lowest HDI, per gender. (Global Data Lab, 2019; IBGE, 2019a; PNUD and IPEA, 2019).

Health and wellbeing are abreast to economic security in the Human Development Index; consequently, there are significant regional differences within the two economically contrasting countries. Figure 24 compares life expectancy for men and women in Britain and Brazil, illustrating the role of class and ethnic inequalities at marking differences in health and survival, due to financial insecurities (e.g. food and housing) and unequal access to health services (Marmot *et al.*, 2020).

The introduction of hormonal birth control, in the 1960s, was arguably the most significant development for women's health. In Britain and Brazil, women had access to the pill in the same years, although with caveats (i.e. financial and marital status). Universal access to birth control was attained in the UK at the end of the 1960s, whereas it took Brazilian women another thirty years to achieve (see Figure 14).

Abortion rights differ markedly between the two countries. In Brazil, abortion is a crime against human life, prohibited in most circumstances (except medical reasons, or if the pregnancy is a consequence of rape) and punishable by imprisonment (Código Penal, 1940). In contrast, abortion has been legal in England, Wales and Scotland on broader grounds since 1967 (Abortion Act, 1967), being decriminalised in Northern Ireland on the same grounds in late 2019 (Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act, 2019).

Gendered violence

In both countries, gendered violence is a continuing problem reflected in rapes, domestic violence, sexual harassment against women and LGBTQI+ people. Statistics of violent crimes of all sorts highlight Brazil's position as one of the most violent countries in the world, of which gendered violence is a significant part. Britain is a less violent country than Brazil overall; however, women in Britain have a 30 per cent of chance of being targets of gendered violence in their lifetime, only slightly less than Brazilian women (33 per cent) (Schwab, Klaus *et al.*, 2019).

After decades of debates and active work from social movements, Brazil has recently decreed legal devices for tackling gendered (especially domestic) violence. Legal frameworks and specific courts for gendered violence were established in that country in 2006 (Lei 11.340, 2006), reducing the projected femicide rates in 10 per cent (IPEA,

2015)¹⁵. British legislation has covered gendered violence since 1994, including domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation (FGM) (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994; Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2003; Sexual Offences Act, 2003; The Equality Act, 2010).

In Brazil, where more than 58 thousand homicides were recorded in 2017, most homicide victims are men; that is also true in the UK, but proportionately more women are killed in Britain (31 per cent of 571 cases) compared to Brazil (2 per cent of all cases) (see Figure 25). Nevertheless, in both countries, women are most frequently killed at home, by spouses/partners and exes (30 per cent in Brazil and 44 per cent in the UK) (Long, Harper and Harvey, 2017; ONS, 2017b; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019a; CNMP, 2020). Figures 26 and 27 show the proportion of homicide cases against women recorded in 2017, which were classified as femicides in Brazil and the UK.

In Britain, official statistics record that 7.7 per cent of women suffered some form of domestic abuse between 2017 and 2018, and 93 per cent of perpetrators were men; of these victims, a fifth suffered sexual abuse (ONS, 2017a; Women's Aid, 2019). In Brazil, roughly one per cent of all women suffered bodily injuries due to domestic violence (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019a). It is important to highlight, however, that domestic and sexual violence are severely underreported in both countries due to stigma and fear of retaliation. It is estimated that 75 per cent of domestic violence cases in Britain are not notified (ONS, 2017a); in Brazil, only 10 per cent of cases are notified (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019a).

¹⁵ The Law 11340/2006 was named after the pharmacist Maria da Penha Fernandes, who formalised a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (case number 12051/OAS) after 23 years of severe domestic violence, torture and homicide attempts went unassisted by the Brazilian justice system.

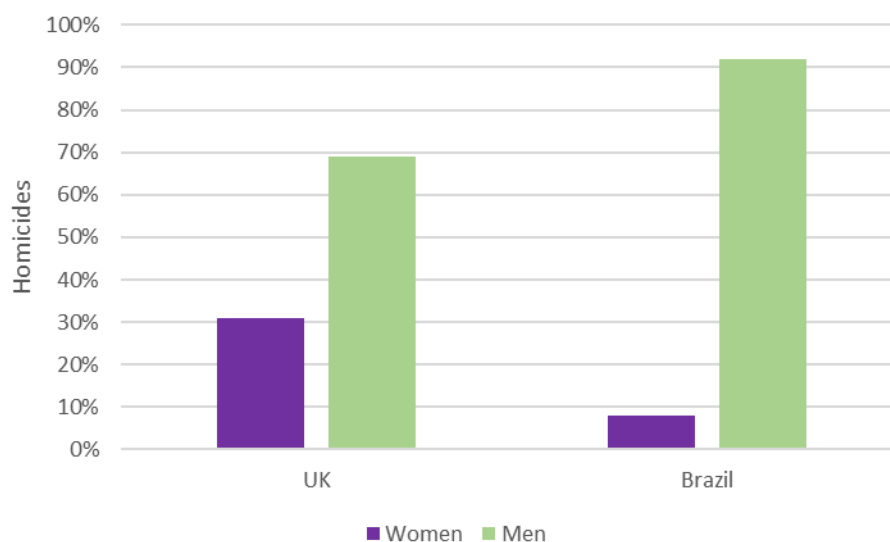


Figure 24: Comparison: Homicide rates in Brazil and the UK (2017), per gender. (ONS, 2017b; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019a).

Brazil and UK have similar records of rape, with roughly 150 daily occurrences; proportionately, less than one per cent of women in both countries were recorded as victims of this violence in 2017 (ONS, 2017a; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019a). Nevertheless, women in Britain are overall four times more likely to experience this form of violence than men (ONS, 2018d); likewise, in Brazil, women are more than 80 per cent of the victims (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019a). Other forms of sexual violence include female genital mutilation (FGM), which more than 100 thousand women living in the UK had undergone at some point in their lives (McFarlane and Dorkenoo, 2015); the practice does not occur in Brazil.

Gendered violence is not restricted to physical and sexual violence; psychological and patrimonial¹⁶ violence, as well as human trafficking and captivity, are unfortunately recorded every year, equally damaging to one's sense of safety, belonging and security, gravely hampering full freedom and civic participation. 94.1 per cent of all victims of domestic abuse in the UK suffer from psychological violence, against 30 per cent of Brazilian victims (Senado Federal, 2018; Women's Aid, 2019).

¹⁶ Refers to the violation of property rights, and financial abuse (Deere, Contreras and Twyman, 2014).

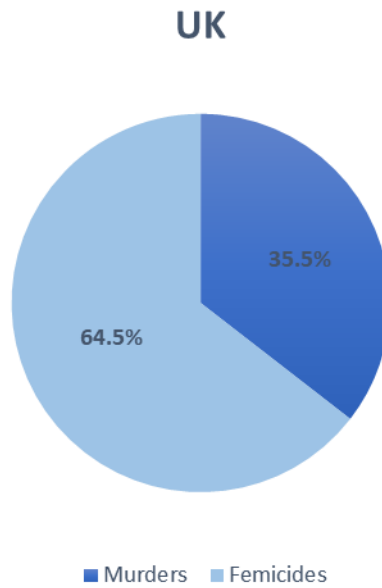


Figure 25: United Kingdom - Proportion of homicide cases with female victims recorded as femicides (per cent). (Long, Harper and Harvey, 2017; ONS, 2018c)

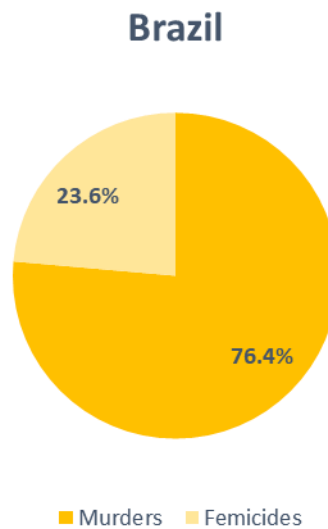


Figure 26: Brazil - Proportion of homicide cases with female victims recorded as femicides (per cent). (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019a)

Gendered violence is an intersectional issue. In Brazil, Black women are the majority of recorded victims of femicide¹⁷, domestic and sexual violence; Black and indigenous men are more likely to suffer sexual violence or to be murdered than White men

¹⁷ Refers to the killing of women by men, for markedly gendered (misogynistic) motivations (e.g. honour killings, as a consequence of domestic violence, as part of sexual assault) (Campbell and Runyan, 1998; Long, Harper and Harvey, 2017).

(SINAN, 2019). In Britain, suspects and victims of serious crimes also vary with ethnicity, albeit significantly more with class. Nevertheless, White people make the majority of offenders and victims in the UK, and most of them are of vulnerable economic status (Ministry of Justice, Home Office and ONS, 2013; HM Government, 2018).

As seen in Figure 14, Brazil had officially decriminalised homosexuality more than a hundred years before Britain; however, it was still extra-officially punished as a public act of indecency in Brazil (Green, 1999). It was not before the 1980s in the UK and 2019 in Brazil that homophobic crimes were described in the law and prescribed punishments. Like with other civil rights advances in the UK, these laws had different timings for Scotland and Northern Ireland when compared to England and Wales. Notwithstanding the legal advances, Brazil has the highest absolute numbers of murdered trans* people in the world, with more than 800 victims (mostly Black or pardo) between 2008 and 2016 (TGEU, 2019b) (Benevides and Bonfim, 2020); in the same period, eight trans* people were murdered in the UK (TGEU, 2019a). Other instances of transphobic violence are recorded, with more than 200 daily cases in Brazil, as opposed to 5 to 6 daily cases in the UK (BBC, 2019b; SINAN, 2019).

2.2. Contextual Indicators and Legal Frameworks

Some contextual indicators of gender equality are not directly linked with the gendered digital divide but are essential to apprehend the extension and depth acquired gender rights. Here, the Political Empowerment index is presented alongside a comparison of legal frameworks for marriage and family directly affecting women and LGBTIQI+.

2.2.1. Political Empowerment

The political empowerment situation in Brazil is still dire, as the country figures as 104th of 153; comparatively, the UK is placed in 20th in this index, still distant from closing the gender gap in that sub-index. Men are still the majority in parliamentary and ministerial positions in both countries – Brazil has had 17 per cent more men in parliament than the UK, and 11.7 per cent more men in ministries (Schwab, Klaus *et al.*, 2019). So far, the UK has had two female heads of state who, between them, stayed in office for around 14 years, whereas Brazil had only one female head of state, staying in office for 5.4 years and removed before the end of her term.

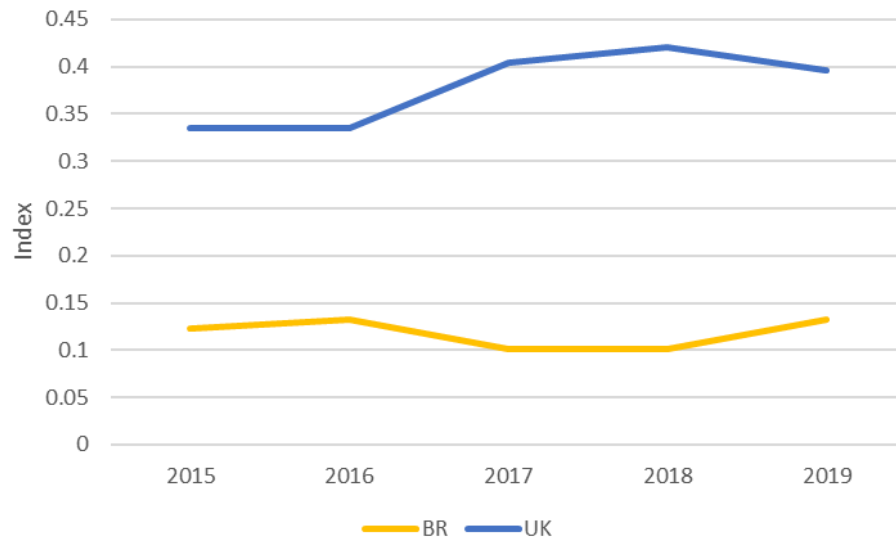


Figure 27: Gender Gap Index - Political empowerment between the years of 2015 and 2019 (per country) (Schwab et al., 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019).

Pioneers of the women's suffrage movement, British women earned the right to vote sixteen years before the Brazilians did (see Figure 14). In both countries, however, the right to vote did not include all women at first, being gradually expanded until the universal suffrage in the 1980s (including people from the Crown colonies in the UK, and illiterate people in Brazil). Britain elected their first woman MP, Viscountess Nancy Astor, in 1918, eleven years before Brazil elected their first female mayor, Luiza Teixeira, in the north-eastern state of Rio Grande do Norte (five years before women could vote in that country).

2.2.2. Marriage and Family Laws

Marriage and family laws reveal much about gendered rights, public attitudes regarding gender roles, the importance of public policies for gender equality, and advances towards including marginalised, non-normative people. Brazil and UK now recognise men and women as legal equals in marriage and divorce although it has taken longer for Brazil to achieve this (see Figure 14). Archaic laws are still being revoked in both countries¹⁸.

¹⁸ E.g. the woman being required to receive the husband's surname, and the possibility of annulment due to the wife not being a virgin before the marriage in Brazil, and the exclusion of the nuptials' mothers' names from marriage certificates in the UK (Lei 10.406, 2002; Fairbairn, 2018)

Following the full decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK, civil partnerships were introduced in England and Wales in 2004; Brazil introduced it in the same year. Equal marriage was attained nine years later, as also in Brazil, taking another six years to be adopted in Northern Ireland (see Figure 14). Likewise, same-sex couples have been allowed to adopt children since 2005 in England and Wales, followed by Scotland in 2009 and Northern Ireland in 2013 (Adoption and Children Act, 2002; Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act, 2007). Children's adoption by same-sex couples is not provided by law in Brazil, but legal precedents have been applied to ensure it under the broader law (restricted to married couples) since 2010.

As seen, Brazil and the UK evolved towards gender equality in all fronts. Obstacles nevertheless persist, notably in economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment, but especially regarding the gendered violence tainting all variables. Although equality in legal frameworks is paramount for guaranteeing fundamental rights, sexist ideologies, and attitudes to gendered discrimination and violence continue to affect women and LGBTQI+ people worldwide.

As shown in Figure 29, Brazil has a higher share of people with gender biases than Britain; nevertheless, the hierarchy is the same. A staggering 77.9 per cent of Brazilians believe it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife, and that abortion is never justifiable; in the UK, roughly 30 per cent of people exhibit the same bias shifting markers of health and survival. Political empowerment is affected by the belief that men make better political leaders than women do, and that women do not have the same rights as men (shared by 43.4 per cent of Brazilians, and 26.7 per cent of Britons). Affecting the index of economic opportunity and participation is the shared bias that men should have more right to a job than women, and that men make better business executives than women do (36.6 and 25.1 per cent in Brazil and UK). Finally, the view that university education is more important for men than for women is exhibited by a smaller share (9.3 per cent in Brazil, and 6.6 per cent in the UK) (Mukhopadhyay, Rivera and Tapia, 2020; UNDP, 2020).

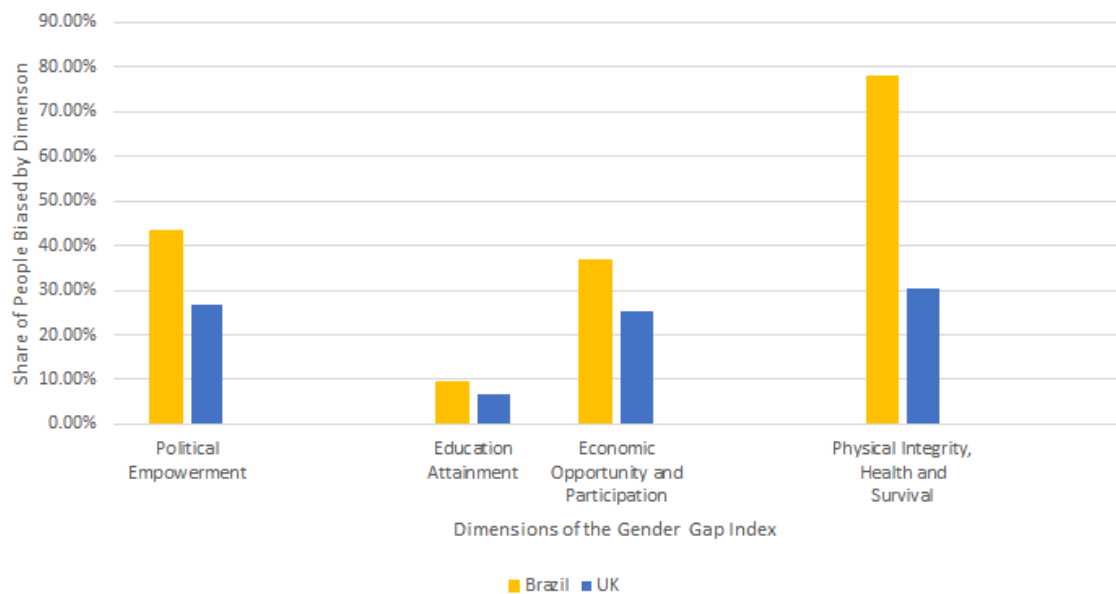


Figure 28: Comparison: Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) in Brazil and the UK, for the last available period (2004-2014) (Mukhopadhyay, Rivera and Tapia, 2020; UNDP, 2020).

These shocking statistics are evidence that, although Brazil shows worse indicators than Britain, both countries are far from offering an equal society to women and men. A profound cultural change is urgent, should Britain and Brazil want to close the gender gap and become more equal countries. Digital technologies carry immense potential for empowering people and tackling inequalities, but also bear their imbalances. The next section discusses and compares digital divides in both countries, focusing on their gendered aspects, providing background for the discussion of inequalities in computer and videogames (CGVs) (and League, specifically).

2.3. Digital Divides and Inclusion in Brazil and the UK

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), over half of the world's population is connected to the Internet, and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) will keep increasing, both for fixed broadband and mobile access (ITU, 2018). Nevertheless, connectivity rates and access to ICTs depend on a complex array of factors (broadband speed, coverage, affordability, etc.), which often create limits to access and engagement with ICTs. These limits, when left unaddressed, generate new forms of social exclusion and marginalisation (Dornelles, 2015) hampering socio-economic development at all scales. Digital inclusion, however, is not measured by simple connectivity or access, requiring attainment of certain basic skills and activities (ONS, 2019b):

- Information management skills – use of search engines, visit relevant websites, safe and legal file downloading.
- Communication skills – exchange of messages via e-mail or other services, expression of opinions on portals and posts, information sharing within and across platforms.
- Transacting skills – purchasing or selling items through applications or websites.
- Problem-solving skills – verification of sources, use of web-based services to solve everyday problems.
- Creative skills – completion of online forms, modification of existing content, creation of new content.

Literacy (digital and traditional) and skill mastery are essential to ensure equal access to and use of contemporary ICTs. This links directly to gaming practices, which require sophisticated digital skills (e.g. ability to download and install software, mastery of gaming mechanics, interpersonal digital communication) on top of access to digital devices and, for online gaming, stable Internet access. For this research, digital inclusion and digital divides are also central to the understanding of the broader profile of gamers in both compared countries and possible reasons for demographic imbalances in participation.

While 97% of the British adult population are Internet users (ONS, 2019f), the digital divide is deeper in Brazil, where 70% have access to the Web (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2019). Although both countries have experienced significant increases in connectivity, this development is uneven, being marked by internal gaps – generational, economic, educational, regional, and gendered, among others.

The area with most Britons currently offline is Northern Ireland, where 14.2 per cent of the population are not Internet users; in Wales, 19 per cent of the population has no basic digital skills. In all the sovereignty, more than half of non-users are elders, disabled, or women (ONS, 2019b). A large part (63 per cent) of the rural population in Brazil have never used a computer¹⁹; in the North Region of that country, only 3.2 per cent of households have Internet access, and 1 per cent has broadband, contrasting

¹⁹ Desktop PC, laptop, or tablet computer.

with the respective 30 and 14 per cent of households in the wealthier Southeast Region. Around 60 per cent of British households with no Internet access feel that it is not useful, interesting or necessary (ONS, 2019f), whereas 61 per cent of Brazilian households lack access due to high costs (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2019).

How people use the Internet is also important to draw out patterns of digital skill and the production of online spaces in different contexts. In Brazil, the most common online activity is instant messaging, followed by the use of social network sites (SNSs), and video and voice chat (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2019). British Internet users mostly focus on e-mailing, finding information about goods and services, and Internet banking (ONS, 2019f).

2.3.1. Intersectional Divides

Age is key to understanding the digital divide since both access and literacy drop significantly when comparing populations between 15 and 24 years old to those between 25 and 74 (ITU, 2018), especially among the most underprivileged. The British population is ageing, but most people are of working age (between 15 and 65 years old) (ONS, 2019h), like in Brazil (69.3 per cent of the population are between 15 and 64 years old) (IBGE, 2010). Internet non-users in the UK are mostly above 55 years old, as shown in Figure 30. Similarly, in Brazil Internet use falls rapidly with age (Fig 31).

As of 2015, young people (25 years old and under) in the UK spend a third of their free time using digital devices (ONS, 2017c); the most common activities for this age range are the use of SNSs and instant messaging (ONS, 2019f), a trend repeated amongst Brazilian users of the same age (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2019). ICT use increases with income, as shown on Figures 32 and 33, confirming that Internet use is limited by cost.

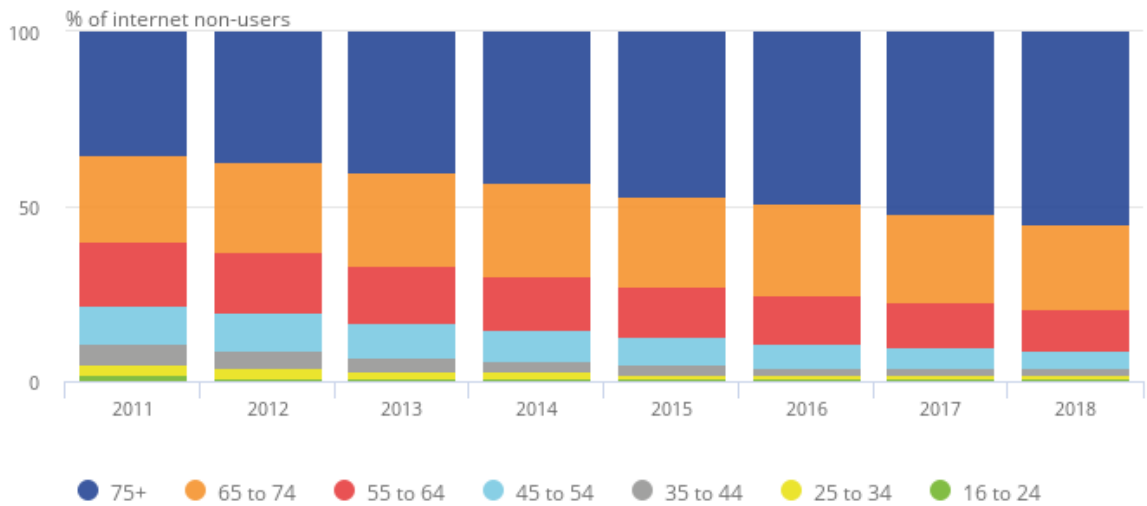


Figure 29: Age composition of Internet non-users, UK, 2011 to 2018 (ONS, 2019c).

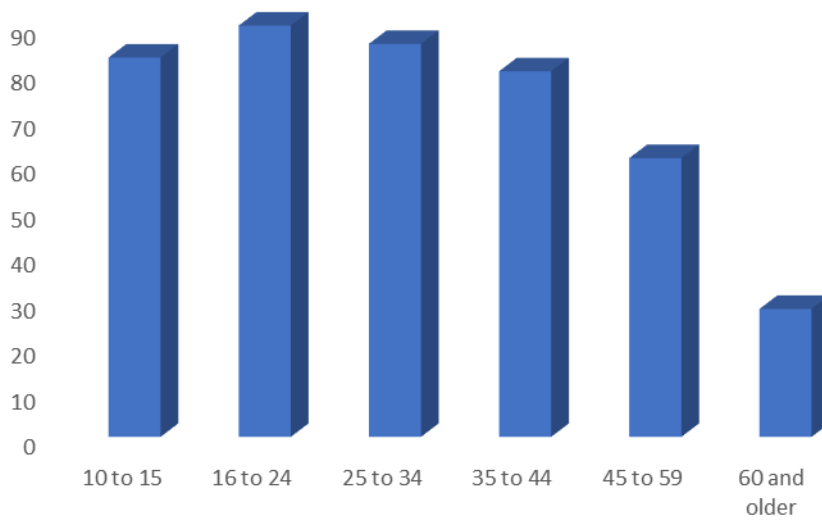


Figure 30: Brazil - Internet users (including mobile) – percentage, by age group (2008 - 2018) (Brazil, CGI and NIC, 2019).

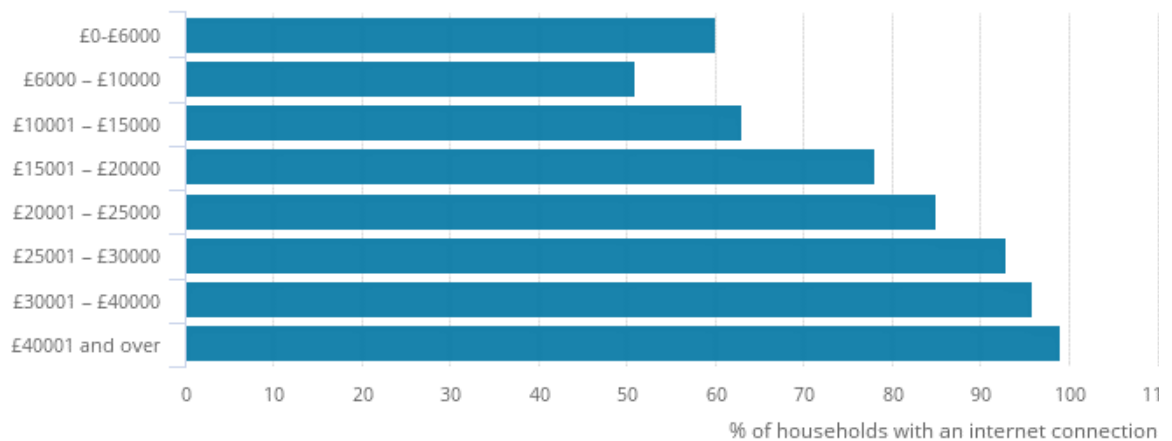


Figure 31: Percentage of households with an Internet connection increases with income - Scotland (Carnegie Trust via ONS, 2019c).

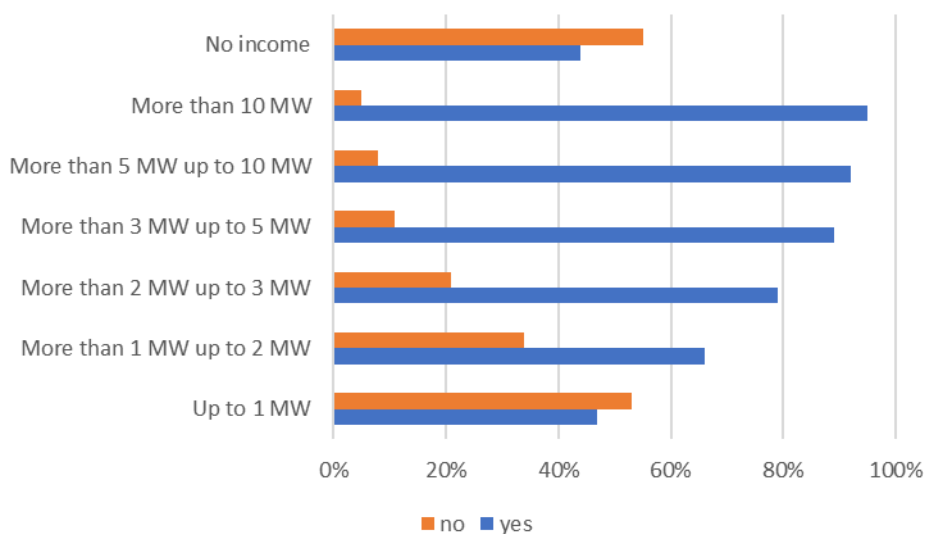


Figure 32: Brazil - Households with Internet access, per minimum wage²⁰ (MW) allowance (Brazil, CGI and NIC, 2019).

The digital gap by ethnic group is currently narrow in Britain; the highest proportion of non-users comprises Indians and Whites, but these figures are less than 10% of their respective total populations (ONS, 2019g). In Brazil, Indigenous and Black people (64 and 63 per cent, respectively) are the most digitally excluded (FGV, 2012); White people are the most frequent practitioners of activities such as listening to

²⁰ Minimum wage in Brazil in 2019 was R\$ 998 (£ 145).

music, watching videos, reading the news, and downloading media online, reflecting a racial divide in terms of digital skills, aside from access. (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2019).

As shown on Figure 33, women are slightly more excluded from Internet access than men (although with little internal gendered contrasts - 2 and 3 per cent in UK and Brazil, respectively). In Brazil, 72 per cent of all people with no Internet access claimed lack of abilities as the main reason (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2019).

Women comprise 61 per cent of all Britons with no basic digital skills in 2018 (ONS, 2019b). In Brazil, more than half of women using online services do not engage with multimedia activities; less than 20 per cent engage with creating, downloading and sharing multimedia content²¹, reflecting a gendered divide in digital skills (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2019).

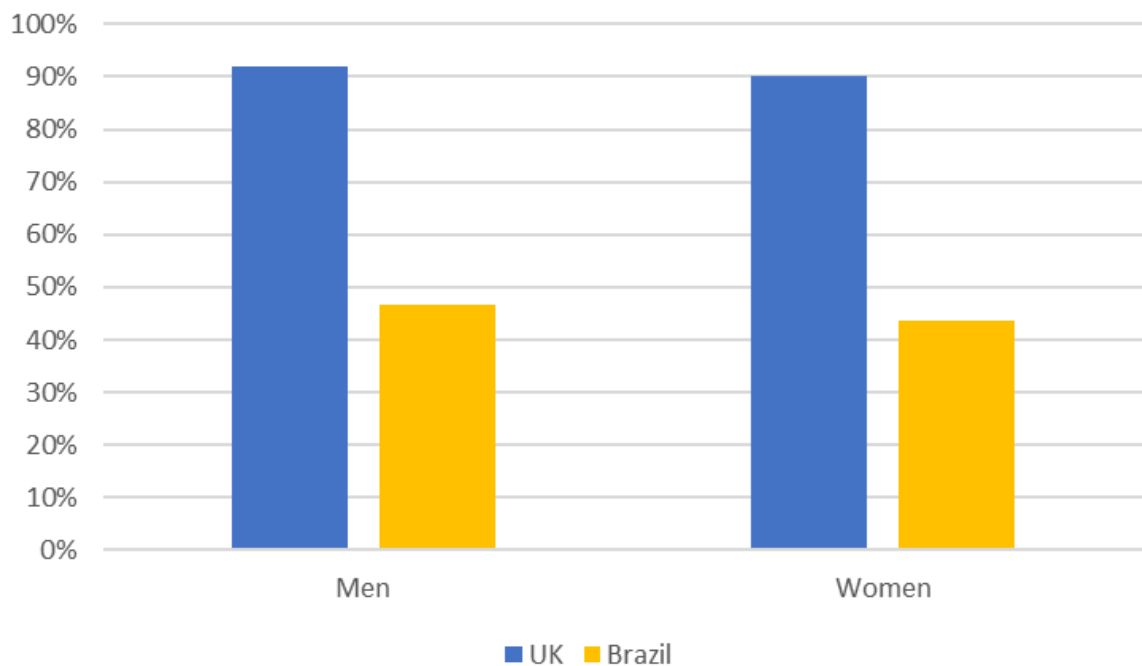


Figure 33: Comparison - Internet access in Brazil and the UK, per gender (FGV, 2012; ONS, 2019g).

²¹ Except music download, practiced by 40% of female users in Brazil.

2.3.2. Education and Employment in the Tech Sector

In Brazil and the UK, the gender gap in education attainment was closed. Both countries have nearly ended illiteracy and reached total or near parity in enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education (Schwab, Klaus *et al.*, 2019).

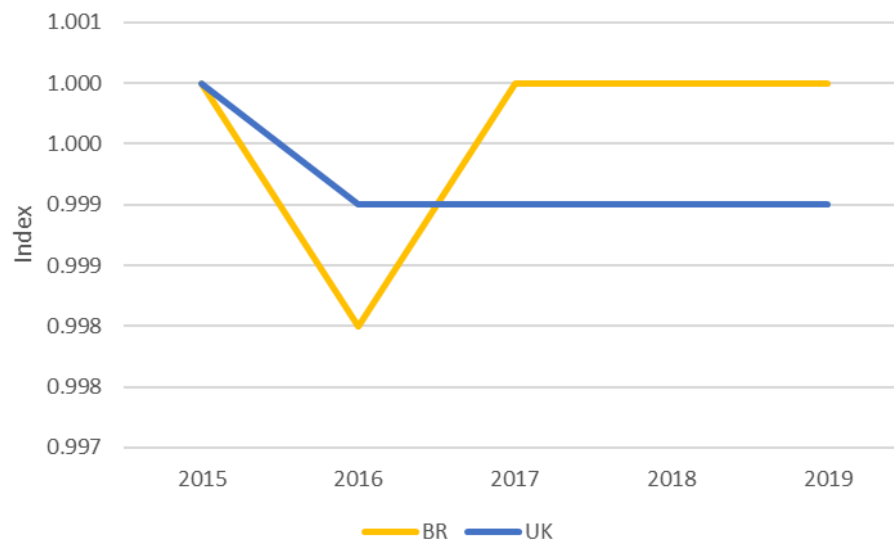


Figure 34: Gender Gap Index - Education attainment between the years of 2015 and 2019 (per country) (Schwab *et al.*, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019).

Although women are now the majority of those enrolled in tertiary education (59 per cent in Brazil and 69 in the UK), female participation in technology is still unequal. In both compared countries, inequality is evident in the training of technology professionals, as shown in Figures 36 and 37, illustrating the prevalence of males enrolled in Computer Science and Technology higher education courses in Britain, and Science and Technology in Brazil.

Both countries have attained parity in professional and technical roles²² (Schwab, Klaus *et al.*, 2019); in Brazil, 38.7 per cent of employees in senior and middle management in 2018 were women – 4.6 per cent more than in the UK (ILO, 2019). Nevertheless, women are still the minority of those working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) roles worldwide, especially in cutting-edge

²² Skilled workers who ‘increase the existing stock of knowledge, apply scientific or artistic concepts and theories or perform technical and related tasks that require advanced knowledge and skill’ (Schwab *et al.*, 2020, p. 49).

fields of cloud computing, data science and artificial intelligence (AI), as shown in Figure 38.

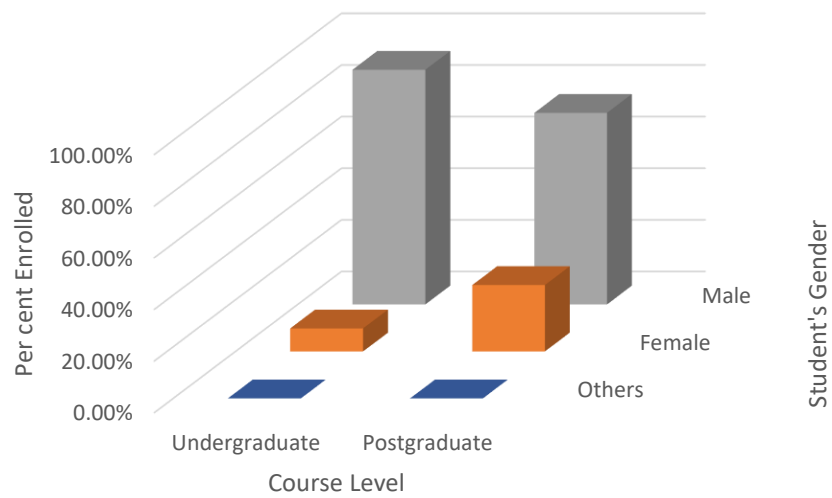


Figure 35: Higher education student enrolments in the UK: Computer Science Engineering and Technology (full time), per gender (per cent) (HESA, 2017)

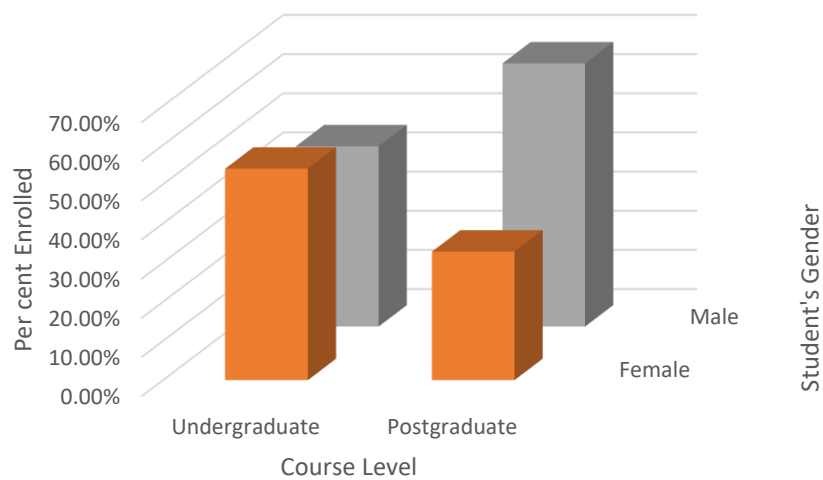


Figure 36: Higher education student enrolments in Brazil: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (full time and part-time), per gender (per cent) (Inep and Ministério da Educação, 2018 (undergraduate)) and (CAPES, 2015 (postgraduate))²³.

²³ Data collected in Brazil does not include other genders.

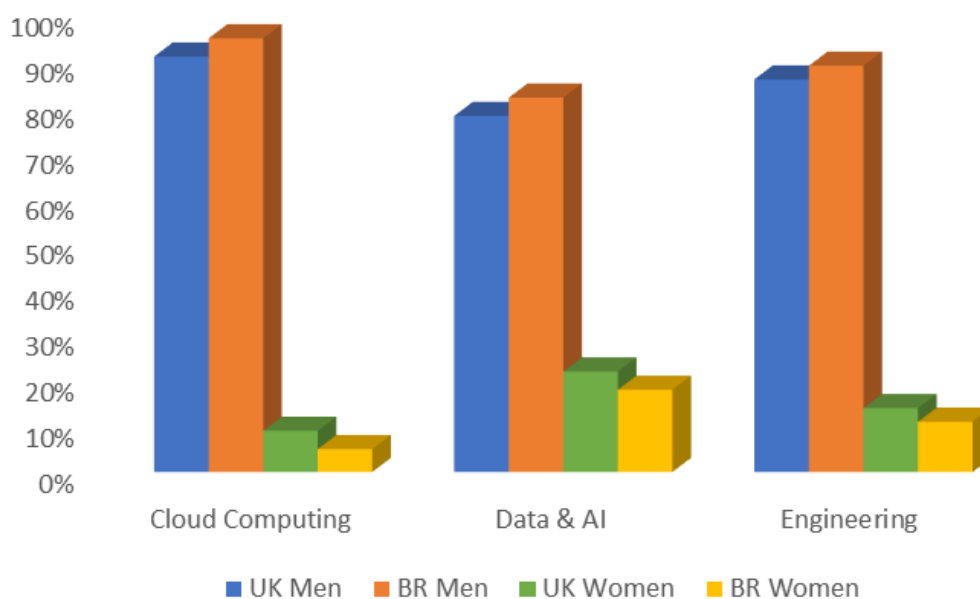


Figure 37: Share of male and female workers in Cloud Computing, Data & AI, and Engineering roles in Brazil and the UK (per cent). (Schwab et al., 2019).

These statistics underscore imbalances in the gaming industry, discussed in section 2.4. Seemingly, despite the growth in numbers of educated and digitally-literate women, the widespread cyber violence against women and girls, central to feminist game studies, is an important factor pushing women out of technology. This issue is now discussed.

2.3.3. Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls (CyberVAWG)

Online gender violence is at the core of gendered divides; 73% of women worldwide have been harassed or have experienced, at least once, some form of online behaviour which exacerbates gender-based violence resulting in physical, sexual or psychological harm (UN Women and Working Group on Broadband and Gender, 2015). Gender-based online abuse and cyber violence are severe, systemic, and persistent forms of digital exclusion and marginalisation in the whole world.

These practices include threats of physical or sexual assault, racism, LGBTQphobia, cyberstalking, non-consensual dissemination of intimate images (NCII)²⁴, unsolicited pornography, among many others (Women's Aid, 2014; FRA, 2015; Amnesty

²⁴ Otherwise known as 'revenge porn', a currently challenged term due to its reductionism and over-simplification (see Maddocks, 2018).

International, 2017; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017; Fraser and Martineau-Searle, 2018). Research by Amnesty International (2017) has shown that, as with other vulnerable groups²⁵, women who encounter online abuse tend to suffer from mental health issues ranging from low self-esteem (61 per cent), loss of focus (56 per cent) and insomnia (63 per cent) to stress, anxiety and panic attacks (55 per cent) (Amnesty International, 2017). Therefore, victims change their social networking practices (76 per cent), often restricting or ceasing to post (32 per cent). Women experience twice as much sexual(ised) forms of harassment than men, who tend to experience 7 per cent more profane name-calling, and 4 per cent more physical threats. Moreover, women experience inordinately higher occurrences of severe online abuse, including cyberstalking (Pew Research Center, 2017). Perpetrators of online violence against women frequently are strangers (59 per cent) (Amnesty International, 2017), and also suffer from their behaviour, being more likely to struggle with high rates of suicidal ideation, anxiety and depression, as well as poor performance at school, especially at younger ages (Alcantara *et al.*, 2017).

Cyberbullying affected a fifth of all British young people (between 11 and 19 years old) in 2017; girls and youngsters with mental disorders are more likely to experience it (NHS Digital, 2018). Brazil has the second-highest cyberbullying rates, where at least 29 per cent of parents said their child had experienced it in 2019 (and 42 per cent saw other children in their community being victimised) – 11 per cent regularly (Ipsos, 2018). In the UK, ten per cent of parents acknowledge that their children experienced cyberbullying. Around 70 per cent of abuses in Brazil and the UK happen on SNSs (Ipsos, 2018). Regardless of motivation, cyberbullying comes mostly from males (Sun, Fan and Du, 2016).

According to Amnesty International (2017), online abuse has affected 23 per cent of women online in the economic north²⁶ – and the same proportion of British women; 46 per cent of the attacks were of a misogynistic or sexist nature, and 40 per cent of these women felt physically unsafe after the abuse. Among Brazilian women, 8.2 per cent encountered online abuse, making the Internet the fourth most unsafe place for them (especially the most educated and higher in income, who were 11.3 per cent of the victims) (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019b). In Brazil, 83 per cent of

²⁵ Young people, LGBTIQ+, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), disabled and religious minorities (Ditch the Label, 2017)

²⁶ The study included participants from Denmark, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and USA.

women victims of online abuse are between 18 and 59 years old, and 57 per cent are victimised by partners and relatives (Comissão de Defesa dos Direitos da Mulher, 2018). Moreover, the higher rates in the UK may be explained by the higher proportion of women using the Internet in that country; another reason is likely under-reporting in Brazil (UN Women and Working Group on Broadband and Gender, 2015).

Awareness of cyberbullying is 8 per cent higher in Brazil than in the UK, where, 71 per cent of people say they are aware of it. The British government has recently issued a framework to conceptualise and present responses to the several forms of online harm²⁷ (HM Government, 2019); there have also been recent developments toward legal frameworks to tackle NCII in the UK (Ministry of Justice, 2019). This comes as a response to the perceived inadequateness of police responses to online abuse, which was agreed on by 33 per cent of British women (Amnesty International, 2017). In Brazil, where 76 per cent of people believe anti-cyberbullying measures are insufficient (Ipsos, 2018), the crime is punishable under existing laws (e.g. those attending to racist and homophobic abuse, and crimes against honour). Nevertheless, a specific legal framework became operative in 2018, through which misogynistic online abuse is now investigated by the federal bureau (Lei 13.642, 2018); other online crimes, including doxing and NCII are covered by a specific law (Lei 12.737, 2012).

All forms of cyberviolence are extensions, and indeed digitally-mediated amplifications, of more traditional forms of gendered violence recorded in material places (see Chapter Three), hence the importance of this topic to the understanding of gendered spatial practices in online environments (Pathé and Mullen, 1997; Chakraborti and Garland, 2009; Burney, 2013; Women's Aid, 2014; Fraser and Martineau-Searle, 2018).

Although the worldwide video games market is relatively evenly distributed between genders (UKIE, 2018), and even though female players reportedly have the same skills as male players (Ratan et al., 2015), the participation of women in gaming arenas is marginal. The next section presents facts on the industry and consumption of games in Brazil and the UK and pertaining divides.

²⁷ The new framework includes forms of harm against individuals (especially children), and threats against national security. That includes clearly defined practices (e.g. child exploration and hate crime), and harms with a less clear definition (e.g. cyberbullying and trolling).

2.4. Games

As a cultural medium and a form of art CVGs intersect technical, sociological and anthropological aspects of society across a broad social and economic spectrum (Richardson, 2010; Flanagan, 2009; Thornham, 2013). CVG industry is also steeply expanding; for instance, the UK is the sixth-largest market (in revenue) for CVGs in the world, with almost 40 million players, contributing to the expected collection of more than US\$ 4 billion in 2017. The industry is rising in Brazil, with an estimated 75 million gamers in 2018, spending 1.5 billion dollars during that year, making it the 13th largest market in the world (Newzoo, 2018a).

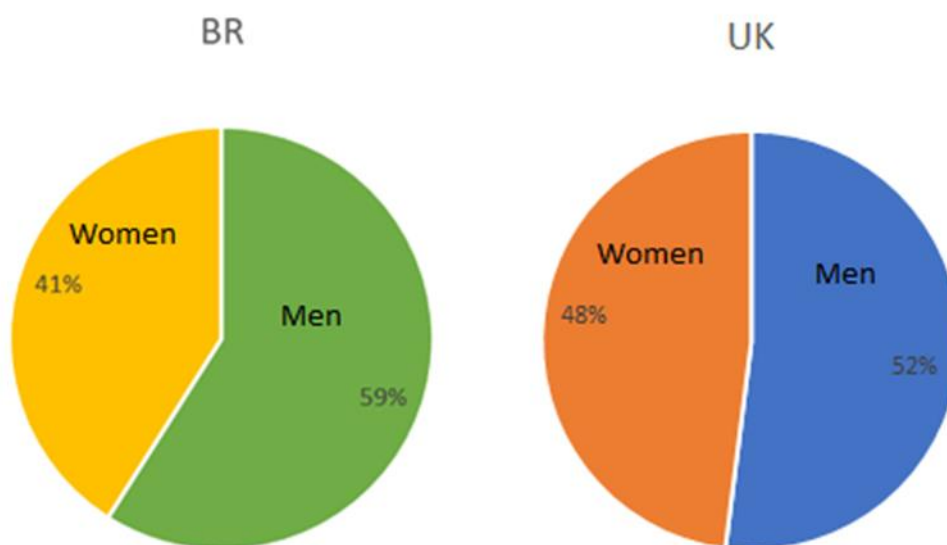


Figure 38: Gamer population in Brazil and the UK - gender proportion (Newzoo, 2017).

As seen in Figure 40, games' consumption on different platforms (expanded on in section 3.3.1) follows similar trends in both compared countries, with mobile being the most popular, and console the least. The gender ratio in games consumption is somewhat balanced in the UK and Brazil (Figure 39), with gendered differences in consumption patterns: British women are the lowest consumer group in the comparison, and, although Brazilian women consume slightly more mobile games than men, the latter is still the largest consumer group for all three platforms (Figures 41 and 42). Overall, Brazilians consume more games than Britons on all platforms, regardless of gender.

Differences in revenue are expressed by consuming patterns across the samples.

Whereas 83 per cent of Brazilian gamers spend money on in-game transactions, 17 per

cent fewer Britons do the same (Newzoo, 2018a). With this rate, Brazil is set to shortly be amongst the largest global markets.

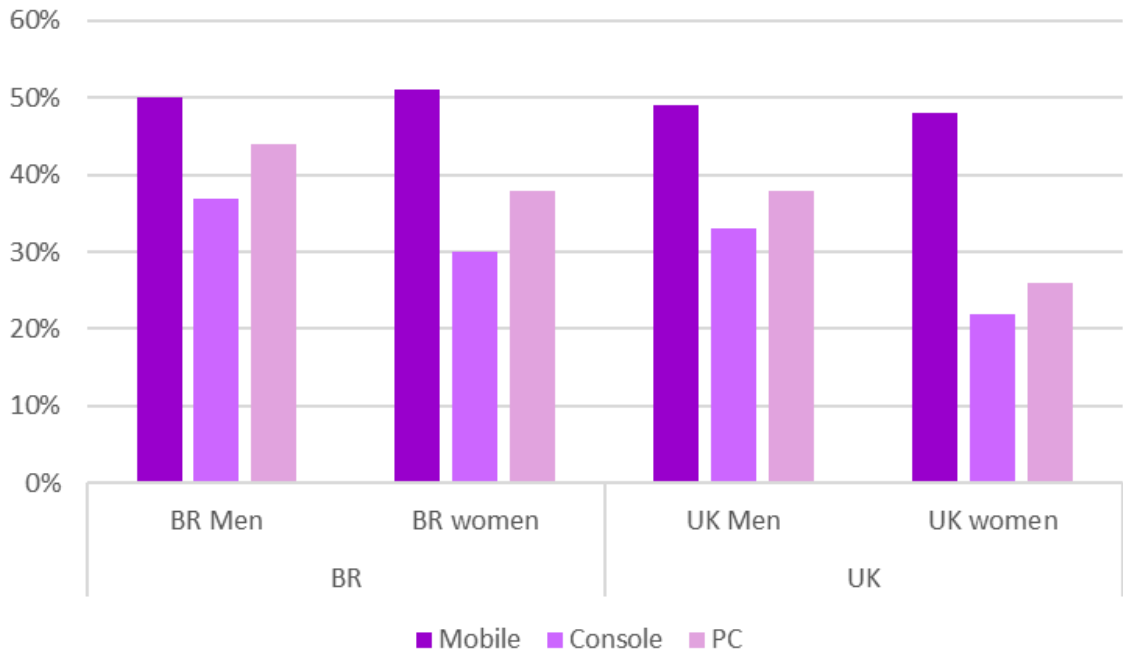


Figure 39: Comparison: Game consumption in Brazil and the UK, per platform, per gender (Newzoo, 2018)

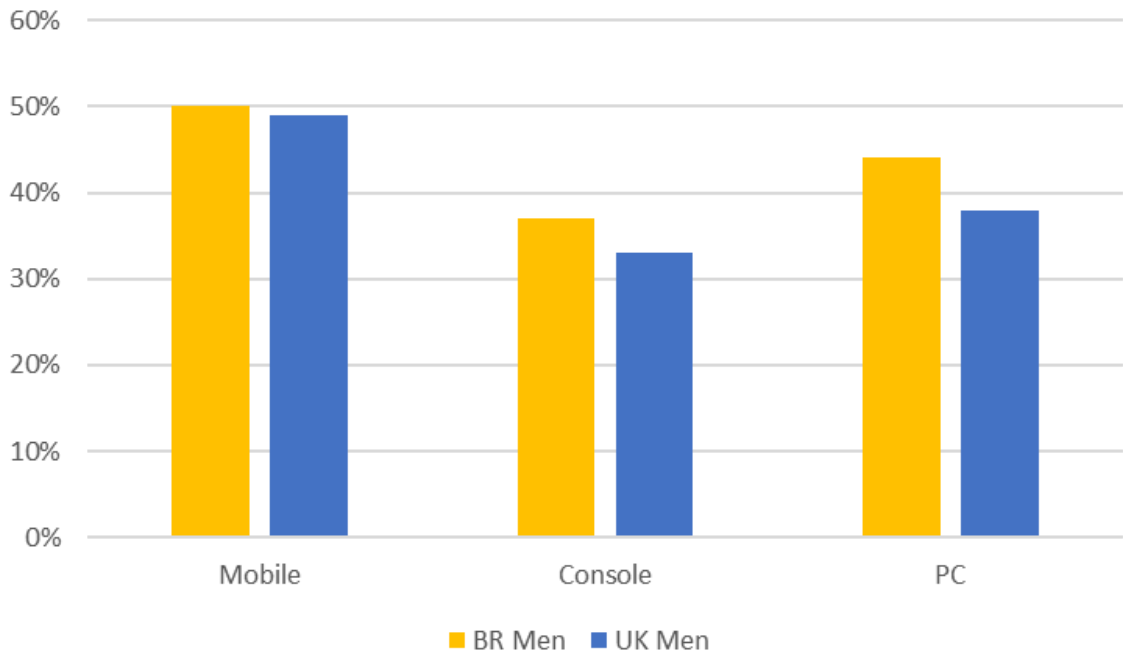


Figure 40: Comparison: Men's gaming consumption in Brazil and the UK – per platform (Newzoo, 2018).

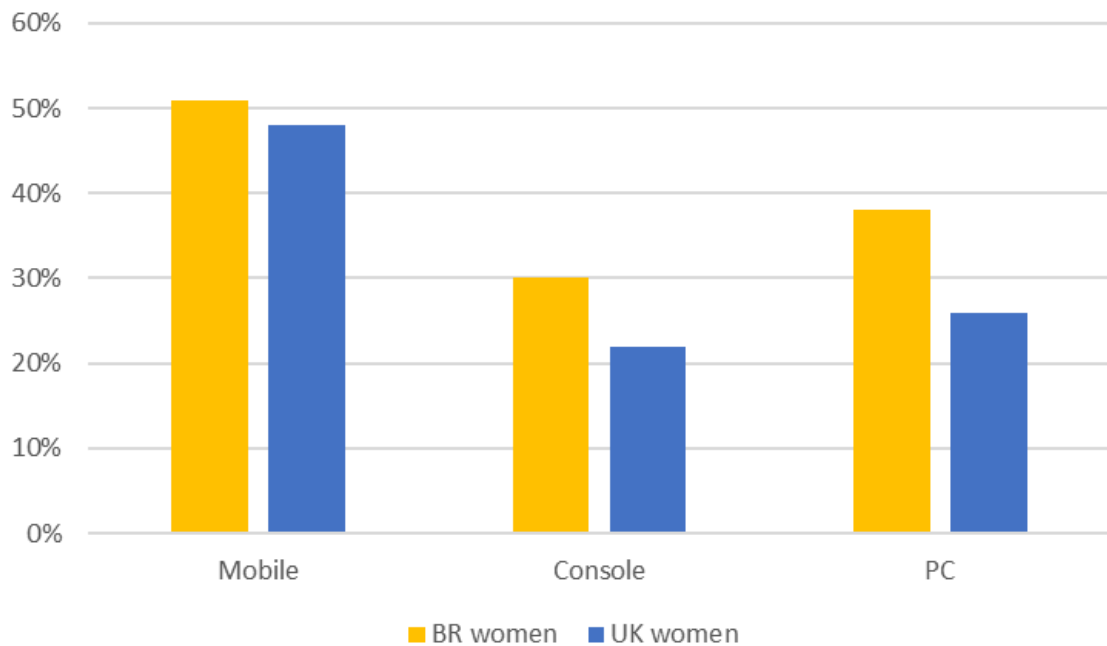


Figure 41: Comparison - women's game consumption in Brazil and the UK - per platform (Newzoo, 2018).

Although CVGs can favour learning, literacy and skills development (Barr, 2017), their consumption requires access to material resources (i.e. specialised equipment, Internet access), as well as significant levels of digital literacy and skills, besides free time. Considering the discussed patterns of digital inclusion and divides in Brazil and the UK, it is understandable that CVGs' growth in both countries (at par with increasing ICT access) exhibit exclusionary patterns in terms of class, age, race and gender.

These inequalities are intrinsic to those of the game industry, which is severely unequal despite the substantial growth in the participation of women as gamers in recent years – now, 41 per cent of online gamers around the world are female (ESA, 2017). In 2018, the UK had around 22 thousand people employed in the computer games industry (ONS, 2018a). Although the British Creative Industries (which include the arts, and IT and CVG development) are steadily growing in employment (ONS, 2018b), they still present imbalances as striking as those in the broader tech industry (see Figure 43). The under-representation of women in the industry is equally severe in the software and hardware productive chain, and in marketing and advertisement (Nichols, 2012; Huntemann, 2012). These gendered imbalances mirror those encountered in the higher education enrolment figures.

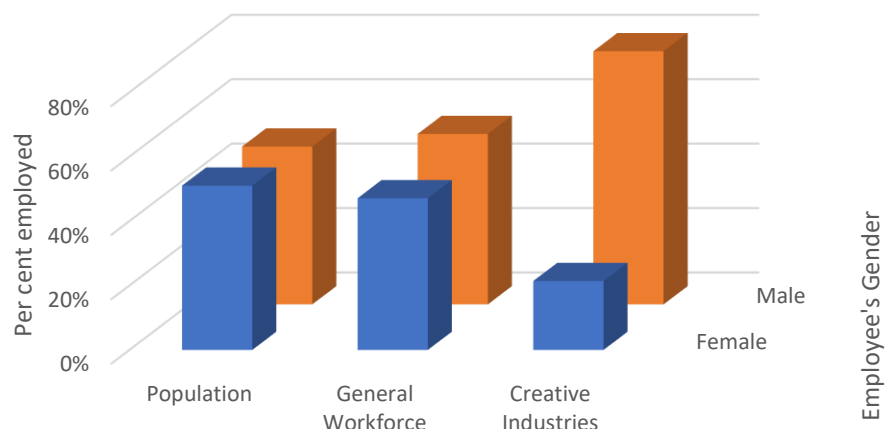


Figure 42: Gender diversity: Employment on IT, Software and Computer services in the UK (Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2016).

The British CVG industry employs mostly heterosexual White (British and non-British) men between 26 and 30 years old. Overall, 10 per cent of the workers are Black, Asian, and of minority ethnicities (BAME); women comprise 28 per cent of the workforce, whereas non-binary people are 2 per cent. LGBTQI+ people are 21 per cent of the CVG industry workforce. According to Taylor (2020), men and White people are more likely to work in more senior positions, as well as in core roles for game production (e.g. programming and art) than women.

The burgeoning CVG industry in Brazil is equally gendered – in 2014, 87 per cent of the workforce was male (PGT-USP, 2014). Black and indigenous people (10.9 per cent of the workforce), as well as trans* people (0.4 per cent), follow the digital divide and are severely underrepresented in the industry as well (Sakuda and Fortim, 2018).

2.4.1. League is a Battlefield

League was the most played online game in the world in late 2019, and the most viewed topic in the streaming platform Twitch.tv (Newzoo, 2020). Eight million players engage with the game daily, and new players keep joining (Rietkerk, 2019). Currently, there are almost 800 thousand ranked players in Brazil, and around 900 thousand in the Europe Nordic and West servers (OP.GG, 2020). No official statistics present the gender ratio of League players, but only 10 per cent of all massive online

battle arena (MOBA) players in the world are female (Statista, 2018a); nevertheless, 22 per cent of female players in the United States (US) play online games often, and 16 per cent do it regularly (Statista, 2016b). Forty per cent of people regularly playing massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) in the US were between 18 and 29 years old (Statista, 2016a).

As seen in section 1.3.3, League's servers are scattered across the globe and regionally organised. For Brazilian players, there is one exclusive server where Brazilian Portuguese, the language of virtually all the population, is used. Being a strong element of that country's cultural identity, language binds gamers together in the Brazilian server, giving it a sense of unity despite sharp internal regional contrasts. Conversely, most British summoners play on the Europe West (EUW) server, which includes ten other countries and has five official languages. In the UK, English is the primary language for 92 per cent of the population (ONS, 2011). In the context of a multicultural game server, the presence of other languages and cultural backgrounds is likely to generate significant disparities, either regarding communication or behavioural expectations and standards in different cohorts of gamers.

Around 47 per cent of all people who are online in Brazil know about e-sports, and 5 per cent are enthusiasts of the modality; 31 per cent of the audience is composed of women, and 53 per cent are below 25 years old (Newzoo, 2018b). The British e-sports audience comprised 3.1 million viewers in 2016, most of them between 21 and 35 years old; women are 31 per cent of the overall audience (UKIE, 2018). Worldwide, more than half League e-sports fans are women (Statista, 2017). In both countries, prominent football clubs have signed professional e-sports players in the past few years.

Aside from in-game strategy and score prediction, individual and collective behavioural patterns and motivations are amongst the most investigated topics in MOBA research (Mora-Cantalops and Sicilia, 2018). News media coverage and popular debate have given significant attention to the association of games and gamers to public health and social problems, reflected on academic interest. In contrast, compulsive engagement with gaming (i.e. videogame addiction), and the correlation between violent videogames and aggressive behaviour between children and adolescents are riddled with controversy in academia, with rare consensus between researchers, especially when comparing the input of different disciplines to the same issue (Bean *et al.*, 2017; Ferguson and Colwell, 2017).

The scientific debate has recently shifted towards the issue of gender representation in videogames and their impact on gamers' behaviours in and off-game, and League is well explored in those areas. The remainder of this chapter contextualises gendered inequalities in League consumption within broader issues highlighted by CVG research.

Inequalities in the industry and community

Gender inequality in involvement in the League starts with the stereotypically gendered nature of the game's characters. The underrepresentation of females in comparison to males among videogame characters (Williams *et al.*, 2009b) commonly involves stereotypical gender representations. Female primary characters are often sexualised, although varying over time and across genres (Kondrat, 2015; Lynch *et al.*, 2016). Again, scientific consensus regarding the socio-psychological consequences of gender (mis)representation in videogames seem to be difficult to achieve (Ferguson and Colwell, 2017; Ferguson and Donnellan, 2017), despite the evident pattern of female gamers reporting wellbeing issues (e.g. self-objectification and negative body image) when exposed to objectified female contents on videogames, and male gamers' propensity to replicate harmful beliefs and behaviours towards women when exposed to the same contents (Gestos, Smith-Merry and Campbell, 2018). Gendered stereotypes are also found in gamer depiction. News media impacts on how gamers are commonly depicted, often presenting oversimplifying and inaccurate gendered portrayals of videogame consumers, contributing to cementing certain stereotypes, such as women as victims and men as perpetrators of violence (Maclean, 2016).

Social, media and scientific debates feed a cultural turmoil in which videogames are a frequent actor. At the intersection of videogames and gendered relations, the #Gamergate controversy which erupted in 2014 highlighted an enduring conflict between gender equality activists in IT and a group claiming to represent a strand of conservative, masculinist gaming culture. The exposure of female developers, commentators and activists to rampant online and offline violence – including assault, rape and death threats – evidenced wounds in how the industry addresses gendered power issues in its headquarters, as well as the power of a small, but loud minority of players capable of virulent reactions to defend their ideals. The antagonism underlying this movement represents, besides a clash over cultural ownership of a medium, one of the contemporary faces of gendered power struggles shaping online and offline

spaces (Gray, Buyukozturk and Hill, 2017). Since its consequences are still felt by its victims, #Gamergate joins the earlier hate campaign experienced by the cultural critic Anita Sarkeesian (Todd, 2015) to show the importance of videogames to the comprehension of gendered power dynamics and their centrality to territorial struggles on the Internet and beyond (Mortensen, 2018). Moreover, this recent event carries important lessons on the role of antagonism and symbolic violence in academic work, especially when activists target research committed to social change (Chess and Shaw, 2015).

Highly popular, League is constantly at the centre of controversies. Its community is frequently referred to as toxic and over competitive due to the ubiquity of otherwise abhorrent practices of verbal harassment, allied to the substantial amount of time and dedication necessary to acquire game expertise (Rimington, Weal and Leonard, 2016). The most loyal League players are male, high in age, and low in income, and dedicate a large number of hours per week to the game (Li *et al.*, 2018). These characteristics often fuel conflicting relations within the community, especially due to an 'uneven distribution of capital (...) negotiated in the context of a shared and understood habitus' (Rimington, Weal and Leonard, 2016, p.356). These internal conflicts, which comprise gendered relations, generate abrasions and frustrations further naturalised as an intrinsic part of the community, and foundational of its character.

Gendered conflict in League stems from wider offline rules resulting in heated in-game interactions (Rimington, Weal and Leonard, 2016), and materialises in practices which impact people's experiences in significant ways. Women experience high levels of pressure to overtly perform their champions' gender identities in-game, which is reflected by their champion choices and consequent limited performances (Waddell and Ivory, 2015; Ratan *et al.*, 2019). Although having different motivations and preferences²⁸ (Williams *et al.*, 2009a; Wilhelm, 2018) female gamers have the same in-game skills as men (Shen *et al.*, 2016). Many argue that women are pushed out of the gaming community by social dynamics. For instance, gendered stereotypes confine women to equally stereotypical roles (i.e. support) often seen as subordinate and undesirable (Ratan *et al.*, 2015). Allied to social constructions of CVGs as male activities (Thornham, 2008), and the perceived hostility in the community's social climate – where women receive significantly more sexual harassment than men (Ruvalcaba *et al.*, 2018) – these factors impact women's mental wellbeing and

²⁸ Contingent on intersecting socio-cultural aspects such as age, biological sex and educational level (Osunde *et al.*, 2015; Wilhelm, 2018; Lonergan and Weber, 2019).

confidence as players (Lopez-Fernandez *et al.*, 2019; Mclean and Griffiths, 2019). Consequently, women tend to use coping strategies which reduce their sense of enjoyment (Mclean and Griffiths, 2019). They may use conformity as a strategy for belonging, often avoiding experimentations with different roles and characters (thus reinforcing stereotypes (Kaye and Pennington, 2016)), or binding their activities to those of their male counterparts, both affording and limiting female participation (Williams *et al.*, 2009a; Ratan *et al.*, 2015).

Gendered inequalities in the game are reflected in e-sports, which replicate traditional sports in their standing hypermasculine culture, centred in gendered hostility – a major factor precluding women from professional gameplay (Ruvalcaba *et al.*, 2018). Examples are the blatantly bigoted politics imposed in e-sports arenas, such as limiting the number of LGBTQI+ players on Indonesian teams²⁹ (Stuart, 2015) and banning the formation of mixed-gender teams in Brazil (ESPN Brasil, 2016b, 2016a). The famously slanderous attacks against Maria' Remilia' Creveling (see section 1.3.4), the first woman to ever engage in high-rank professional gameplay (LeJacq, 2015; Rigon, 2018) also illustrate why League is seen as a toxic place with a pernicious community, of which masculine domination is perceived as cause and consequence (Graham, 2015).

It is in this context that Riot Games, League's managing company, got involved in a high-profile case of sexual harassment and gender pay gap (D'Anastasio, 2018b, 2018a). The company's response denying any intentional bias or knowledge of the allegations (Wolf, 2018) was deemed unsatisfactory, and the case reached its apogee in a massive employee walkout (D'Anastasio, 2019; Klepek, 2019) followed by a state lawsuit against its allegedly biased payroll policies (BBC, 2019a). By the end of 2019, around a thousand women who had worked for Riot Games since 2014 were set to receive financial restitutions from a US\$ 10 million settlement (Favis, 2019).

Notwithstanding these problematic scenarios, the company and players are frequently involved in initiatives to mitigate violent environments and foment fairness, and a friendlier community. Between 2011 and 2014, Riot Games ran The Tribunal, a user-centred disciplinary system in which summoners were responsible for judging cases in which their peers were suspected of violating the Summoner's Code (Riot Games, 2014b). Prior to being disabled in early 2014, The Tribunal was responsible for delivering punishment (including warnings, demotion and banishment) to toxic

²⁹ Later lifted due to heated debates (Garena, 2015).

players in the NA, BR, EUW and EUNE servers (see section 1.3.3) (Formaglio, 2013). To encourage more empathetic gameplay, the company has also launched modes like the since-disabled Team Builder (Riot Games, 2014a), and in-game campaigns such as the *Acampamento Yordle*³⁰ (League of Legends BR, 2017). One of the most important initiatives, in operation since 2012 (Riot Games, 2012), the *Honor System* is a reputational scheme based on peer-to-peer incentivisation of positive behaviours; in this system, players award one ally with a badge indicating the ability to stay calm, good leadership or general friendly play (Riot Games, 2018). In 2015, Riot Games ran a psychology survey to evaluate players caught using offensive/non-compliant summoner names, a controversial tactic dismissed as offensive and invasive (Maiberg, 2015). Nonetheless, e-sports professionals have been facing exemplary punishment (including lifetime bans) when involved in antisocial or criminal behaviour, including of gendered and sexual character, in or off-game (Ganiko, 2017b, 2017a).

2.5. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, Brazil and the UK are presented and compared through statistics reflecting their demographic, political and economic states, alongside their state of gender equality. These figures open the way to a discussion about digital divides in both countries, and how gendered relations inflect access and use of digital technologies, especially CVGs. Brazil is still working towards universalising the Internet, and the digital divide is much higher there than in the UK. Even so, Brazilians consume much more CVGs on all platforms and have a much bigger player base in League. That raises questions about contextual, cultural landscapes of game and play, and links to regional in-game differences.

Although both countries reached high scores in educational attainment and health and survival in the past years, the UK is the 15th in the Global Gender Gap ranking, while Brazil is in the 95th place of 153, due to disparities between economic participation and opportunity for women and men, and in the political empowerment of the two genders. The state of gender rights in both countries illustrate there is still a long way ahead to reach gender equality, even regarding education and health, due to structural and everyday systems and practices of gendered norms marginalising people based on their gender. Internal digital divides also stress gendered inequalities. Both in Brazil

³⁰ Brazil only.

and the UK, women have less digital access, skills, and literacy, and are less involved with creative technologies. The statistics on gendered violence on- and offline illustrate real barriers to the advancement of women, and LGBTQI+ people, who often have their accessibility and use of technology halted and punished, as is also the case with their access to physical, offline places.

Imbalances in the gaming industry and regarding gaming practices gain new salience. In requiring good digital skills and literacy, access to fair quality equipment and connectivity, and free time, CVGs already carry gendered barriers that are often embodied in industrial practices and illustrated by the game's ideologies and visual representations (see section 1.3). Inequalities in the player pool feed back into the industry, generating a vicious cycle of female and LGBTQI+ marginalisation.

The controversies in which League is immersed are examples of the inefficacy of access massification, or simply improving access to digital technologies. Decreasing the gender divide in gaming by increasing employment and participation may have immediate effects on statistical equality, but structural, intersectional gendered power relations may still create and reinforce bigoted practices. For instance, having a thousand female employees from a 2,500 pool did not exempt Riot Games from employing discriminatory practices in their offices – their practices were scored in the wake of contemporary feminist demands. The same is true for in-game practices and behaviours identified by gamers as exclusionary, aggravating women's marginalisation and emphasising the assertion of League as a place for men.

This context evidences a series of gendered spatial practices worth addressing in gender and digital geographies, opening a discussion about the political dynamics exerted in cyberspace, and impacts upon relations of inclusion, exclusion, and agency. The choice of League as a case study seeks to fill a gap in geographical studies of CVGs, raising questions about the role of language- and location-bound servers in the production of online spaces while providing a strong context for the analysis of gendered relations in said spaces. Moreover, the choice of Brazil and the UK for the binational comparison seeks to illuminate the different levels of gendered inequality inflecting the production of digital spaces while cultural contrasts are also at play.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework sustaining this research. It starts with the discussion of the philosophical positions covering the research approach and follows by binding the structural concepts within feminist and digital geographies and their approach to the central concept of spatial practices.

Chapter Three:

Theoretical Framework

Spatial practices the ways in which people generate, use and perceive space (Lefèbvre, 1991). When these practices are based on gendered relations, to buoy up or combat particular interests, these are gendered spatial practices (Bird and Sokolofski, 2005). There are a plethora of studies looking at spatial practices in material places of all scales, but little is discussed about the gendered practices related to “the socio-techno-cultural productions, artefacts, and orderings of everyday life that result from our spatial engagement with digital technologies” (Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski, 2016, p.13), and even fewer focus on these practices around online gaming. Geography must seek to unveil power structures, orders, and regimes, dissecting the mutual constitution of place and power from within its context. In applying a feminist analytical frame to geographical inquiry, conventional notions of scale are challenged; reflections about private/public spheres and other simplistic binaries, as well as the power relations acting in space (Nelson and Seager, 2005) refine geographical scales into the community, the household and the body (Pratt, 2009).

In the spirit of these approaches, this chapter presents the theoretical framework structuring this research, built on the understanding of spatial practices, its feminist critiques, and the pertinence of applying this concept to the geographical understanding of online environments. The first section unpacks gender relations, presenting gender as an anchoring concept and analytic framework, providing an overview of the researcher’s position in the field, and reviewing the influences of feminist theories on the discussion of space and place. The second section of this chapter dissects the concept of spatial practices and its relationship to gender, travelling from physical to digital places to draw a route for the research of gendered spatial practices in online gaming. In the third and final section, this chapter introduces digital spatialities with a discussion on the production and experience of online places and the contradictions (and critiques to) digital/material intersections. In being complex, dynamic, and relational, spatial practices are interactive and co-created by the permanent power struggles between actors and agents in the territory.

3.1. A Geographical Perspective on Gender Relations

Fundamental to social and spatial organisation, gender is not used, in the social sciences, as a synonym for sex. Gender refers to socially created distinctions and roles attributed to the different biological sexes (i.e. male, female and intersex), a label that prints the appropriateness of activities, behaviours and performances onto people (WGSG, 1997). Instead of a stable and permanent identity, gender is constituted by longitudinal 'stylized repetition of acts' (Butler, 1988, p.519), not being essentialised or dichotomous, but a 'field of structured and structuring difference' (Haraway, 1988, p.588) in which individual, localised bodies resonate in and with global webs of power and knowledge. Therefore, gender intersects biological traits, societal structures and roles, and personal identity.

Geographers use gender as an analytical category to understand placemaking, territorial snippets and territorialities, political construction of space and places, and gendered practices of socio-spatial organisation. Gender is a useful analytic category because it illuminates the often-obscured struggles and successes of women's daily lives in all social sectors. Ultimately, the scholarly focus on gender relations has a political commitment to social transformation, with the mission to employ academic knowledge to improving the lives of women, and all people positioned as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer/questioning, intersex and beyond (LGBTQI+). The nature of feminist thinking, and activism position these struggles in the same context of marginalisation affecting people of colour, disabled people, children, and elders (see section 3.1.3).

Gender relations thus refer to the different ways in which the gendered person and the accepted attributes of appropriateness (i.e. masculinity and femininity) are defined across time and space (McDowell, 2013). Gender relations are embedded in places and operate in all geographical scales. Consequently, the feminist critique is directed to all sites where gender roles and relations are reified and enacted; from schools and classrooms (McDowell, 1979; WGSG, 1984; McDowell and Peake, 1990; Hyams, 2000; Longhurst, 2001; Bondi, 2004; Kannen, 2014) to the researcher's fieldwork (Rose, 1997; Cloke et al., 2004), including interpersonal relations and interactions (Painter, 2008), the home (Gregson et al., 1997; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; McDowell, 2007; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2015) and beyond, to the intangible realms of emotions (Rose, 1997; Browne and Rose, 2004; Maddrell, 2009, 2012, 2013; Morrow, Hawkins and Kern, 2015; Maddrell, 2016). Far from being natural or immanent, contemporary

gender relations encompass complex relationships between power, production, emotions and symbolism (Connell, 2002). Following, gender relations will be discussed in their making through performance, the cultural significance of masculine and feminine performances, and its mutual constitution with other identity cleavages.

3.1.1. Performativity

Instead of being a given identity, gender is produced through culturally-inflected, politically-controlled bodily performances. Performativity is central to the understanding of the relationships between power and gendered identity, for it relates to how gender roles are dictated and expressed. Following the first wave of feminist reforms in the West, the notion of natural sex roles was challenged by the realisation of these being transmitted via socialisation and social expectations (Mead, 1928). Gender hierarchy was later recognised as an amalgam of elements (institutionalised or not) – e.g. education, marriage, compulsory motherhood, double standards on sexual freedom, financial dependence (Beauvoir, 1949). Extensive and enduring patterns in gender performance and relationships produce rigid social structures. Institutions set their patterns of gender organisation – i.e. gender regimes (Walby, 1997) – co-constitutive of social structure through hegemonic gender orders. The nature of gendered relations is contingent on the manifold social structures and their articulation; gender is, then, relational, and its performance is a place of power contestation.

Although traditionally associated with institutionalised hierarchical imposition of force, domination and regulation, ‘power (...) is a relational effect of social interaction’ (Allen, 2003, p.2). As part of a wider historical and cultural process that includes formal, practical and popular representational practices, power shifts in form and spatiality depending on how it is exercised (Painter, 2008). Notwithstanding the importance of state and institutional power to the constitution and maintenance of gender relations, power is mostly a ‘fine network of micro-scale or capillary relations that link objects, events and different levels of society’ (McDowell, 2013, p.50), being exercised in every social relation, especially interpersonal ones, challenging binary divisions between private and public (Sharp, 2007). This diffuse, ingrained power regulates individual and collective behaviours through a subtle but effective surveillance system over individual bodies.

Patriarchy, a universal, historical, and overarching structure that focuses on the male³¹ dominance, derived from ‘the law of the father’, dominates and controls women as wives, mothers, and daughters. As a system of power where sexual difference underlines women’s oppression and subordination, patriarchy establishes institutionalised inequalities in gender relations, advantageous to men (Piscitelli, 2009; McDowell, 2013), being thus responsible for the separation and opposition between public and private spaces, leading to the segregation of women (although with class cleavages, see section 3.1.3).

Seeing that identity comes from social interaction, gender is not a natural characteristic; for that reason, sex is also discursive. The discourse embodying values across and beyond biological categories infuse meaning to gendered bodies, imposing roles. Gender attributions are symbolic, for the labelling of people and performances depends on the underlying social meaning attributed to each one: what it means to be a man, a woman, transgender, feminine, masculine, or neutral is given by a symbolic reading of these features. Simultaneously, symbolic attribution shapes gender, as the literal and metaphorical marks, differently attributed to gendered people, are themselves symbolic. Material and symbolic practices are saturated with meaning, and binary value (drenched in emotional attachments, commitments, and responses) is attributed to gender through symbolic dualisms.

Gendered categories thus become identity markers through the long-term naturalisation of gendered roles. As argued by Butler (1988), sex is discursive for its very definition comes from social interaction. In time, the politically-defined standards of gender appropriateness are crystallised through the naturalisation of performative gender roles. This crystallisation welds sex and gender together, essentialising gender identities, transforming identity production into the ontology of people and defining systems of difference and hierarchy which reinforce heteronormativity and patriarchal relations through dualities such as in/adequateness and otherness (Butler, 1999; Barker, 2016). Therefore, action produces subjects and bodies – the ultimate materiality, in constant production and power endowment. More than exposing the given appropriate and inappropriate ways of being a woman or man, gender performativity reveals gender identities as results of a persistent

³¹ Although the terms ‘male’ and ‘men’, like ‘female’ and ‘woman’ have different (and sometimes contrasting) meanings, they are often used interchangeably to improve readability in this thesis. They are accompanied by ‘biological’ and ‘sex’, or ‘identity’ and ‘norms’ when a specific distinction is necessary.

performance that creates the 'being' through the 'doing'. Gender is ultimately an action, expressed in bodily performance.

Bodies exist within a social substrate; accounts of the diverse kinship systems and gendered behaviours over the world illustrate the discursiveness of bodily gendered classification, heavily dependent on social dynamics and values that change in time and space (Connell, 2002). The connection between body and identity is policed by a complex set of ideological and epistemological apparatuses (Althusser, 2014), with shifting parameters and methods that work to ensure normality through discipline. People are labelled with identities within a scale of normality, while surveillance and discipline ensure conformity to institutionally adequate standards. By dictating gender symbolism, ideological apparatuses prescribe adequate body shapes and behaviours (Connell, 2002). Hence, gendered bodies are products of disciplinary practices: those who fall on the abnormal end of the scale are systematically punished into becoming adequate to the social and institutional standards (Barker, 2016). Nevertheless, bodies are active, and 'must be seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct' (Connell, 2002, p.40).

Western feminism was aimed at, and validated a specific type of woman: White, Anglo-American, middle-class, adult, heterosexual; by thinking about Woman (i.e. category) as a being, first and second-wave Western feminists produced an exclusionary idea of feminine identity which erased non-conforming bodies due to their incoherence with prescribed identities. This dichotomy is highlighted by social movements' grievances about complex forms of exclusion within and beyond the feminist movement (Piscitelli, 2009). Non-conforming bodies defy the traditional coherence between sex, gender, and desire, being rejected by the essentialised gender category which relates bodies to socially predefined identities. Heterosexism is, then, a key structure supporting patriarchal relations; sexuality is thus central to the understanding of gendered performances and relations.

Related to the production of gender, sexuality and sexual orientation refer to the complex categories of erotic and affective desire/attraction between people. Accordingly, heteronormativity is a set of cultural assumptions related to normative standards of gender performances, desires, and sexual and affective practices and inclinations. These norms are binary and hierarchical for they consider male and heterosexual as the norm (alongside cisgender, monogamic, and others) of which female and homosexual are the deviations. The hierarchisation of these binaries

results from their normativity and interdependence (Barker, 2016), complexifying gender performance through the dominance of heteronormativity.

Performativity helps illuminate how gendered identities are negotiated within a social arena, being central to this study's endeavours of understanding how gender relations play a role in shaping online spaces. In the explored gaming arena, these performances are identified under new and traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity, discussed below.

3.1.2. Masculinities and Femininities

The idea of gender roles and subordination as a social construction poses that this structure can be changed; for this reason, the use of the term 'patriarchy' has been criticised for its generic and monolithic character, which does not define all types of masculine domination, nor all particularities of women's conditions (Piscitelli, 2009). Moreover, masculinities and femininities are mutually constitutive in their asymmetries; this relationship is one of interplay, negotiation and appropriation, and not simply of downright oppression (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

In the context of normative and dominant ideologies and identities, masculinity is a relational, dynamic social practice of gender, encompassing spatially- and historically-shifting philosophical standards, definitions and practices of maleness (Longhurst, 2000; McDowell and Sharp, 2014). Likewise, femininity speaks of dominant ideas and practices of womanhood and woman identity, as a response to maleness and male identity. In being hierarchical, the relationship between masculinity and femininity is one of otherness, where masculinity is what 'men do', and femininity is the Other, what men do not do (Paechter, 2006). Although hierarchy does not presuppose oppression, structural masculine dominance is still a strong axis in the system of socio-cultural dominations, thus fundamental to gendered relations spatial production.

Underscoring masculinity, the avoidance of femininity comes from binary assumptions of femininity as inherently negative (e.g. irrational, hormonal, dependent, emotional, dangerous) or contingently positive (e.g. beautiful, nurturing, docile, faithful) (McDowell, 2013). It is argued that, as the opposite of an idealised standard of masculinity, femininity is produced through fictions (culturally, historically and geographically defined) about what women lack as a category, and what they must do, as individuals, to fill these gaps (Walkerdine, 1989; McDowell,

2013). For instance, in being framed as less intelligent, girls are portrayed as diligent students; in being perceived as lacking the drive for business, women are expected to excel in homemaking, or emulate masculinist performances should they want to achieve respect in the workplace. Indeed, if the masculine is the subject, femininity is defined by what it lacks from masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the patterns of practice engaged with the ascendancy of Men (i.e. category) in relation to women, through a hierarchical and systematic interplay between types of masculinity (Connell, 1987). The concept exceeds sex roles through the assertion of cultural ideals of masculinity embedded in and justified by ideological apparatuses and supported by symbolic and coercive practices. Moreover, hegemonic masculinity is constructed through a strategic approach to women, comprising a complex blend of violence/acceptance and repulsion/attraction. Femininity is thus defined either in relation to compliance and accommodation to hegemonic masculinity (i.e. emphasised femininity) or in relation to resistance, non-compliance, or negotiation with it. In relation to other men, hegemonic masculinity is primarily shaped by heterosexism and subordination of homosexuality, as well as to ageism and class-based distinctions, positioning masculinity in an intensity spectrum. Nevertheless, processes and apparatuses of male dominance are volatile, adapting to the times and to locational expectations of feminine and masculine performance. Therefore, universalised representations of masculinity and femininity do not always necessarily correspond to local, lived masculinities and femininities.

Dominant images of masculinity are inflected by contextual intersections of class and race (see section 3.1.3). For instance, in Brazil (and most of Latin America) practices of heteronormative and hypermasculine social relations are commonly referred to as *machismo*, expressed in male embodied performances and use of space (Baldwin and DeSouza, 2001; Nunn, 2013). *Machismo* is constructed in contrast with other identity categories, through performances centred on physicality: a cult of virility, expressed on blatant homophobia, sexual prowess (e.g. sexual intercourse with several women, often producing illegitimate offspring), displayed invulnerability, risk-taking, and aggressiveness (especially violence against women, and arrogance and belligerence against other men) (Gutmann, 2013).

But it is often a label of otherness: because *machismo* is more commonly perceived as negative, Latin American men rarely position themselves as *machistas*, but somewhere liminal between man and *macho*. Manliness, in the Brazilian context,

entails both the physically virile dimension and a set of virtues (e.g. breadwinning and protection). Moreover, *macho*, and more so *machista* is often attributed to men in a certain intersection of class and race; the White, middle- or upper-class man who carries personal virtues of manhood (e.g. bravery, courage, honour) is rarely labelled as so, in contrast with the working-class, mixed-race (more often Black or *pardo*) man, who equally stereotypically carries the negative aspects of masculinity, often read as vulgar or obscene³² (Gutmann, 2013). The Brazilian *macho* is thus constructed as opposed to and exercised against with non-man (i.e. women) or lesser-man categories – e.g. boys (not yet men), ‘henpecked’ (weak men), or homosexuals (not men at all) (Baldwin and DeSouza, 2001). *Macho* is the Latin American expression of hegemonic masculinity, both because it is systemic, and because it produces non-hegemonic masculinities expressed by those in the margins and outside the boundaries. *Macho* is a sought identity (‘achieved rather than ascribed’ - Beesley and McGuire, 2009, p.252), something one wishes to be and performs accordingly as to achieve. Thus, *machismo* is often perceived as a choice, but one only available to those born male (Gutmann, 2013).

Simultaneously (and as a counterpart), Latin American femininity is mainly constructed within the Model of Mary, built from the Roman Catholic influence framing the example of the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, as the epitome of womanhood (Baldwin and DeSouza, 2001). This model imposes rigid traditional gender roles to women, from whom it is expected an impossible balance of motherhood and sexlessness, alongside uncomplaining homemaking work, a self-sacrificing life, and profound inner strength. While imposing an unambiguous burden over Brazilian women, the Marianist ideology of womanhood can be a source of power, especially over spaces of nurture and social reproduction (e.g. home, classrooms, religious cell-groups). Like with *machismo*, this model of femininity has variable penetration in Brazilian society, being less accepted by young, middle- and upper-class, educated people, and with complex and variable intensity depending on ethnic background (e.g. White women expectedly embody the ideal, whereas Black and indigenous women are seen merely as objects of desire, further from the ideal). Nevertheless, Brazilian women are historically portrayed as strong (which is evidenced by our permanent political struggle for equality – see Chapter Two), which constantly clashes with the imposed stereotypes of frailty.

³² Not surprisingly, ‘macho’ translates as ‘male’ when referring to animals’ secondary sexual characteristics.

It is argued, however, that heterosexual relationships in Brazil were developed, from the early days, in a context of slavery and colonialism, ingrained in how men and women are hierarchically positioned within the capitalist production, both in terms of sex and of race (i.e. the White man is viewed as much superior to the Black woman) (Neuhouser, 1989). In this sense, *machismo* and its negative consequences are especially deeper in the Brazilian context, where poverty is feminized, and sexual relationships are still reflective of socialisation for female subordination and male domination, leading to a fraught grasp of consent and harassment (Baldwin and DeSouza, 2001).

The Brazilian example shows that it is virtually impossible to draw a unified picture of masculinity and femininity. Gendered relations at play in Britain are also entangled with historic interregional conflicts, migrant identities, and class clashes. For instance, younger heterosexual men have radically changed the meaning of masculinity, receding from traditional standards of homophobia displayed by older men, who tend to stereotype and loathe homosexuality, associating it with most forms of homosocial tactility, which they thus avoid (Anderson and Fidler, 2018). The resilience of this 'masculine ethos' (p. 256) in older men creates a generational rift where contemporary (and often perceived as feminised) expressions of masculinity by the youth clash with traditional masculinities. Class cleavages add up to these conflicts, defining different approaches to masculinity in Britain. Young, poor men in urban centres are commonly perceived as carrying forms of undesirable masculinity, often associated with warped morals, gang violence and failure in education and employment (McDowell, Rootham and Hardgrove, 2016). An example is the *chav*, a caricature of the working-class, disenfranchised young man, associated with sexual promiscuity and substance abuse (Nayak, 2006; Jones, 2012), sitting in a complicated intersection of hypermasculinity (through embodied performances) and subordinate masculinity (through class). Likewise, the *lad* encompasses the urban, heteronormative young man, usually at university settings, who boisterously expresses his masculinity through mischievous behaviours, especially of misogynistic or overall bigoted nature (Phipps and Young, 2015). Notwithstanding the recognised behavioural patterns of these forms of masculinity, these labels are problematic for they carry the risk of reification; again, masculinity is not homogenous, being constructed in time and with space through which *lads*, *chavs*, and *alpha males* may change in meaning, or simply cease to exist (Fine and Kuriloff, 2006; Thompson and Langendoerfer, 2016; Nichols, 2018).

Britain's colonial past and migration-marked present pose other cleavages, perhaps less markedly than in the Brazilian reality. Asian, Muslim, Caribbean and American masculinities are challenged and reshaped through (often unequal and violent) racial relations in the UK (Hopkins, 2009). Kalra (2009) argues that the moral panics and crises marking Britain's relationship with race, ethnicity and religion (e.g. related to marriage customs and arrangements, and bodily performances) are increasingly transferred from migrant women to migrant men, who are usually perceived as perpetrators while women are seen as victims.

The co-construction of masculinity and femininity endures in the socialisation and performances of womanhood in Britain and Brazil. In the UK, women's socialisation is underscored, from early stages, by the contrast and negotiation between performances of emphasised femininity (e.g. *girlie* girls) and performances where femininity is seen as deficit due to the absence of these codes (e.g. *tomboys*). The contrast is lived in daily activities, especially those more centred at the body (e.g. sport), polarising heterosexual masculinities and femininities by creating deviant categories for those who perform somewhere between the poles (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002). In both countries, though, as beauty is a central support to the display of femininity, embodied practices of beautification (e.g. clothes, makeup, hairdressing) draw lines of class between appropriate and inappropriate, desirable and undesirable forms of femininity (Nicholls, 2019). As with hypermasculinity, exaggerated performances of femininity (i.e. hyperfemininity) further enhance the more sexualised aspects of heterosexual femininity, whose performances are perceived as unauthentic or distasteful (Francis *et al.*, 2017), on the extreme opposite to *tomboy* performances, perceived as transgressive and undesirable.

A geographical focus on the representation of hegemonic masculinities, transgressive femininity, and the crisis of masculinity illuminates gendered experiences of space and place. For instance, the intersection of masculinity and sexuality is mapped onto the spaces of the imagination of gay men who negotiate their navigation between the 'closet' and the outside. The materialities of male identity are charted within institutional practices (including public policies) and public places of labour and leisure, where symbolic understandings of manliness shape spaces of masculinity often reflected in material practices such as the built environment (Longhurst, 2000; Brown, Lim and Browne, 2012). As for these examples, this study benefits from the exploration of gendered identities in the context of space production through material and symbolic practices within online social arenas.

As seen, masculinities and femininities are constructed in multiplicity. Nevertheless, although masculinity is not (nor should it be seen as) inherently negative, patterns of hypermasculinity are useful to uncover negative consequences of masculinity within wider, hierarchical gendered relations. Where a term such as *machismo* is not available to describe and categorise undesirable masculine performances in their context, *toxic masculinity* has been used to refer to how these practices can be harmful.

It is important to understand *machismo* and its British counterparts, such as *laddism*, in the context of toxic masculinity due to their fundamental bonds with violence. Positioned as the subject of sexuality, the masculine (in contrast with the feminine – object) is placed as the agent, amassing power and domination. In this context, violence is, at once, natural, rightful and a duty, applied as an imperative, to correct the faults of others (non- or lesser-men) and to protect one's position in the category (Minayo, 2005). While masculinity itself does not cause violence, the latter is often employed as a means of achieving masculinities, varying with the context (Beesley and McGuire, 2009). In Brazil, masculinist violence is employed within the logic of an 'individual hyperliberty' (Minayo, 2005, p.24, loose translation), which needs to be immediately expressed due to the perceived shortness of life, pleasure and success. In Britain, behaviours entailing the *lad culture* are dismissed as banter which, although undesirable, is expected from heterosexual men in that age and social position (Jeffries, 2019); likewise, homophobic behaviours are expected of older men, and antisocial behaviours are expected from working-class young men. As seen, in both Brazil and Britain, toxic masculinity is naturalised, and its practices trivialised; as a result, violent practices are dismissed as harmless or unavoidable while alienating women and LGBTQI+ people.

Toxic masculinity 'is resilient because it constitutes not simply a form of 'consciousness', not 'ideology' in the classical understanding of the concept, but a field of productive relations' (Lancaster, 1994, p.19). While strengthening bonds between men and reinforcing current standards of hegemonic masculinity (Jeffries, 2019), toxic masculinity produces spaces of assurance for men, and fear for the Others (see section 3.2.3). As a result, gendered violence, misogyny, and homophobia become endemic to spaces where toxic masculinity is a central social currency; this applies to online spaces, particularly gaming spaces, as discussed in section 3.3.3. Toxic masculinity is thus a central practice in the production of online spaces, being fundamental to uncovering the role of gendered practices in the context of gaming.

As an issue of power, toxic masculinity faces permanent resistance (see section 3.2.1). Networks of feminist solidarity highlight how toxic masculinity presents itself and offer ways of curbing its practices. The production of ‘safe spaces’ and denouncement of microaggressions produces inclusive, negotiated spaces in which hegemonic masculinity is challenged, and toxic masculinity is combated (Lewis, Marine and Kenney, 2018). Feminist spaces of solidarity are thus collectively produced with aims to transform otherwise exclusionary spaces (discussed in-depth in section 3.2). Femininity and masculinity are embodied performances of gender, made visible through socially and historically produced devices and behaviours. Likewise, the practice of inverting, misusing or mixing performances and objects framed as masculine or feminine, at once reifies and contests gender norms and stereotypes. Given that gender performances are adapted across time and place, female agency is often enacted through the feminised performance of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. the first-person-shooter game *Hey Baby*, in which a female avatar shoots and kills catcallers on the street – see Ohl and Duncan, 2012). In sum, agency is also enacted through embodied performance, challenging, and changing gender roles and hierarchies.

As discussed, performances of masculinity and femininity are not only socially constructed but also built with understandings and implications about class, gender, race and religious affiliation (Longhurst, 2001). For this reason, the idea of intersectionality, discussed in the following section, is important to this study.

3.1.3. Intersectionality

As seen, gender is a result of struggles between what Haraway (1988) calls ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’ bodies, the latter being those bodies in a dominant position – ethnically, racially, sexually and socially inconspicuous and seen as ‘normal’. Accordingly, marked bodies are all those labelled as ‘different’ when faced with the dominant. For instance, the very idea of opposite sexes derives from an epistemological issue: in its colonising fetish, the West projects their heteronormative patterns on the natural world and on non-Western peoples, thus distorting the often more complementary, non-dualistic views present in other cultures, traditions and dynamics (Connell, 2002; Johnston, 2015). Gender is part of a system of differences in which multiple and fluid domination structures – not simply male, but also heterosexual, White, Western, Christian – operate at particular points in time and

space. The existence of contextual contrasts in what is marked and unmarked calls for questions about the relationship between gender and other socio-cultural cleavages.

In fact, gender, sexuality, and race frameworks bear inherently political, discursive, and legal failures, further erasing the experiences of people in the intersections. Building on decades of Black feminist theorisations, intersectionality, as initially proposed, examined the different ways in which Black women experience racialised and gendered identity and oppression when compared to Black men or White women (Crenshaw, 1989; Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, 2016). It has subsequently been developed as an approach for examining the intersection and interaction of multiple inequalities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability and age. Often invisible forms of marginalisation are thus imposed on individuals, depending on the variability of identity hierarchies across time and space; consequently, the naturalisation of socio-cultural difference legitimises unequal power relations. Intersectionality, thus presented as a structuring approach for analysing socio-cultural inequality and agency, denounces the erasure of the experience of people due to their position at the crossroads of identity, the power relations to which they are subject, and the production of distinct inequalities at identity intersections. Intersectional agency is the practice of building power despite the marginalisation, by mapping out identities, pointing out exclusions and fractures, and acknowledging experiences.

Nevertheless, an intersectional approach should not be used shallowly (Davis, 2008), but should be ethically employed as a framework, a theory, a paradigm and a political orientation, honouring its origins in Black feminist social movements by aiming at social justice, especially at antiracism (Hopkins, 2017). For geographers, Hopkins (2017) argues, intersectionality should be employed with and as a sensitivity to investigate the entanglements of race and other social cleavages in the production of space. Albeit acknowledging its limitations in the use of race, and its sharper focus on gender and sexuality, this research was designed as to recognise the tensions arising when marginalised identities intersect, despite the perceived non-racialised character of bodies in online environments.

As presented in the Introduction, this research follows contemporary feminist geographies in its aim at building conceptual and empirical connections between feminist and digital geographies, while talking to other fields such as ludic geographies. An intersectional approach affords nuances to this study, especially in its binational comparison, by discussing racial and class cleavages marking the

fundamental differences between Brazil and the UK. In the following section, this chapter enters the understanding of gendered spatial practices in online gaming through a discussion of the nature of spatial practices and their mutual constitution with gendered relations, further bridging physical and digital spaces.

3.2. Gendered Spatial Practices

Time and space are articulated in the construction of reality, where the former unveils the origins of spatial phenomena, while the latter is socially produced and productive (Lefèbvre, 1991). Geographical space is thus a relational ensemble of the technosphere (i.e. objects and tools) and the psychosphere (i.e. actions and emotions), a multidimensional intersection of social affairs, experiences, conceptions, and significations articulated across time (Santos, 1999). Consequently, there is no *a priori* space, and no social action is a-spatial – to produce is to produce space (Merrifield, 2002).

In being a product rather than a static, given category, space is defined by its use. Place, territory, scale – all terms evoke ‘a spatial practice that they express and constitute’ (Lefèbvre, 1991, p.16). Social performances form a set of practices creating structures and resources which, throughout time, produce spaces, which produce more practices. Spatial practices are thus cyclic and complex production and reproduction of geographical categories.

Identity arouses internal and external relations in the production of space; hence, space reflects the social arenas behind its creation. The realisation of social processes in geographical objects generates forms containing fractions of the social, disposed and organised in a territory (Santos, 2008a). The social movement through history changes the meanings of each form, altering their contents, changing the social tissue. Consequently, geographical space is both producer and product of social processes.

Although any disjuncture of geographical space (e.g. physical, social, cultural) is arbitrary and artificial, there are some aspects of social life and experience which manifest more strongly in certain forms (Maddrell, 2016). In their difference, these practices also craft different dimensions of space which, although not referring to separate spaces, are parts of articulated processes of spatial production – lived, imagined and perceived spaces (Lefèbvre, 1991). Material spatial practices relate to the lived experience and aim at ensuring social production and reproduction, where everyday practices are defined by and executed through the collective relationship

between a social group and the space it co-creates. Concurrently, perceived spaces relate to projections, representations of space by and through imposed orders (e.g. patriarchy, capitalism), conceiving a dominant space bound to knowledge, codes, and signs. Representational space is lived through imaginations and emotions, a dimension encompassing the symbolic, expressing meaning and signification while reinventing and re-signifying the practices.

All spatial formations are social productions derived from the articulation of the experienced (material spatial practices), the perceived (representations of space) and the lived (representational spaces). One dimension affects and inflects another, concurrently producing a third material dimension (Lefèbvre, 1991; Harvey, 2010). Ultimately, the physical substrate, including one's body, is a materialisation of the practices (Santos, 1999; McDowell, 2013).

Spatial practices have interdependent aspects, contingent on specificities of social production and reproduction. Expressed by actions, understandings and feelings, spatial production and reproduction is aroused by friction, modes of production, and systems of organisation and power, in a complex and interdependent system (Harvey, 2010). In this system, Lefèbvre's triadic spaces intersect the social relations governing the context where they are enacted, forming nodes in a matrix (Table 2).

Spatial practices are central to the understanding of how the Internet is produced since space interpenetrates social life and technological production. Geographical forms are not always physical objects organised in a territory, but they always express themselves territorially (Santos, 2008a). Thus, spatial practices produce geographical objects that often re-signify materiality – including online gaming spaces and social arenas.

For Maddrell, 'physical', 'virtual' and 'embodied-psychological' spaces are dynamic and permeable, outlined by porous and overlapping boundaries (2016, p.181) shifting according to the socio-spatial practices enacted by the power relations at play in each category (McDowell, 2013). Physical spaces are material in form, and range in scale (e.g. community, household, body; local, regional, international, global).

	<i>Accessibility and distanciation</i>	<i>Appropriation and use of space</i>	<i>Domination and control of space</i>	<i>Production of space</i>
Material spatial practices (experience)	Flows of goods, money, people, labour-power, information, etc.; transport and communications systems; market and urban hierarchies; agglomeration	Land uses and built environments; social spaces and other 'turf' designations; social networks of communication and mutual aid	Private property in land; state and administrative divisions of space; exclusive communities and neighbourhoods; exclusionary zoning and other forms of social control (policing and surveillance)	Production of physical infrastructures (transport and communications; built environments; land clearance, etc.); territorial organisation of social infrastructures (formal and informal)
Representations of space (perception)	Social psychological and physical measures of distance; map-making; theories of the 'friction of distance' (principle of least effort, social physics, range of a good, central place and other forms of location theory)	Personal space; mental maps of occupied space; spatial hierarchies; symbolic representation of spaces; spatial 'discourses'	Forbidden spaces; 'territorial imperatives'; community; regional culture; nationalism; geopolitics; hierarchies	New systems of mapping, visual representation, communication, etc.; new artistic and architectural 'discourses'; semiotics
Spaces of representation (imagination)	Attraction/repulsion; distance/desire; access/denial; transcendence; 'medium is the message'	Familiarity; hearth and home; open places; places of popular spectacle (streets, squares, markets); iconography and graffiti; advertising	Unfamiliarity; spaces of fear; property and possession; monumentality and constructed spaces of ritual; symbolic barriers and symbolic capital; construction of 'tradition'; spaces of repression	Utopian plans; imaginary landscapes; science fiction ontologies and space; artists' sketches; mythologies of space and place; poetics of space; spaces of desire

Table 2: Harvey (1989, p. 220-221). A 'grid' of spatial practices (reproduction).

Embodied-psychological spaces refer to emotional responses which may translate into somatic responses, thus inflecting one's body and one's experience and sense of place (e.g. places perceived as dangerous and eerie, or welcoming and warm). Finally, what Maddrell (2016) calls virtual spaces encompasses all immaterial 'spaces of interaction, practice and performance' (p. 178), including digital, technological spaces such as online gaming arenas, as well as emotional spaces, and incorporeal, supernatural spaces associated with spiritual practices (e.g. heaven). All these spaces change in importance depending on the time, and on the meaning ascribed to them – this meaning inflected by culture and symbols, social codes, political disputes, and personal states and trajectories. This is illustrated in Figure 44, where these spaces are depicted as bound by permeable, porous membranes coiling and changing shape while overlapping and intersecting each other. Physical spaces thus find extensions in the digital and the embodied-psychological, as well as the other two are rooted in them, and extend back and forth into one another.

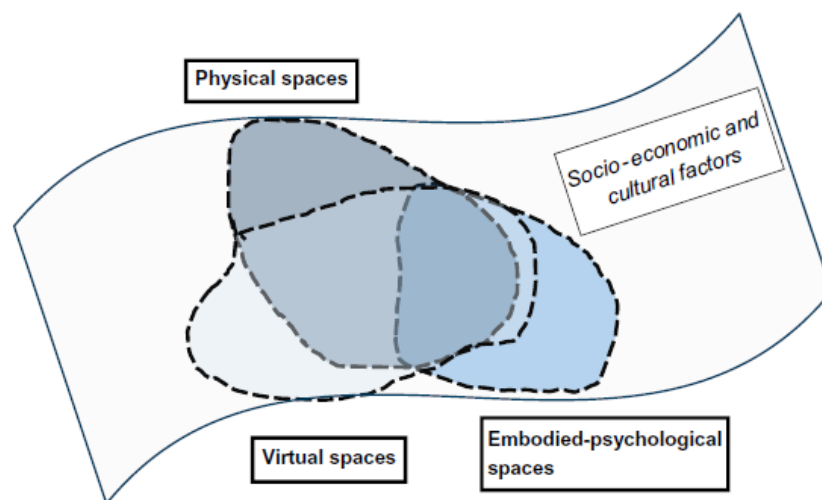


Figure 43: Overlapping physical, embodied-psychological, and virtual spaces, experienced through the lens of socio-economic and cultural factors. Reproduction. (Maddrell, 2016, p.181).

Spatial practices are a useful geographical framework for analysing power relations of gender, class, race, age and other socio-cultural cleavages (Knox and Pinch, 2014). Space and gender are relational and co-constituted, for gendered power invests space with practices, experiences and meanings which bounce back and shape society. Hence, social, and spatial organisation are gender issues. Relative expressions of male-female dominance and subordination are localised and change with place; consequently, they shape places through the creation of differentiated social spaces for

men, women, and non-binary people. Gender relations are, then, localised and localising. As illustrated by the striking statistics of gender inequality discussed in Chapter Two, the production of space is based on and reinforces gendered erasure and marginalisation.

For instance, gendered dynamics of labour and production in the West ensue a gendered accumulation of wealth. Underscored by the classic sex/gender system (Rubin, 1975), the gendered division of labour also divides production between the spheres of waged work and unwaged home, consistently identified as men's and women's realms, respectively. As seen, gendered inequality transcends the physical, being expressed in widespread unequal gender orders, and social structures of class, race and gender (Connell, 2002). Gender inequality thus alludes to the not-always visible but strikingly unequal access to, and control of resources, and unequal decision-making in social arenas.

More than measuring the depth of gendered gaps or proposing the wider inclusion of women, the examination of intersectional gender relations and their consequences over social and spatial practices seeks to promote a deeper view of reality: gender relations are spatial practices. Therefore, gender is one of the transforming forces of space (WGSG, 1984), fundamental for uncovering geographical patterns and relationships (Silva, 1998).

3.2.1. Power and Agency

In her benchmark work on feminist geographies, McDowell (2013, p.4, added emphasis) beautifully summarises spatial practices:

'(...) places are contested, fluid and uncertain. It is socio-spatial practices that define places, and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion (...) places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience'.

Power structures and relations are central to spatial configurations. Aspects like appropriation and use, domination and control, and production of space (Harvey, 2010 - see Table 2), which often gain physical forms, are only injected into spatial practices by virtue of power. Spatial configurations invested with meaning are also invested with power, often manifest in intangible forms. Over time, places are

differentiated according to technical, informational, and communicational contents within the physical forms. Consequently, if hegemonic actors have knowledge about simultaneous events and phenomena around the globe, the mastery of techniques gives them the power to choose the best places and roles to play. Without this competitive advantage, other actors get residual, secondary roles and places. Knowledge and technical hegemony find their pinnacle in globalisation, and so do the spatial practices of differentiation and selectivity; the results are experienced in all scales (Santos, 1999).

When expanding on Lefèbvre's spatial triad, Harvey (2010) states that spatial practices are imbued with certain significates depending on the axis of power cutting across them through social relations. Still, when focusing on capitalist relations, Harvey neglects gendered relations (hence dismissing feminist thinking and theorisation) in his discussion of the production of space (Massey, 2012). As discussed, gendering produces socio-spatial organisations (e.g. gendered division of labour); bodily gendering is individually displayed, but the collective display of gendering is spatially distributed and organised. Moreover, individual, and collective perceptions change with their position in the socio-cultural-spatial intersection. Hence, all spatial practices are gendered (Deutsche, 1991; Massey, 1991).

Withal, power relations are acts of domination and resistance generating sets of rules which delineate multiple (and movable) socio-spatial boundaries. These boundaries define overlapping and intersecting places, marked by the intersecting socio-spatial relations in their making (McDowell, 2013). Gendered power relations hence construe gendered boundaries which establish whose bodies belong and whose do not, and where. Although finer power relations are the foundation of gender, generating fluid, shifting spaces, this fluidity does not cancel the structuring power of rigid institutions extensively defining rules and boundaries (i.e. family). Hegemonic discourses are enforced upon bodies, individually and collectively, through a range of devices. Therefore, the construction of gendered spaces is the result of a permanent struggle between domination and resistance throughout all geographical scales. Gendered power relations are a geographical issue because the production of gendered bodies adheres to discourses that are hegemonic in a given time and space; any shift in these discourses deeply impacts the production of space.

Although fluid, relational and contingent, the structuring power of place-bound institutions still fixes their boundary-defining rules. Though authority, coercion and

domination are power modalities often reflecting strength and inscrutability, power is rarely absolute, for resistance is always present as a counterpoint to the establishment. As illustrated by the interchangeable nature of spatial practices, production of space is also contestation and power struggle since different groups (including those populations historically marginalised by hegemonic views of gender normality) are permanently questioning and challenging spatial boundaries.

In looking at dynamics of inclusion and inclusion, this study seeks to understand the power struggles within the social arenas of online gaming, practices and devices of domination and control, appropriation, and resistance. Power is central to this research project for it frames gendered relations as structuring and producing of online environments, which are coloured by the constant negotiation of identities.

3.2.2. Body, Identity and Meaning

Lefèbvre states that 'social space contains and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to social relations of reproduction (...) and the relations of production' (1991, p.32), discriminating co-constitutive relations in order to localise them. Hence, othering is an important element of placemaking, for its inherent dualism gives meaning to processes, places, and people. Nevertheless, although social roles may seem clearly defined and fixed, these social and spatial discriminations are not always simply dual, since otherness and sameness both come from diverse power positions and relations (Vacchelli, 2014). Since gendered perceptions of place are attached to geographical scales, traditional divides are not as neat and hierarchical as they seem (Sharp, 2007). Dualisms such as public/private are frequently gendered – the negative, weak and undesirable often positioned as feminine, as the gendered appropriateness of behaviour and values sum with material practices to produce and interpret space (WGSG, 1997). For instance, the dichotomous separation of public/private and work/home has been constantly challenged by the everyday practices of women who work at/from home, and of women who have always done waged work (e.g. Black, Latina, immigrant, rural).

In section 3.1.1, the body was presented as a product of disciplinary practices established by and enforced through ideological apparatuses. Both gender symbolism and body-conforming practices are localised, and change in time and space; however, the body is itself an arena where social things, often based on bodily structures and processes related to human reproduction – i.e. gendering – happen. The body is a place, the physical site of gender. If gender is produced by the imitative performances

expressed in the body, ‘performances themselves constitute spaces and places in ways which are at once material and cultural’ (Gregson *et al.*, 1997, p.196). The policing and regulation of bodies based on their sexed characteristics generate a space of gendered performance, as male and female bodies are supposed to carry signs of their gendering, thus gendering the very space they occupy (McDowell, 2013). Gendered bodies navigate space differently, as their shapes and functions may represent placement or displacement – there are places for men, places for women, and different places (or no places at all) for non-conforming bodies. Spaces are sexed by the relationship between bodies (McDowell, 2013); for that reason, the body is crucial to ‘a richer analysis of time- and place-specific’ power relations (Craddock, 1999).

The movement of the body through space synchronises discourse and materiality, turning bodies which play, commute, copulate, give birth, migrate, mourn, and die into corporeal spaces. Equally, places are shaped by bodily movements and dynamics, while socio-spatial practices shift individual and collective bodily boundaries (Longhurst, 2001).

Bodies are sites for intersectional structural, political and representational experiences (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). Encounters of gender, race and sexuality, and the inclusion of the body as scale and locale of geographical inquiry poses a critique to the false binaries underpinning the discipline, being crucial to the restoration of erased practices and experiences through the examination of finer scales of spatial practice. Moreover, this restoration helps orientate the elaboration and implementation of effective public policies based on localised specificities (Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2015; Porter and Oliver, 2016). Indeed, specificity is experienced and structured in space, and the focus on particularities allows for the examination of how a certain population experiences oppression in places, as well as how changes in place and spatial practices affect people’s social and spatial position.

Intersectional identity ‘affects people’s use of space and the meanings they attach to space’ (Longhurst, 2002, p.548). Likewise, non-conforming bodies are ‘sites of oppression and sites of resistance’ (McDowell, 2013, p.61) – their performances may act as strategies of submission and conformity, and/or as strategies of disobedience and opposition. However, although the body and the embodied-performative encompass multiple, shifting and overlapping identity categories and markers, this strategy may create the illusion of a universal, unmarked body, thus occluding

specificities in the production and experience of space (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014).

Indeed, the hybrid subjectivities of people inscribe their non-conforming bodies and identities to places where they are unwelcome, or where their cultural backgrounds clash with local standards while changing the face of these places. This is the case of displaced people, such as forced migrants (i.e. refugees). This unevenly ‘embodied contextual, multiscale and relational’ (Johnston, 2017, p.4) negotiation between placement and displacement moves across emotional realms and global geopolitical arenas, revealing multiple forms of precariousness through the spatialisation of violence, vulnerability and insecurity. Likewise, non-conforming, LGBTQI+ spaces are hence marginal due to the socio-spatial contradictions reproduced in their midst. Consequently, the focus on trans* embodied experiences and lived materialities has the power to reveal unknown ‘structural inequalities, and resistances, produced and differentiated across spaces and places’ (Johnston, 2015, p.6), as well as place-bound, socio-cultural contradictions in identity and space production (e.g. those present in the uniquely Latin-American *travesti* identity, as opposed to the overarching trans* category – see Williams, 2014; Silva and Ornat, 2015; Di Pietro, 2016).

Concurrently, as bodies are policed into fitting standards dictated by heteronormativity, places are also shaped by these assumptions. In fact, both the built environment and social norms ‘affect and reflect dominant assumptions about social relations’ (McDowell, 2013, p.61), reinforcing underlying power relations and the expected gendering of places. For instance, the family house may be seen as a dwelling, a place of acceptance, but it often becomes a site of profound distress and displacement for non-heterosexual people (Domosh and Seager, 2001; McDowell, 2013). In this sense, political activism, and queering practices (e.g. *camp*) subvert normative assumptions and change spatial configuration, temporarily or permanently. Indeed, spatial practices of inclusion and exclusion are the basis for the development of political identities (Wright, 2010).

Through the examination of alternative spatial practices of Black and Latinx LGBTQI+ in Detroit (USA), Bailey (2014) evidences the multiple layers of segregation at play in one community. Economic inequality and racism exclude Black LGBTQI+ people from mainstream gay clubs, whereas LGBTQphobia marginalises the same people within Black/Latinx communities. These exclusionary practices have severe consequences, noticeable in urban space through residential segregation and homelessness. Likewise,

the discussion about racialised exclusion in *travesti* sex workplaces in Salvador (Brazil) reveals how a place widely known for sexual liberty severely marginalises non-conforming bodies through an intermeshing of economic inequality, racism and heterosexism, producing complicated spaces of exclusion (Williams, 2014).

When localised in places of hegemony, religious traditions often enforce conforming cultural and social practices; in places of contrasting (or secularised) traditions, religious affiliation can be a source of marginalisation and distress. Moreover, individual, and collective experiences, feelings, and perceptions of women and LGBTQI+ people regarding their or others' religious values and practices are often related to specific locations. One example is Buang's personal experience of negotiating the use of the veil as a Muslim woman living in a secular country: 'I only managed to cover my head for two weeks because the situation in Singapore (...) at that time was such that I often found myself to be the only Muslim girl (...) I could not bear the feeling of being seen as so different' (2004, p.143).

Although these and other works focus on negative aspects of difference due to the dominance and subjugation experienced between power axes, they all refuse to position women, Black, LGBTQI+ people as victims of oppression; in fact, their marginalised practices are put at the centre of an active movement of resistance. Institutional and discursive power are constantly fought and contested by individuals or organised political movements, through the refusal of everyday roles and activities, individual and collective disruption of fashion standards, use of alternative, challenging languages, and many other expedients whose success depends on the current socio-political conditions (Connell, 2002). Meanings, like discourses, are shifting. While gendered practices and objects often act as gender signifiers, the political struggle for gender equality is pervaded by symbolic acts disruptive of the gender regimes where they are enacted, subverting or trampling on traditional signifiers.

When socio-cultural categories are seen as variable, instead of fixed identities, people are perceived to live their religion, gender, sexuality, and race as agents; subjectivity turns identities into spaces to be navigated in an autonomous way. Hence the importance of the self-determination of the *travesti* people in Brazil and Latin America as an opposition to the perceived foreign and unwanted transgender label (Williams, 2014); equally, the voluntary use of the veil by Muslim women challenges their stereotypical representation as victims of misogyny, placing them as agents of

their faith. Accordingly, the creation and maintenance of intersectionally-segregated communities can defy multiple marginalisation and spatial exclusion while creating safe environments for people vulnerable to multiple oppression axes (Bailey, 2014).

This study's exploration of gendered spatial practices in online gaming uses identity to understand what it means to be a gamer in both compared countries, and how gamers enact gendered relations in their social arenas (see section 3.3.3). Gendered identities are thus fundamental for the understanding of the meaning of practices employed by gamers to produce spaces across the various spheres of the case studies.

3.2.3. Emotions

Places are relational and relative, constructed, and experienced, represented and symbolically used through the reciprocal interactions between experience, perception, and imagination. The definition of a place is subjective, depending on the meaning and purpose given by the community, which arises only through contrast. Spatial practices shape meanings, senses and images of space, expressing micropolitical and cultural dimensions of social life; the former will then condition future practices, consequently transforming meanings, senses and images (Góes and Sposito, 2016). The imperative of subjectivity (Probyn, 2003) is expressed by embodied lived experiences built-in and across time, challenging the familiarity of practices and beings, and crumpling current understandings of space and place (Nash, 2010). Subjectivities are thus responsible for shaping power relations and creating the tensions which shift the nature of spatial practices.

The cultural significance of place comes from a certain sense of belonging, as well as from the 'personal and collective symbolic meanings' contained there (Paiva, 2015, p.146). Emotion and affect often create and change the sense of place: grief, fear, amusement, pleasure are powerful forces that shape space and (re)produce the social through power relations, being brought about by embodied practices (Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2012; Urry, 2012).

Emotional life is mutually constitutive of space and place, a process expressed through language and discourse (Whatmore, 2006; Panelli, 2010; Colls, 2012). Emotional experiences are responsible for symbolic and material constructs in social space; likewise, emotions produce and are produced by gender performances. The geographies of emotions are privileged places of personal/political, private/public interconnection, highlighted by the centrality of people's accounts of life. Thus,

emotions are the currency with which people negotiate their place in society (Tuan, 1990; Sharp, 2009).

Individual and collective gendered emotional commitments produce positive (e.g. identification, compassion), negative (e.g. prejudice – LGBTphobia, misogyny) or ambivalent emotional responses towards gendered performances. Similarly, emotional attachments are deeply gendered in Western society, as the sexual and emotional connections at the core of contemporary romantic relationships are defined by gendered relations.

Furthermore, because gendered emotional relations may unconsciously underlie practices of attachment or exclusion (Connell, 2002), gender is often consciously used as a means to generate certain emotions (e.g. kindness or fear), which define socio-cultural boundaries. Depending on the meanings and understandings attached to a body, people have different emotional experiences, being expressed (or not) through different discourses. In that sense, emotions can be used as power devices. For instance, violence is a device of physical and emotional control, employed to coerce, survey and polarise individual and collective agency (Ohl and Duncan, 2012). Fear of violence is markedly gendered (i.e. fear of street harassment, rape and other forms of gendered violence), being a major factor for unequal access and use of urban spaces (Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2015). In this context, fear leads to gendered spatial fragmentation, and violence is the main apparatus for isolating and marginalising women into their designated places (Pain, 2000, 2009; Kern, 2010; Brickell and Maddrell, 2016). As discussed in section 3.1.2, gendered violence is an essential mark of hegemonic masculinity, either as expressed to ascertain one's hierarchical position as a man, or as used to enforce this hierarchy. By removing lesser bodies from space, hegemonic performances and practices erase the difference of non-hegemonic socio-cultural categories.

In this study, emotions are often the most immediate expressions of gendered relations in gaming arenas, as further shown by participants' accounts. As the next chapters will emphasise, emotions are also a fundamental dimension to methodological approach and data interpretation; the encounter of researcher and participant is heavily emotional, and these feelings 'will usually do far more to illuminate the realities of a given issue than could any other data source' (Cloke *et al.*, 2004, p.28). A researcher's position is never neutral (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015a); doing feminist geographies 'involves rethinking your perspective on the world,

being open and honest about feelings and fears, and integrating your own life into the research process' (McDowell, 1988, p.170). As aforementioned, feminism is also a mode of doing geography. Emotions impact upon feminist geographers' approach to the field, research experience (in different ways for different methods) and relationship to participants. Chapters Six and Seven present a discussion of the emotional landscapes of this research, and how the investigator and her project were affected by her choice of topic, methods and case study (Bondi, 2012).

3.2.4. The nature of spatial practices

Spatial practices are not discrete or mutually exclusive. Often conflicting power relations are employed simultaneously within a social arena through complex mechanisms, devices, and motivations. For this reason, power relations, practices and devices interblend and impact each other, and one practice may have different outcomes depending on the actor's role in the spatial dynamics. This chapter draws from empirical works to present some practices that, spread across the matrix (see Table 2), can be involved in union, division, hierarchy, production, dismantling etc. according to the nature of the relations that shape them.

Employing a feminist approach to material spatial practices enables the critical examination of everyday practices such as marriage, homemaking, and family rearing as spatially-bound and space-producing. As banal as they appear, these practices unveil the processes engendering traditional distinctions of private/public, home/street, play/work. The patriarchal and heteronormative representations of space wherein these practices are rooted can act as devices reifying gender norms and engendering spatial exclusion. For instance, spatial differentiation is often generated through violence, whereas violence is often generated by representational differentiation. Gendered violence is an exclusionary act engendering equally exclusionary spaces – a subtractive practice that produces certain kinds of spaces which attend to certain interests (Liggett and Perry, 1995).

Likewise, the systematised use and occupation of the physical by objects, activities, individuals, classes involves the creation of 'territorially determined forms of social solidarity' (Harvey, 1989, p.222). Appropriation is a heavily relational practice, for occupying spaces, allocating/dislocating/reallocating, or invading can simultaneously be forms of resistance or domination, all localised and localising practices of docking/undocking of forms and contents (Santos, 2008a). Material, social, and economic attributes drive area choice, and the consequent creation of new places,

fragmenting the territory. Therefore, fragmentation and reassembly are joint practices of dividing or agglutinating places as a response to socio-cultural-economic dynamics. Spatial appropriation can be one consequence of these practices, for it attaches rules and meanings to the newly created places, (re)defining rhythms and purposes. Alternatively, spatial marginalisation can be identified, on a larger scale, in the abandonment of areas due to changes in economic dynamics (Santos, 1999), or, on a finer scale, in the forsaking of certain social groups, relegated to controlling and unfavourable spaces by means of prohibition or access denial, and (overt or covert) forms of oppression within public and private spaces (Bailey, 2014).

Domination and control of space imply some level of power and hegemony, often expressed, and experienced as discrepancy and inequality. Regarding spatial organisation and production, domination and control presume dictation from a group in legal or extra-legal ways (Harvey, 1989), commanding other practices such as distancing and appropriation. Contrast and conflict result from dynamics where domination precedes production. Practices of concealment, fragmentation, marginalisation, reallocation, and exclusion are intimately connected to domination and distancing. Practices like appropriation hence can be means of resistance and structural change (Bailey, 2014; Ohl and Duncan, 2012), but can also be devices of backlash and counter-resistance (Waitt, Jessop and Gorman-Murray, 2011); furthermore, spatial practices enable the production of spaces opposed to domination or resistance.

As shown, the mutual constitution of spaces and practices is a complex network of power differentials. Within the same territory, capital exerts pressure over the social tissue (Harvey, 1989; Santos, 1999); meanwhile, gender roles and relations are reinforced through practices of domination and control, under direct fire from other, complicating axes of difference. The socio-spatial struggle of practices and power relations provoke shifts across all levels of the triadic construction (Vacchelli, 2014), and this strain generates a nurturing medium that fosters social resistance. Again, although the relationship between establishment and resistance is often portrayed as oppositional, spatial practices are not monolithic or binary; acts of agency, as well as hegemonic practices, are manifold and comprehend various materialities and experiences that both subvert and apprehend hegemonic perceptions and imaginaries (Ehrkamp, 2013; Bailey, 2014; Joniak-Lüthi, 2015; Nguyen, 2016). In contemporary examples, the SlutWalk (which reclaims a sexist slur) and the Women's March (with the motto 'pussy grabs back' and the characteristic pink 'pussy hats') demonstrate how

feminist activist movements appropriate otherwise offensive discourses and exclusionary practices, transforming them into (often strategically gender-segregated) spaces of political contestation and resistance to marginalising practices and structures (Moss and Maddrell, 2017).

Nevertheless, agency and resistance are not always synonymous; the exercise of power is often enacted through the avoidance of frontal clashes, utilizing other practices and devices to negotiate participation. For instance, the concealment and segregation of women can be used as control tools by hegemonic groups (and it is often portrayed as marginalising), or as a safety asset by women who comply to the rules as a form of negotiation (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). Once more, marginalisation is a relational practice, whose virtues or vices are deeply positional – e.g. the use of the veil by Muslim women is often interpreted as a domination device; however, it is also a form of negotiation and resistance for those bodies, as it is for the culture where they are embedded (Scott, 2010). Finally, resistance often creates a demand for the multiplication of safe and emancipatory spaces (Bailey, 2014); resistance is however resisted to – methods and strategies of resistance are often repelled, and certain practices tend to face consistent backlash.

Spatial practices constitute historically different imaginaries of ethnicity and nationhood, defined through constant shifts in power differentials, perceptions of space and boundary fluctuations. For instance, mechanisms of ethnic solidarity and national identity are formed and maintained by spatial practices co-constitutive with spatial relationships exercised not simply due to reinforced identities, but also as a form of contrast. Boundaries (material or not) between ethnicities and nations reinforce a sense of identity by simultaneously enhancing a sense of belonging and of difference, face to another (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). Likewise, an outcast's arrival brings the Other's body to the spotlight, transgressing the established order and often concealing existing spatial layers and structures. Consequently, everlasting practices may shift to become practices of resistance to this invasion – again, the practice is as relational and contingent as the perception of its outcomes. Nationhood and ethnicity are interesting examples of how the co-constitution of spaces and their social arenas (through spatial practice) is contingent and relational; hence any change in imagined and perceived spaces may evoke resistance, often expressed in the material. However, resistance also plays when certain power differentials work to systematically exclude or conceal those bodies not contemplated by the underlying representational spaces. Formation and strengthening of social networks is thus a common strategy for

individual and collective endurance against marginalising structures (Bailey, 2014) and/or threatening socio-spatial shifts (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015), where marginality can be used to create socio-cultural spaces often indispensable for a community's survival (Nguyen, 2016).

In material settings, spatial segregation can be verified through physical distance; however, segregation also derives from – and engenders – an unequal distribution of the knowledge necessary to tackle underlying power imbalances (Vacchelli, 2014). These imbalances, grounded in stratified representations of gender and space, are often institutionalised; for that reason, and to ensure the necessary changes, some practices demand others to be suppressed or extinguished, which means conflict. Exclusionary practices can then be employed as agency devices aiming at spatial appropriation; for instance, separatism is a device expressed through acts such as alteration and disruption of the body and material objects in space to create counter-cultural places (Vacchelli, 2014). Gender- or sexual orientation-exclusive groups are heterotopias wherein difference is highlighted by a separatist device aiming at conceiving a place for contestation (Foucault, 1984; Vacchelli, 2014). Yet, these are only spaces of disturbance and contestation in that they 'do not exist in pure form and can only function in relation to each other, in a way that clashes and creates the 'spatiotemporal disturbances' (Vacchelli, 2014, p.8). Nevertheless, this practice is also twofold and relational – depending on where the subject is located, it can either be interpreted as spatial segregation or as a mobilised act of agency against it. For instance, sexual segregation practices present in some societies are commonly portrayed as abhorrent when compared to gendered spatial practices enacted in others; although lived and understood as acts of agency by their endorsers, those practices are often used as subterfuges for acts of colonialism and imperialism (Scott, 2010). In sum, the same practice can be employed with different outcomes, depending on how formal standards and rules of institutional power entangle with informal or implicit social codes (Bailey, 2014); hence, all research addressing spatial practices must focus on underlying notions operating among social arenas. When the structures are underlined by unequitable spatial representations, tensions abide while power differentials shift and clash.

As discussed earlier in this section, places are shaped by practices underlined by the sense and experience of heritage, identity, and commitment, insufflating meaning to spaces. Thus, personal and collective movements and trajectories through time and space are spatial practices (Paiva, 2015, p.147). Sense of place comes from time- and

location-bound personal and collective perceptions; the perception of space by a group creates emotional landscapes capable of altering individual and collective experiences of place. Emotional issues such as the fear of crime significantly affect communities' sense of identity, creating a feeling of socio-spatial exclusion (Pain, 2000); when a space is understood or portrayed as predominantly masculine or masculinist, fear of violence underlies women's choices and trajectories (Ehrkamp, 2013). Hence, sense of place affects spatial movements, and effectively, placemaking practices (Paiva, 2015).

The socio-cultural spaces generated by spatial practices are rarely tied to specific locations in the world but shift with changes in the power differentials acting on the territory (Nguyen, 2016). As discussed earlier in this chapter, some aspects of place are more prevalent in certain spatial dimensions and, for each of these dimensions, power relations exert distinct pressure when drawing the shifting and protean socio-spatial boundaries between them. Maddrell (2016) sees virtual spaces as one of these dimensions, encompassing diverse non-material arenas ranging from online platforms, to experience-, interest- or belief-based rather than place-based communities, and the imagined spaces of belief, anchored in material objects and structures, and dynamic in relation to bodies-minds. Concurrently, contemporary digital geographies expand on that notion – the digital comprises these and more. In the following section, this chapter presents the notion of digital spatialities, walking through digital geographies' surge and development, and presenting the compelling questions and critiques to the development, access and use of digital technologies. The chapter ends with an overview of the spatiality of online games, and the positioning of this research within the current inquiries.

3.3. Digital Spatiality(ies)

As this chapter has discussed, geographical space is the locale, container and product of power relations (Harvey, 1989), where generative struggles take place over all scales, including the gendered body. As a historical outcome of human behaviour, space is simultaneously crafted by the meaning invested in spatial practices, across a multitude of co-constitutive times and dimensions. Technology – and especially here, the Internet – has challenged places and the very idea of place. This dynamism of spatial practices, allied to the ontological and epistemological revolutions brought by digital technologies, highlights that every place is a hybrid: physical, virtual, and emotional spaces are permanently overlapping and porous, intermeshing over time (Maddrell, 2016).

Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski (2016) summarise the digital as an assemblage of material technologies, socio-techno-cultural productions and orderings of everyday life, the logics structuring these practices and their effects, and the discourses underlying the creation and dissemination of these technologies. The experience of digital places is ultimately punctured by socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and gendered relations (Maddrell, 2012). Offline social practices are mimicked and reproduced online; likewise, contextual, materially-embedded socio-cultural discourses – be they official (stated by the law and/or formal cultural practices) or vernacular – normalise and regulate spatial practices of life online.

The term ‘virtual’ was first employed to describe environments and practices based on cyberspace, bringing heated philosophical discussions on the duality between virtual and real. In a key reflection about online cultures, Lévy (2003) questions the use of the term ‘real’ as opposed to ‘virtual’, presenting the idea of the ‘actual’ as an alternative contrast to the virtual, since virtuality presupposes non-realisation, a certain or total level of obscurity, falsehood, inexistence. However, the logic of something that is still to become, or that lacks materiality seems increasingly unfit as online time and space dynamics become more complex (Kinsley, 2014). Accordingly, the ‘actual’ does not seem to be an alternative, opposite state to the virtual, as cultural dynamics reinforce the actuality of the so-called ‘virtual’ – in fact, as further discussed, presence and embodiment are crucial to the understanding of how ‘virtual’ spaces come into being and are experienced. Alternatively, ‘digital’ has been employed as a broader term for computer-mediated practices and technologies; yet, the term’s broadness seems to embrace all digital technologies, even those not connected to the Internet. Instead, this thesis proposes the use of the term ‘online’ when referring to practices, experiences, technologies, and places based on cyberspace, within and connected to the web.

Since their inception, web-based environments have received metaphorically geographical names (e.g. lobby, room, home, site), presenting cyberspace as a kind of simulacrum (Paiva, 2015). However, although computers have not always been accessible for data processing, their very existence changed methods and questions in geographical inquiry; through culture, cyberspace passed from simulacrum to ‘the conceptual space within ICTs³³’ (Dodge and Kitchin, 2001). The impact of computation networks on space and place can be illustrated by the cycle constituted by

³³ Information and Communication Technologies.

the feedback motion between computation, communication and place/space: as communication networks became a fundamental part of computation, a new space was created – cyberspace; that new space deeply impacted ‘actual places’, changing structures in order to provide more connectivity; changes in places led to the improvement of the technical infrastructure and consequent increase on communication networks, restarting the cycle (Batty, 1997). Consequently, virtual geographies were focused on the mutually constitutive nature of interrelated nodal and netted spaces – computer or c-space, cyberplaces and cyberspace – the latter described as ‘the new geographical spaces within the ether’ (Batty, 1997, p.341). Informed by Castell’s (2000) ideas of ‘real virtuality’, Batty’s ideas reflected the state of ICTs at the time, when computation and Internet were separated and starting a still incipient convergence.

Geographical space is both stage and play, medium and outcome, a surface marked by the unequal accumulation of times (Santos, 2002; Graham, 2010); accordingly, a place is important due to its singularity or conformity in relation to other places. Online places intersect with physical and embodied-psychological spaces, overlapping their dynamic, permeable borders, and punctured by personal and collective experiences (Maddrell, 2016). Some aspects of spatial experience, perception and imagination are manifest only in material places, others only in non-physical (although materially-grounded), exclusively online locations. Thus, online places are singular for their absolute location on the web, but also due to their interchangeable, overlapping and mutually-constitutive relationship to material places. Online places are unique because they replicate social, economic, political, and cultural processes from material places, while simultaneously creating their own, unparalleled processes and practices. Far from being opposite, online, and physical spaces are extensions of each other, as the transposition of practices between one another is marked by the adaptation of forms and bodies, from material to digital versions. Online places carry significance and spatial dimensions similar to their physical correspondents (e.g. online retailers, chat rooms, memorialisation sites), which can be verified by the use of language as a bridge between physical and digital spaces (Maddrell, 2012).

Although earlier works on virtual geographies have pointed to the existence of an immaterial, disembodied space in the ether (Batty, 1997), contemporary digital geographers have advocated for the suppression of binary distinctions such as real/virtual, physical/digital. Since the contrast between physical and virtual is challenged by ideas such as ubiquitous computing, geographers have replaced duality

with entwinement and assemblage (Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski, 2016). Moreover, technics allows geographers to look at supposedly immaterial components of the digital as inherently material (Kinsley, 2014); notwithstanding the usefulness of this shift, a focus on the technicalities of the digital may render digital geographies overly material. Although related, the several spheres of the digital are rooted in different places, being assembled, disassembled, and reassembled in different ways, entwined, and experienced differently across time and space. They may not be inherently distinct but are spatially distinct in how we use and experience – and thus shape – them. For instance, online communities are not dichotomous – communication may be fluid, but localised individual and collective characteristics change the scope and scale of these interactions (Zook, 2006). The intertwined spheres of human activity compose hybrid spaces, where materialities and immaterialities cannot be understood without one another.

Power relations enacted in and through online spaces thus challenge old statements about the end of space, space-time compression and spacelessness of the digital (Virilio, 1991). Moreover, ample access to digital ICTs is shown to lead to higher individual involvement in communities and, therefore, a more accentuated sense of attachment to places, renewing the concept of territoriality (Dodge, 2001; Breindl, 2010; Mesch and Talmud, 2010; Drissel, 2011). The understanding of power relations and their impact upon online places is fundamental to reveal the contradictions of technology development and consumption, bound to issues of socio-cultural difference and consequent multiscale struggles.

Accordingly, the forces operating within and across spaces touched by ICTs can be deduced and mapped with traditional geographical methods which aid the assessment of the information society and its digital spatialities (Dodge and Kitchin, 2001). For instance, user-generated data create online representations of places (i.e cyberscapes) revealing inconspicuous layers at certain locations (Zook, Graham and Shelton, 2011; Craglia et al., 2012; Das, van Elzakker and Kraak, 2012; Graham, Stephens and Hale, 2013; Shelton et al., 2014). Geotagging unravels complex information about conflicts and access to technology (or lack thereof). Power relations are at the core of how the digital is shaped, perceived, used, and represented.

As shown, geographers have long debated the spatial character of digitally mediated practices, and about which – and how – online environments could be considered places. In fact, theorising the digital is a contested work for geographers that either

advocate for a stronger commitment to the materialities of the digital (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011; Kinsley, 2014; Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski, 2016), or understand spatiality as pertaining to online environments and related social arenas. These (often limiting) views derive from a binary way of thinking space and place. While the idea of a superimposing, ethereal cyberspace has recently been abandoned by geographers, online environments maintain placemaking aspects (Paiva, 2015).

Computer and video games exemplify how the complexities of online platforms, social networks and data processing technologies (Batty, 1997) are assembled and experienced through a digitally mediated and inflected, ludic interaction between social arenas. Online games produce physical and digital spaces which unfold in several overlapping spheres, thus producing, in their arenas, the epitomic archetype of online spaces. Next, the concept of online gaming is presented in relation to digital geographies, situating issues of embodiment and power in shaping social spaces.

3.3.1. A place for computer and video games (CVGs)

Computer and video games (CVGs) are created and operated within an electronic platform (i.e. hardware and software) and based on human interaction interfaces that generate 2D or 3D visual feedbacks on a television or computer screen. Electronic games can be interchangeably classified according to the platform (e.g. console, PC, mobile, arcade, browser), the genre and subgenres (e.g. Role-Playing and its subgenres Sandbox, Tactical and Action RPG) or the specific design objective/public (i.e. casual, serious, and educational). When a CVG, regardless of its classification, is either partially or primarily played through the Internet, it is considered an online game.

Virtual World (VW), Synthetic World or Metaverse are other names for computer-based and computer-rendered simulated environments, comprising the same human interactions – political, financial/economic, social and cultural – of material places (Castronova, 2005). Economic patterns and assets from material places are replicated online, creating solid market structures (Barnes, 2007; Lehdonvirta, 2008; Castronova et al., 2009); likewise, VWs are gathering places in which human practices operate, each one with different sorts of social, cultural and symbolic capital, evidencing contrasts between communities according to their behaviour and status in the physical world, and the existence of particular law systems often conflicting with those operating in material worlds (Lastowka and Hunter, 2004; Whang and Chang, 2004; Barret, 2009; Hjorth, 2011). In VWs, business and entrepreneurship interlace with social and political spheres, and practices like publicity, trading and gold farming

are becoming increasingly relevant in the context of contemporary digital production networks (Li, Papagiannidis and Bourlakis, 2010; Graham, 2014).

These worlds are modelled according to characteristics of material or fantastical places, presenting complex landscapes populated by users who control, and interact with, graphical representations of themselves. Although overlapping in many points, VWs are not the same as online communities; equally, VWs are not always considered games (e.g. SecondLife), although the technology behind the former is successfully applied to massively multiplayer online games (MMOs); for distinction, the term 'social world' can be used for non-gaming VWs, as opposed to gamified virtual worlds (Bartle, 2015). Nevertheless, one common point between social and gamified VWs is embodiment, visually and socially expressed by avatars (Taylor, 2002).

As an extension of the body and a representation of embodied identities, avatars employ a range of communication forms, including text, voice, and motion senses (Bartle, 2004) to afford contact and interaction between the player and the 3D environment where she dwells, compounding senses of presence and place. Although meant to be a digital representation of the player, avatars tend to be constructed to fulfil certain needs, i.e. gaming strategies and system structures, usually radically differing from the player's self in its physical and psychological construction (McCreery et al., 2012). Nevertheless, avatars' outward aspects tend to replicate, to some extent, users' physical sex, and impact upon players' in-game behaviour and perception of and by other players (Lehdonvirta et al., 2012; Li et al., 2018).

MMOs lie in the intersection between online gaming, social network sites (SNSs) and VWs. These cooperative and competitive large-scale online games gather staggering numbers of players simultaneously in the same dedicated virtual world, accessible via download or purchase (Castronova *et al.*, 2009; Hjorth, 2011). MMO is an umbrella genre with many subgenres, the most popular being the Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) and the Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBAs). Sociological research frameworks for MMOs were recently discussed (Rimington, Weal and Leonard, 2016), while ethnographic studies look at participants' subjectivities, revealing online interactions embedded in material places (Taylor, 2008; Fields and Kafai, 2008, 2010; Golub, 2010). Multiscale development and consumption of MMOs are co-dependent to particular social, cultural, economic, and political contexts (Chung and Fung, 2012; Shaw, 2012b; Portnow, Protasio and Donaldson, 2012). Games of this genre are also explored for their touristic potential,

compared to material places, whereas digital devices and network connections allow for practices of incorporeal travel (i.e. cyber-tourism) (Gale, 2009). These studies show some level of consensus about the strong relationship between VWs and physical spaces (not to mention the abundant spatial metaphors at use in those environments) (Flanagan, 2000; Consalvo and Ess, 2011).

MMO players tend to integrate games in their daily life schedule, seeking the alleviation of negative feelings (e.g. relaxation) through a sense of detachment and time loss; players describe improved social and technological skills as positive, and excessive play as a negative outcome (Hussain and Griffiths, 2009). As aforementioned, online and offline CVGs have a strong potential for social interaction, aside from high flexibility and enhanced cognitive stimulus, leading the use of these games as teaching and learning tools to increase motivation and public participation, introducing new and complementary skills while aligning with educational curriculum guidelines and participatory political requirements (Adams, 1998; Brysch, Huynh and Scholz, 2012; Poplin, 2012). When allied to other strands such as mobile technologies, games are capable of empowering vulnerable people by enabling access to new physical spaces (Wilson, 2016); in this context, MMOs are particularly powerful educational tools (Steinkuehler, 2008; Peachey *et al.*, 2010).

Gaming spaces are often attributed to positive aspects of leisure and sociability (Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006; Ducheneaut, Moore and Nickell, 2007), but negative social experiences and the possibility of professional gameplay subvert this configuration. Online games can be ludic places or places for labour and capital production; they can be places of relaxation, role play, violence and hostility, separately or simultaneously, depending on the symbolic uses made by the community (Knox and Pinch, 2014), and by the architecture and design behind the game-world's construction (Ducheneaut, Moore and Nickell, 2007). For instance, the gamer may play from home or an Internet café, where she may play for leisure or work.

In a seminal chapter, Aarseth (2007) explains the evolution of videogames and their classification by the kind and quality of spatial representations implemented by them. Employing Lefèbvre's (1991) ideas on the production of space, the author offers a useful philosophical approach to the spatiality of games; however, Aarseth's focus on visual renderings of code leads him to classify CVGs as allegories of space, simulacra where the fundamental distinction between real and not-real is crucial for play. Although representation is constantly mooted in CVG studies (Shaw, 2009; Williams

et al., 2009c; Shaw, 2015b; Gestos, Smith-Merry and Campbell, 2018) and, from a geographical perspective, there's a permanent dialogue between the representation of people and places and affective relations on- and offline, games are not only representations (Taylor, 2002; Shaw and Warf, 2009). With an integrative focus on social arenas and norms, geographers have since called for a qualitative shift in which games are more than representations, but spaces of emotion and affect, enabling Geography to address the spatiality of games as relational and enmeshed with the practices behind them. In fact, as stressed by Woodyer (2012), the spatiality of play is constructed through intentionality, embodied performances reproducing and transforming social and spatial realities; likewise, Longan (2008) poses gaming as experiencing landscape production through the apprehension of practices, and the meanings these practices invest in the spaces of play.

The act of play engages the player's embodied knowledges, generating an extended space through the interaction between screen and user (Ash, 2009). Affect is the mechanism behind this process, shifting player's perception of space by prompting them to adapt and navigate through 3D environments; as a consequence, the affective experience of play is felt in the player's body, whose brain associates screened images with bodily responses, thus 'reconfiguring the relationship between seeing and touching' (Ash, 2009, p.2120). The embodied spatial practices of gaming and play link the human and the non-human in the production of spaces through and with digital technologies.

Clearly, gaming is bound up with spatiality, either through the representation, production and negotiation of space or through intersections and co-productions of different spatialities centred on and routed through the body-mind (Maddrell, 2016), with power relations cutting across the production and experience of game and play. In being a contested and contesting activity, gaming relates to power (Squire and Jenkins, 2002); in games, power is achieved and demonstrated through the mastery of skills and expertise necessary to win, in a process that engages several social relations constitutive of spatial relationships and power modalities (Painter, 2008). Power is thus an element of play, performed or reproduced, but also manipulated as a game device; simultaneously, power can be experienced as embodied negotiation of 'being in the world', not only as dual relationship, the resistance to a vertical, inflicted power but as an empowering enactment of emotional-affective experiences (Woodyer, 2012).

Communities play a pivotal role in contemporary online gaming, for SNSs enable the creation of online communities related to the practice of playing online (Hjorth, 2011). Likewise, the power-laden social relations created and reproduced through gaming are fundamental in challenging the seeming duality between real and virtual, being quintessentially expressed, within or outside gaming environments, in online communities and interaction between avatars. As discussed earlier in this chapter, online communities often replicate offline practices, which are complexified by avatar use. Avatar interaction in 3D online environments tends to follow the same social norms of physical places (Yee et al., 2007); however, although usually replicating the users' physical sex, avatars can be used for spatial negotiation (Jenson et al., 2015) – e.g. gender-bending and sex-swapping. These facts reinforce Taylor's (2002) point: the avatar is not a mere visual representation of the player, but a material device – a body – through which presence is constructed. In online environments, there is no immersion without embodiment, regardless of the visual feedback offered by the media.

Besides being central to immersion and affect, embodiment links the game to the gamer and their identity. The relationship between a player and their avatar is often one of emotional and affective incorporation, through which the player identifies (on different levels) with their in-game character, creating, through vision and language, a new level of embodied experience transiting between physical and digital (Black, 2017). Indeed, different levels and experiences of embodiment lead to variable levels of engagement from specific publics, as much as it impacts in-game choices and behaviours (Milik, 2017), rendering the player incorporated, more than immersed in the game (Calleja, 2011). Moreover, in-game activities are more than simulated cinematic experiences; while the game has (value-laden) goals and affordances, the player greatly invests their personal goals and perspectives, filling that online space with meaning (Gee, 2008). It is in this context that the gamer identity – or *gamerness* – takes shape.

Identity

Much has been said about what it means to be a gamer, and how this identity is shaped relationally, with individual and collective experiences of gaming. Firstly, *gamer* is a cultural positioning, a specific identity constructed via individual and collective practices, performances and expressions related to a wider 'gamer culture' (De Paula, 2016). Secondly, as an identity, *gamerness* is a fluid, temporary,

fragmented and overlapping sense of belonging to a group of people defined by their consumption of specific media. Gamer identification is fundamentally related to 'adequate consumption' (i.e. result of certain types of financial, social, temporal, and knowledge-related commitments) (Shaw, 2013) of games and related media products (constituting a wider *geek* or *nerd* social capital). As discussed by Shaw (2012a), gamers perform an attachment to the medium and navigate the wider community by wielding time- and place-specific social and cultural capital.

Spatial practices are consequences of individual and group behaviour. In online games, this behaviour is shaped by the population strata and hierarchies (including processes of intersectional domination and exclusion), software development, marketing, representation and portrayal of characters and avatars, use management and regulation and, ultimately, individual and collective perceptions and practices. The place of online gaming is thus interwoven with socialisation and consumption patterns. As shown in section 2.4, gaming requires access to technology and digital literacy, creating an initial threshold of accessibility and selectivity further emphasised by other practices, creating either a sense of belonging or alienation. Consequently, to look at online gaming spaces as geographical places is to unveil the processes producing them.

As discussed, spatial experience is co-produced by embodied-psychological, physical, and digital spaces, not disjunctive but mutually-constitutive spheres where some aspects of spatiality manifest differently. Drawing from a Queer and feminist account of embodied experience, in combination with recent works on virtual three-dimensional and textual environments as extensions of the body, this research is based on embodiment as key to understanding online gaming environments as places which, instead of being ethereal and opposed to 'real' material space, bear their own materialities when acting as extensions of the physical. In the following section, this idea is developed through a critical assessment of digital spatialities, presenting ideas around presence and embodiment, embodied-psychological experience of place, sense of place, and feminist critiques to affordability, access/production and impacts of digital technologies in everyday life.

3.3.2. Spatial practices of the digital

Orchard et al. (2016, p.1581) reflect on Grosz's (1992) thoughts on the co-constitution on spatial spheres and scales: 'just as humans make cities, the norms and structure of the city permeate the construction of the body and its circulation through the urban

landscape'. That relationship includes digital spaces, as the pervasiveness of information and communication technologies generate a deep intersection between all spheres, through the same norms and structures. Likewise, human interaction with digital technologies can be framed by a (gendered) matrix of spatial practices. It has materiality, expressed in the individual and collective experience of using devices, and navigating and producing code and data; this interaction is intellectually produced and conceptualised through and for hegemonic discourses, generating and reinforcing knowledge through language and signs. Finally, the digital also refers to representational spaces where old and new signs and discourses, mediated by the emotional and symbolic, give new meanings to practice and discourse. Spatial practices thus craft the differential space of digital technologies.

As the Internet crafts places where human activities and identities are performed and (re)created, embodiment complexifies the concreteness and materiality of digital places (Kinsley, 2013). Social relations are the core of cyberspace, as communities 'put themselves into this global arena and become part of the force that constitutes it' (Miller and Slater, 2000, p.7). This sense of belonging challenges the ever-artificial separation between online and offline spheres, fulfilling online places with embodied materiality. Through technology, 'the conceptual logics that computers made possible were transformed into potential spaces, spaces that awaited construction and definition' (Consalvo, 2011, p.331); if social worlds overlap and interpenetrate, the dichotomous model of virtual and real is challenged (Lehdonvirta, 2010).

One aspect of spatial practices is especially significant to digital geographies. Accessibility and distancing refer to the tensions and effects of time and distance on social interaction. Distancing, as discussed in section 3.2.4, is an outcome of this time-space friction, posing barriers (or defences) against interaction; when covered, the costs (time and resources) of overcoming the effects of this friction generate accessibility that accommodates social interaction (Harvey, 2010). An old trope about cyberspace and the web had it that digital technologies would finally defeat space, but Massey (2008) illustrates that, in fact, they shrink time through an increase in speed; equally, space is widened through the multiplication of multiplicities within and around digital technologies such as the web. Because space is not simply distance and coordinates, time does not annihilate space but alters some effects of distance. Space is recreated by social interaction with digital technologies. Accessibility and distancing, then, gain other nuances expressed by informational flows, connection speed, infrastructure quality and availability, digital divide, the emotional response

embodied in an immigrant student and her grandparents when seeing each other – through a screen – for the first time in months.

In their work about educational spaces in virtual worlds, Savin-Baden and Falconer (2016) propose that these environments should be seen in contrast to physical classrooms, where the experience of being online equals to a sense of being in two places at the same time – metaxis. Again, although useful, this image evokes a dichotomy between material and immaterial realms; however, a mutually constitutive sense of presence/absence bridges both dimensions of spatial experience. The feeling of ‘being there’, a ‘temporal, spatial, and ontological state of consciousness’ (Paiva, 2015, p.152), is an embodied-psychological experience derived from a permanent negotiation between absence and presence. Absence is experienced, and the embodied-emotional practices around this experience generate presence – sense of absence is the outcome of a permanent tension between physical absence and emotional presence. Although seemingly paradoxical, this relationship is negotiated and expressed through spaces and practices – text, context and material form (Maddrell, 2013). In digital online environments, this feeling is evoked (and provoked) by several (intentional or unintentional) mechanisms including medium, interactive devices, sounds, perspectives, aesthetics (Paiva, 2015); these mechanisms, to which social interactions should be added, generate the feeling of immersion that engenders a sense of presence. As Falconer has discussed elsewhere (2013), online environments evoke a sense of authenticity that can be enhanced through mechanisms ensuring presence, realism and engagement, or diminished due to the lack of visual and/or tactile stimuli. These dynamics eliminate the need for a contrast between physical and virtual environments, for the sense of presence in the latter is unique.

The absence of tactile stimuli raised by Falconer’s (2013) research participants is often confused with disembodiment. For instance, Jackson and Valentine (2014, p.200) express their worry that ‘the absence of the embodied nature of being’ may hinder democratic political discussions on the web. While it is true that the sense of social distance (allied with anonymity) may create a sense of spatial isolation, online interactions are not disembodied because they are not face-to-face. The same immersion mechanisms that engender the feeling of ‘being there’, bridge online interactions and the user’s body, where emotions and affective responses form an embodied-psychological space (Maddrell, 2016). Once more, these distinctions are challenged, and so is the distinction between embodied/disembodied experience of online interactions. Digital spatialities are, thus, an assemblage of materially grounded

online spaces, physical/offline places, and embodied-psychological spaces. Moreover, the digital provides environments, tools and languages which enable a situated embodied experience of gender and sexuality not only expressed by but materialised and spatialised in 'digitally material artefacts' (e.g. chat logs, pictures) which act as actualisations and materialisations of gender in both digital and physical spaces (van Doorn, 2011).

What was then seen as intangible, are now seen as ephemeral due to changes in spatial practices of accessibility and distanciation. Digital technologies are grounded by materialities, expressed in technological objects (Kinsley, 2014). However, the materiality of digital technologies, usually expressed in the more conspicuous aspects of their infrastructure, is also expressed in the materially-grounded social arenas where space is constructed through intangible – although embodied – emotions. Visiting (online or offline) places is more than travelling between two points – it is an encounter that engages involvement (Massey, 2008), experienced as an embodied-psychological dimension tied to sense of presence and sense of place. Digital space is, then, an experience materially anchored in people's bodies. For that reason, Massey (2008) advocates for a careful focus on the 'otherness inside' in postmodern discussions of space, for power relations are as important as the spatial forms wherein they are contained. It is not possible to define space outside the social practices that make it, as it is not possible to apprehend these practices without looking at the power articulations which configure them. In this sense, identity is central to the understanding of how online spaces are produced. As discussed on section 3.2.2, identity performances are negotiated, and this exercise of power produces space; evoking one's knowable nature and characteristics, identity is shaped by and changes with cultural meanings, which are dynamic and ever-changing across time and space (Downing and McKinnon, 2014).

Central to the process of *becoming* – construction and discovery – which entails identity (Downing and McKinnon, 2014) language is co-constitutive with meaning and place. Perceived as Others in relation to media consumption, seriousness, adulthood, or reality (albeit neither could be further from the truth), gamers build a lexicon that produces a gaming culture while reinforcing this otherness and producing new instances of difference within the community (De Paula, 2016). In their lexicon, gamers might adopt or reject this very identity depending on their attachment and feelings of belonging.

Since identity is disputed, gamerness is negotiated, being denied or invested depending on how the performances of this identity are socially constructed, articulated and regulated in a certain time and place (Shaw, 2013). For this reason, the very category of *gamer* is criticised as being useless, reifying or essentialising. In this study, the concepts of gamer and gamerness are important tools to understand how identities are constructed and negotiated within the League community,

Although portrayed as democratic and inclusive, online games are marked by inequalities and malpractices that complicate the participation of certain groups, either as players or developers. The remainder of this chapter will focus on critical assessments of digital spatialities, including feminist critiques of universalised ideas about the web and online CVGs, locating this research within the critical intersection of feminist digital geographies.

3.3.3. Technology is not universal

The dawn of the new ICTs brought optimistic scenarios regarding global connection through universal access to and production of knowledge, of ‘societies more decent and free than those mapped onto dirt and concrete and capital’ (Dibbell, 1999). However, as geographers have stressed, from the beginning, technology and society are co-constituted, and spatial variation in access creates complexity (Kwan, 2001; Kinsley, 2013). Moreover, technology is never neutral, for it bears dominant power relations, values and theories (Leszczynski and Elwood, 2015). Every software is a rule of conduct, imbued with power, and although software can be alienating, it is made by and through certain worldviews which standardise and classify, reinforcing and recreating difference and hierarchisation (Warf, 2001; Thrift and French, 2002; Warschauer, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Zook, 2006; Demo, 2007; Best and Butler, 2015). Moreover, software affordance – the program’s powers and limitations, and what they allow the user to do (Gee, 2008; Crenshaw and Nardi, 2016; Burgess *et al.*, 2017) – is a form of power that brings about conflicts and power relations that shape place (Carter, 2005; Warf, 2007; Santos, 2008b; Crutcher and Zook, 2009; Costa, 2012; Dornelles, 2015). The creation of online environments (and their borders and limits) depends on the contrast between the potentialities of technology and the (lack of) access to them. Accordingly, unequal access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) around the world also influence their development, drawing new places in the physical world and evidencing the permanent relationship between digital and material spaces.

Alongside classic cyberspace tropes – global village, space-time compression, end of Geography – comes the idea that digital technologies would have the power to free humanity from the embarrassments of spatial and bodily constraints, shared by early cyberfeminists (Wajcman, 2004). The web could, through the cold aloofness of code and screens, allow individuals and societies to wander around disembodied, ethereal spaces. As previously discussed, a geographical look at the digital allows for a sophisticated shift towards seeing space as a process; thus, when space and body are seen as burdens, relationality and social affairs are also seen as burdens. According to Massey (2008), this idea comes from a modern fear of difference that could, allegedly, be kept away by means of distance. However, as contemporary research has shown, difference – one of the most important constitutive aspects of space – breach through representations of space, changing material spatialities, and challenging ideas of universality, freedom, and uniformity. After all, even though informational vectors spread differently in terms of speed and reach (Santos, 1999), cultural vectors such as moral values spread and disseminate increasingly fast and pervasively in the hyperconnected information society.

Othering and Gamer Identity

As discussed earlier in this chapter, identity processes of othering and otherness permeate digital spheres, where they thrive with the help of the distancing between bodies. Otherness arises from cultural marginality, where the Other is binarily posited as the opposite in relation to the universal; identity is expressed through tacitly agreed standards of adequateness which highlights margins (and consequent exclusion) through difference (Barnett, 2005; Perlman, 2010; McDowell and Sharp, 2014). In this sense, ‘the cultural other is necessarily posited as the unstable foundation of hegemonic identities’ (Barnett, 2005, p.7), from which the Other is distant, or which the Other lacks – for instance, maleness (Beauvoir, 1949), *Westernness* (Massey, 2008), connectedness (Kleine, 2018), gamerness (Shaw, 2012a). In being central to processes of alterity and identification, otherness generates exoticism, which lies on the permanent tension between desire and dread, fear and fascination (Fanon, 2008). As argued by Wajcman, ‘difference is lived as inferiority’ (1991, p.152). In this sense, for instance, gamer performance is exclusionary by nature, because it relates to intricate processes of identification, but also due to the power relations which particularise these performances.

The sex segregation encountered in the digital technology industry (evidenced in Chapter Two), perpetuates gender inequalities while fuelling the patriarchal values in the foundations of Western society. Technology is, in Wajcman's words, 'a defining feature of masculinity' (2004, p.6) – thus, technology is gendered (and classed, and racialised). Values associating technology and technological competence with masculinity are consistently transmitted through ideological apparatuses at the service of gender roles and orders, through stereotyping in education, and segregation in the job market. Although equal access and representation, exhausted in past and current initiatives (such as those discussed in Chapter Two) are undeniably important, the very gendering of technology itself cannot be ignored. Science and technology are produced through masculine languages, symbols, and values (e.g. domination and reorganisation of nature, and modes of production and interaction), reproducing and reinforcing patriarchal gender ideologies. Modern technology and ideologies of manliness are mutually constitutive, and while demeaning traditionally feminine technologies as lesser, this process also excluded women and stamped technology as a masculine domain. Likewise, the possibility of offshore work for tech companies is a means for new colonial work relations through the hiring of cheap labour from peripheral countries (Wajcman, 2004).

Although the Internet carries immense potential for subversion of gender orders, and women's autonomy, its military roots hint at the important role gender ideologies play on the development of digital technology (Wajcman, 2004). As mentioned in section 3.2.2, space is coded by hegemonic views on gender and sexuality; moreover, digital spaces have been historically coded as masculine, Western and heterosexual, regardless of the dominant common-sense view of the Internet as a neutral technology uniting a global village. Production and access to information and communication technologies are heavily stratified by location, age, race and gender (Kleine, 2018), making the Internet a product and producer of gendered relations. Recent web-based technologies such as the new spatial media '(re)produce gender(ed) identities, norms, subjectivities, exclusions, and spaces in new, unprecedented ways' (Leszczynski and Elwood, 2015, p.14) Data curation and production are embodied in and through the individuals whose identities shape their ideas; likewise, digital mediations of everyday life and the affordances of new technologies are heavily gendered and produce material consequences for social life. In fact, the gendered dimensions of new spatial media practices are common to all digital and web-based technologies to date.

Technological revolutions are often widely responsible for transgressions in traditional gendered spatial practices. When introduced to various media, traditionally excluded groups produce new discursive spaces and practices, with consequent backlash from traditionally hegemonic groups. Hence, highly pervasive technologies such as the Internet are especially transgressive, for they manage to violate prevailing practices simply by being everywhere. This subtle invasion is a new practice that emerges holding hands with other, new (sometimes opposed) practices. Spatial practices are in the eye of the beholder – they are culturally and historically bound, open to interpretation. Likewise, online environments play a two-fold role in spatial contestation and conflicts – on the one hand, cyberactivism counts on online communities for consciousness-raising and activism to promote changes in socio-political scenarios (Breindl, 2010; Drissel, 2011); alternatively, these same online places face their unique internal conflicts, for participation and experiences often differ across the socio-cultural spectrum. For instance, the advent of social media has amplified and complicated the debates in the past years (Almeida and Henriques, 2019) – social media is precisely where and how contemporary feminist debates on unequal gender relations in CVGs have come to the public fore. SNSs are increasingly becoming places of political mobilising, reporting and civic engagement, through practices of personalisation that end up bringing politics to the finer scales of personal space (Hjorth, 2011), a discussion in many ways related to the controversies of private and public space (Hanish, 1969; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2015).

As evidenced by the statistics discussed in Chapter Two, CVGs are for men – an enduring trend verified in how games are developed by and targeted towards this demographic (Kirkland, 2009; Salter, 2018). The very first video game, developed in the USA in the 1960s, was ‘Space Wars’, which is telling of the ideologies underlining CVGs’ language and values. How games are developed within the broader context of technology advancement (already gendered) has consequences for female participation due to gendered socialisation to ICTs in general (Wajcman, 1991). Notwithstanding, the erasure of women from technology, and thus from games is an extension of another familiar erasure; despite the widespread labelling of gaming as a masculine activity, and the imbalances in women’s participation in the game developing industry, gaming still depends on women. In requiring free time for enjoyment and the mastery of techniques, gaming excludes women from fruition while still indirectly depending on the housework done by them. Likewise, the men working in the games industry depend on women’s labour to focus entirely on their

endeavours. This issue reveals yet other cleavages; where housework is not done by White, middle- and upper-class women, it is done by women of colour from the working class. Indeed, gaming is produced by women, and by overall marginalised people, who often cannot consume what they produce – which renders games as spaces of inequality and therefore deeply political.

More than that, the *gamer*, as an identity, has been historically associated with one intersectional demographic: a White, heterosexual, young, middle-class man. The gendered body carries, from the offline to the online, the same essentialised gender identity created by the ideological apparatuses and expressed in gendered performance (Crenshaw, 1989; Connell, 2002; Butler, 2004). Ideological devices create symbolic divides into seemingly neutral, inconspicuous activities, turning them into gendered activities. As power differentials generate otherness, gendered practices and spaces are mutually constituted. The gendering of the gamer is thus a process entailed by the role of gender in the social construction of play (Taylor, 2009). This process renders gaming as a male activity, and gaming spaces as male spaces; consequently, CVGs end up being a media that reproduces hegemonic and hypermasculinity (Ohl and Duncan, 2012; Salter and Blodgett, 2012), and physical spaces related to CGVs (e.g. arcade parlours, gamehouses, LAN houses) are often seen as masculine places (Thornham, 2008). The formation of gender orders and gender regimes within games and gaming are localised and localising practices: in raising boys as gamers and girls as spectators, society defines gaming as a primarily masculine activity.

As identification walks jointly with representation, research has deeply explored intersectional identity representation in games' characters. Female characters are numerically underrepresented, and there is an enduring trend of stereotyping these characters in most games. When present, female characters in CVGs tend to be less clothed, voluptuous and with fewer or shallower speaking parts (Beasley and Standley, 2002; Dickerman, Christensen and Kerl-McClain, 2008; Martins *et al.*, 2009). Alas, the trends encountered in early CVGs have been enhanced lately, with a growth in more hostile forms of sexism (i.e. hypersexualisation, despite increased protagonism) in the portrayal of female characters (Summers and Miller, 2014). BAME people tend to be stereotypically represented (and BAME women are mostly invisible); Black and minority males are usually represented as criminals or athletes, even in nonviolent games, reinforcing racist stereotypes at play in physical spaces (Leonard, 2006; Dickerman, Christensen and Kerl-McClain, 2008; Higgin, 2009; Burgess *et al.*, 2011).

Concurrently, LGBTQI+ representation is problematically meagre due to industrial limitations posed by structural, audience, and design uncertainties (Shaw, 2009). Despite the increased investment from LGBTQI+ developers in changing the scenario, existing representations of non-heteronormative identities stay mostly problematic and ambivalent, with games either propagating stereotypes, incentivising homophobic violence, exhibiting blatant queerbaiting³⁴, or relying on the unnecessary killing of LGBTQI+ characters (Vitali, 2010; Nordin, 2015; Chan, 2017). More physical practices, such as professional gameplay (e-sports), tend to underscore gendered inequalities. When inside e-sports arenas, women are rarely players; among those who are, the trend is to be placed under stereotypical labels like other women in peripheral roles (i.e. advertising and janitorial services) (Taylor, Jenson and de Castell, 2009).

Although relatively recent in comparison with the television, CVGs are also an important cultural product through which gender regimes can be reinforced or challenged, one reason why design choices are critical to social change (Kennedy, 2002). When playing with sexualised female avatars, women often lose confidence in their skills (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009; Gestos, Smith-Merry and Campbell, 2018). Concurrently, young men tend to be tolerant of sexual harassment in the physical world and to rely on rape myths to justify their views when exposed to CVGs depicting it (Dill, Brown and Collins, 2008; Gestos, Smith-Merry and Campbell, 2018). Both men and women tend to present lower self-esteem when exposed to stereotypical gendered body ideals (i.e. voluptuous or muscular) in games, and both tend to develop a negative view of women's gaming competence when exposed to subordinate (i.e. damsel-in-distress), objectified and hypersexualised female characters (Martins *et al.*, 2009; Gestos, Smith-Merry and Campbell, 2018). Nevertheless, research is cautious about inferring unfavourable outcomes from the exposure to sexualised or stereotypical gender representations.

Complex gender performances, practices of virtual sex, and digitally-mediated practices of agency all reveal a wealth of possible important insights about spatial practices in online environments. For instance, in countries where gender roles are sharply defined, and the domestic is regarded as a feminine space, females are the main consumers of mass culture and entertainment from home. Equally, the different access to leisure allies with cultural logics that place the feminine aside with media deemed as inferior; in that sense, the idea of non-violent, casual and mobile games as

³⁴ Refers to a marketing technique in which the story hints at a queer romance without overtly depicting or discussing it.

inferior – cheap, easy, low-maintenance – is profoundly meshed with the high consumption of these genres by females. A geographical analysis of gender relations within MMOs can shed light on exclusionary and inclusive practices at play, unveiling obstacles and efforts to bringing diversity to digital spaces.

Gender performances in CVGs are as multiple and complex as those in physical spaces; sex swapping and gender-bending are somehow normative in online games, evidencing the existence of a multiplicity of identities expressed by the avatars (Bartle, 2004). There are many reasons behind these practices, e.g. a desire to explore all the resources of certain software, gendered negotiations of participation, gendered agency against exclusionary practices (Bartle, 2004; Todd, 2012; Thornham, 2013; Jenson *et al.*, 2015). Some authors would state that, by subverting gendered norms and hierarchies, some online games can provide questioning and liberating experiences for women (Chen, 2016); however, a Queer approach to the same practices may evidence how enduring heteronormative practices are often disguised as revolutionary.

As seen, patent inequalities justify the intense focus on the representation and construction of femininities in CVGs; nevertheless, research has also explored the complex and hierarchical masculinities produced through and by CVGs (Kirkland, 2009). Adoption and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity performances are not necessarily associated with CVG usage (e.g. time spent playing); nevertheless, male players often experience lower self-esteem and a higher sense of inadequacy when engaging in multiplayer games (Beavers, 2017). Notwithstanding the enduring tropes representing women in subordinate positions, contemporary CVGs have seen a shift in masculine portrayals; for instance, more paternal figures now seek to rescue female characters as their daughters, pointing to the construction of masculine identities that lean towards care and protection (Lawlor, 2018). However, traditional and hypermasculine are still the predominant depictions of masculinity in CVGs, and the wide consumption of games centred on ‘militarised masculinities’ (Kirkland, 2009) reinforces men and women’s endorsement of hegemonic masculinity performances (Blackburn and Scharrer, 2019). In this context, patterns and performances of toxic masculinity are expected to become prevalent. In some cases, it becomes a norm; for instance, e-sports institutions and players tend to adopt toxic masculinity practices to cement the modality’s place as an institutionalised sport (Summerley, 2020). As discussed in section 3.1.2, toxic masculinity is expressed and produced through sets of practices that act both in producing identity and socio-spatial boundaries.

The umbrella term ‘online misbehaviour’ includes cyber violence, online hate speech, flaming, trolling and cyberbullying (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017), complex practices which affect all gaming spheres. As discussed further on Chapters Five and Six, this research points to four main types of online misbehaviour discussed below – Negative Word of Mouth, Flaming, Trolling and Cyberbullying – widely encountered in textual interaction in different web environments, each one characterised by different motivations, patterns of language use, intended outcomes and possible consequences. Motivations for online misbehaviour change with context, the specific location or community where it occurs (Fichman and Sanfilippo, 2015). Motivations for online misbehaviour are generally grounded in internal (psychological, cognitive, and emotional drivers) and external (social and environmental drivers) factors. More specifically, online misbehaviour may be motivated by activism/ideology, enjoyment/humour, malevolence, loneliness/belonging, instigation with aims to socially negotiate or challenge, but also aiming at a sense of achievement and immersion. Lonely players may turn to online misbehaviour to provoke a reaction and start a conversation; alternatively, they may employ this as a tactic to induce group acceptance, in a strategy aimed at creating or enhancing a sense of belonging.

Negative Word of Mouth (NWM) is a behaviour characterised by overtly insulting, profane language, aimed at offending the interlocutor; capitalised letters and excessive punctuation are visual identifiers of this behaviour in text-based online communication (Hickman and Ward, 2007). Internet users engage in NWM as a response to unsatisfactory experiences, often driven by a high identification and sense of loyalty towards a certain brand or community. NWM can result in reduced or hindered productivity, and character assassination (i.e. destroying one's reputation and credibility) depending on the nature and frequency of comments.

Trolling behaviours are all intentionally deceptive and mischievous communications and gaming interactions aimed at prompting reactions from their interlocutors (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017). Persons who engage in online trolling (i.e. trolls) are motivated by a certain sense of superiority and are amused by any damage caused. While most trolling behaviours portray random, pointless, or comic remarks and actions, revenge is also a common motivation for online trolls, who act on a perceived absence of surveillance or sense of impunity. Intentionally or not, the practice can cause severe disruption, material or immaterial damage and severe distress to the victims.

Research on trolling behaviours reveals that about 27 per cent of Britons have previously engaged in these practices (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017).

Typified as the use of deeply offensive comments, flaming is very prevalent in online gaming; unlike trolling, the lewdness and malice of flaming render this behaviour dependent on anonymity. Although having similar characteristics to NWM, flaming is not necessarily a response to discomfort or dissatisfaction; in fact, flammers do it as a reaction to provocation, a pastime, to relax or escape from anxious situations (very common in gaming environments), to feel superior to their interlocutors, or simply a response to an open opportunity (Alonzo and Aiken, 2004).

Cyberbullying comprises online misbehaviour including all repetitive, intentional behaviours aiming to cause alarm or distress to a chosen victim (Protection from Harassment Act 1997, c. 40, 1997; Slonje, Smith and Frisé, 2013). It includes (but is not restricted to) cyber harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, impersonation, and sabotage, associated or not. Victims of cyberbullying are vulnerable to innumerable mental disorders and, in extreme cases, suicide (Samara *et al.*, 2017), since online shaming practices can lead to character assassination. Practices related to cyberbullying are associated with the use of digital tools to send unwanted messages, typically of derogatory content. Messaging can, however, escalate to the use of social media and other public domain websites to humiliate the victim by publishing defamatory, false information, threats and hate speech. Perpetrators can act alone or in groups (mobbing) and use stationary or mobile platforms to inflict injury. Although often associated with children and adolescents (7 per cent of this demographic have been victims in 2010) (Smith *et al.*, 2008; Livingstone *et al.*, 2011), cyberbullying is widespread in gaming communities – victimising around half of MMO players and being engaged with by around a third of them (Ballard and Welch, 2017) and can become a major threat to a person's life and wellbeing (Chang *et al.*, 2015; Ballard and Welch, 2017; Kwak, Blackburn and Han, 2015; Li and Pustaka, 2017; McInroy and Mishna, 2017; Rehman, 2017).

Under cyberbullying's umbrella, cyberstalking consists on using sophisticated means to determine the victim's contact details, and sometimes their habits and whereabouts, further using this information to pursue and harass them in digital media, sometimes intensifying to physical stalking. Doxing is an extreme form of cyberstalking and involves the use of digital means to search and disclose an individual's private information to be further published in online platforms. Disclosed information is then

used for other harmful practices, including pranking (e.g. delivering unsolicited material to one's address), bank fraud, swatting (i.e. deceiving emergency services into attending false reports of grave emergencies), blackmailing (using sensitive information such as photographs and online conversations), blacklisting, character assassination and threatening (Wu, 2015; Douglas, 2016). The infamous event of #Gamergate (further discussed) is a recent case of how game-related doxing was used to harm people's lives on and offline.

Online Sexism

More than other forms of online misbehaviour, cyberbullying is linked to sexist and misogynistic practices on the Internet, and very prevalent in online gaming arenas. Indeed, the lack of physical contact does not impede the occurrence of sexual violence, which is prevalent in online environments, especially those dedicated to gaming (Dibbell, 1999; Stächelin, 2017). The classic case of cyberrape described by Dibbell (1999) at the turn of the century illustrates the complexities of gender performances in online environments, the meaningful, gendered violence experienced by feminine-performing people, and the dilemmatic interpretations of reality and relevance at the core of the regulation and punishment practices at play in these environments. The LambdaMOO's³⁵ case is indeed a magnified look into the role of gender in the formation of online communities, and online spaces in general. Moreover, the endurance of these and other practices of sexual harassment and gender discrimination in online environments (Buck, 2017; Stächelin, 2017) is at least indicative of its endurance in the physical world, if not illustrative of the amplification of (mostly harmful) gender roles in society as a whole.

While it is true that online communities allow for some flexibility (e.g. online characters who differ from the physical bodies whom they incorporate), identity is still central to online performances (be they true to life or not). Thus, behind every case of online gendered violence – as it was with Dibbell's (1999) rape case – there is a strain of toxic masculinity sustained by underlying gendered practices in the foundations of digital technology. Sociopsychological drives for these extreme behaviours are still controversial, ranging from a perceived foreign invasion by identity minorities whose presence threatens a certain original entitlement to a given space (Massanari, 2016), to downright normalisation of hegemonic and hypermasculine discourses within the

³⁵ LambdaMOO is one of the oldest (est. 1990) text-based online community still active, site of the infamous cyberrape case described by Dibbell (1999).

community (Condis, 2015). Regardless of what motivates cases of online violence, the mutability of these spaces, the opaqueness of digital ethics (see section 4.6), and the increasing slipperiness of the sites' managing companies render the cases difficult to tackle.

As discussed, these practices benefit from the perceived anonymity of the Internet, whose arenas provide new spaces for old power struggles (Thacker and Griffiths, 2012). While the flexibility of the digital can be employed to loosen the constraints of identity markers, the archetypical gamer – a White, adult man – chooses to reproduce and augment offline practices as a means to demarcate the last frontier where a man can be a man (Tucker, 2011). It is in this context that the 'technologically-fused' (Salter, 2018, p.249) and technology-dependant *geek* masculinity, once positioned as a lesser form of masculinity in relation to hegemonic performances, dictates the formation of new ICTs, and becomes the norm, whose maintenance relies on the reinforcement of gendered stereotypes in technology consumption and mastery (Braithwaite, 2016; Massanari, 2016; Thornham, 2008).

As summarised by Salter and Blodgett (2012, p.401), hypermasculine discourse, based on the othering of women in both physical and digital spaces, 'encourages the overt privileging of masculinity over femininity and discourages women from engaging in gendered discourse within the community'. This process reinforces gender essentialisms, pushing for often aggressive responses towards those perceived as threats. Consequently, hypermasculinity becomes a common thread in the fabric of the gaming community which, in fairness, has had its share of marginalisation, and is used to (re)claiming and affirming its identity where it seems to be misunderstood (Salter and Blodgett, 2012; Chess and Shaw, 2015).

Indeed, the prevalence of intersectional discrimination in online misbehaviour reveals how contextual hegemonic (and often toxic) masculinities thrive and shape online communities through the oppression of vulnerable identities. Practices of online misbehaviour in online gaming environments increasingly gain sexist undertones that are clearly aimed at gamers performing as women. Gendered online misbehaviour relies on a misogynistic language (e.g. widespread rape jokes – see Salter and Blodgett, 2012; Nordin, 2015) which tends to alienate female players. For this reason, it is argued, these practices should be increasingly addressed as online sexual harassment, instead of mere incivility (Megarry, 2014), since it has the potential of escalating to

coordinated attacks which threaten and harm (sometimes permanently) one's safety and mental health (Mantilla, 2013; Salter, 2018).

For LGBTQI+ players, representation is less important than feeling safe in gaming communities (Shaw, 2012c), which is unsurprising given the widespread use of homophobic slurs in flaming practices, for example. At the same time, due to their patent undesirability, racist slurs are widely used to wreak havoc among the players, especially at the presence of perceived foreign players (Thacker and Griffiths, 2012). For people of colour, albeit offensive, racism pushes the boundaries of accepted online behaviour, being perceived as expected, a form of 'gaming capital for Whites' (Ortiz, 2019, p.888). Racist slurs can, however, shed light on how racial politics actually matters to them in many, complex ways (Higgin, 2013).

Practices of hegemonic and toxic masculinity are, alas, being deepened by contemporary practices which provide new sites for more sophisticated forms of violence, posing new challenges to conceptualising and tackling these issues (Minayo, 2005; Salter and Blodgett, 2012). Crucially, the 'aggrieved entitlement' (Kimmel, 2013, p.18) leading these practices comes wrapped up in a discourse of free speech defence as an inalienable right, as a result of a sense of persecution and complicated identity anxieties (Chess and Shaw, 2015).

When this perceived persecution and anxiety is followed by the endemic presence of online misbehaviour in CVGs' social arenas, the consequences can be grim. In the #Gamergate episode, academic and media feminist discussions of gaming were interpreted by some gamers and geeks as part of a wider conspiracy against themselves and the industry, with pernicious consequences for the lives of many gamers, journalists, critics and scholars (Chess and Shaw, 2015; Todd, 2015; Braithwaite, 2016; Gray, Buyukozturk and Hill, 2017; Mortensen, 2018; Salter, 2018; Dowling, Goetz and Lathrop, 2019). This case, among many other recent ones, illustrates the feedback loop between online and offline practices, and how online forms of hegemonic and toxic masculinity effectively produce spaces of gendered exclusion.

Notwithstanding the evident use of technology for and through the exclusion of women, identity, subjectivity, and agency stand in the fight for transformative and transformed technologies. Technology must be interrogated for its potential use for emancipation, more so than on whether it includes women (Harding, 1986). That would require different (new, not reverse) values and attention towards the agency of

those in a position of subalternity (Wajcman, 2004), as well as different – and more active – approaches towards those practising gender-exclusionary behaviours (Chess and Shaw, 2015; Lange, 2017; Phillips, 2018). Fortunately, there are examples of online spaces (including gaming-related spaces) which allow for marginalised communities to explore their identity and form social connections through the formation of safe, supportive, and driven spaces (Gray, 2018; Titus, 2018) – which does not undermine the complexities and severities of online gendered violence, and the importance of more structured approaches to it (Williams, 2015; Aziz, 2017). As argued by Salter (2018, p.248), ‘online abuse is symptomatic of the gendering of the technological base and (...) its amelioration requires cultural, technological and industry responses’.

3.4. Chapter Summary

Gender is a political concept for it refers to power relations and structures that create inequality and difference. In its contemporary form, it requires the contemplation of how masculinities and femininities are constituted and articulate with other intersectional socio-cultural cleavages, and what acts of gendered, racialised, sexualised dominations (among others) are enacted as power relations. This research seeks to be intersectional by including other categories of socio-cultural classification in the dominance system, and by looking at agency central to power struggle. The inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in the understanding of gender follows Butler’s assertion that domination and discrimination structures also (and differently) affect people who display non-normative identities.

In this work, gender is the core, all-encompassing analytic category. However, it is not at all seen as hierarchically superior to other social differences. In fact, the postcolonial challenges to gender as a concept deeply resonate with the worldviews that guided this investigation. First, the experiences of intersectional, gendered people cannot be homogenised, as the distinct socio-cultural cleavages weigh over individual and collective experiences in time and space. Consequently, it is virtually impossible to isolate and measure identity elements in their influence on those experiences.

For this reason, the choice of gender as the main analytic category is as contradictory as necessary, for it is employed as a scholarly and political strategy of amplification and evidencing, respectively. Indeed, as the next chapters will show, the centrality of

gender was constantly destabilised during this project, especially by its participants. However, this concept is still important because it was contrasted with the multiplicity revealed through the binational comparison. In fact, this comparison aims to provide depth to other systems of difference not covered by gender. Likewise, understanding the emotional dynamics of online spaces is important to uncover how these social arenas are shaped and mobilised and how emotions can be a motor for change.

The following chapter presents the research design and methodologies employed to answer the research questions posed in the Introduction.

Chapter Four: Methodology

The literature reviewed on chapters one and two provided an overview of related literature, findings, and gaps in previous research, shaping the conceptual and theoretical frameworks sustaining the central investigation of this thesis. This chapter presents the methodology built for data gathering and analysis, situated in the philosophical approach that guided the choice of topic and research strategies. The chapter starts with an overview of the chosen philosophical approaches, including ontological and epistemological positions, followed by a presentation of a case study approach and the choice to develop a mixed-methods study. The next section explains the use of participant observation for study design, followed online surveys and semi-structured interviews that completed data collection, and discusses limitations to the chosen strategies. Finally, the chapter presents a detailed description of the data analysis process, including meta-results, followed by a section about the central ethical aspects which structured fieldwork and analysis.

4.1. Philosophical Perspectives

4.1.1. Feminist Epistemologies

Academic geography flourished on Western philosophical standards. In the dominant tradition, rigorous research should be produced through uncontaminated fieldwork where the researcher would be free from the facts of life which inevitably position them in the world (Dixon and Jones III, 2006; Harding, 2015a). In criticising the silencing and invisibility of women and ‘womanly’ activities in geographical inquiry, feminist geographers also challenged the idea of full objectivity and unbiased social research. Consequently, the feminist approach shifted the field by presenting methods centred in people as research agents, in a nurturing relationship that creates an inclusive environment. In short, feminist geographers question the idea of bias and defend that the separation between subject and object is artificial, if not impossible. This epistemological shift has also revolutionised the position of scientists in the field, for it advocated of research that could also ferment social change (Dixon and Jones III, 2006).

One of the most important contributions of feminist geographies is the critique to the universalised and compartmentalised perspectives (Dixon and Jones III, 2006).

Alongside the revolution of critical geographies in the years 1970, feminist geographers started to critique conventional methods of data collection that separate researcher from 'subjects', as well as questioning 'hard', quantitative methodologies, emphasising the importance of methodological pluralism to addressing different cleavages (WGSG, 1984).

Notwithstanding, as evidenced by post-structuralist and feminist geographers, research is intrinsically political, for the relationship between research subject and object is a power relationship (Gibson-Graham, 1994; Rose, 1997; Morrow, Hawkins and Kern, 2015). This inextricable relationship starts with the research design, where the researcher frames and selects participants to fit an arbitrary methodology; research design and conduct is an exercise of power further confirmed by the researcher's educational, financial, and social privileges (Rose, 1997). This unavoidable dilemma can be addressed through permanent exercises of positionality and reflexivity – recognising and acknowledging one's position as partial, tied to one's gender, race, class, language, location, and many other cleavages (Rose, 1997).

The dilemma persists, as gender continues to be an important axis influencing the research process. For instance, traditional discussions on the presence of women in the field are updated to the contemporary world, wherein the gendered perception of risk and safety often hinder the female work (WGSG, 1984; Flick, 2002; Pain, 2000; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2015). Concurrently, common phenomena such as researcher effect³⁶ may be catalysed by the researcher's profile, as research participants may feel compelled to provide responses that would be preferable or ideal, based on the researcher's gender or race, for example (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Furthermore, the researcher's gender impacts in even finer scales, for issues like gender pay gap, exploitation, harassment and third work shift are proven to impact directly on researcher's work and their consequent position and success in academia (Bain and Cummings, 2000; Cloke et al., 2004; Williams, 2005; CohenMiller, 2013; Maddrell et al., 2016; Yousaf and Schmiede, 2016). On another note, information sources can be heavily gendered; for instance, official research institutes still use purely quantitative techniques which, allied with the use of medicalised language (i.e. 'male' or 'female' – see Chapter Three) that may dim or

³⁶ Also known as Hawthorne effect, refers to changes in setting and participants' behaviour due to the presence of the researcher in the field (Sedgwick and Greenwood, 2015).

occlude (through invisibility) different genders and gendered relations (Cloke et al., 2004).

It is argued that feminist geographers introduced subject-centred methods, i.e. in-depth interviews, focus groups, artwork, and everyday journals, traditionally related to the social sciences, to Human Geography (WGSG, 1984). Feminist geographers still advocate for these methods to illuminate the complexities of human research, due to the importance of employing methods that consider everyday experiences and assure the participant's place of speech. McDowell (1988, p.165) has argued the use of multiple information sources and mixed methods, by stating that 'in order to excavate women's experiences, feminist methods should value subjectivity, personal involvement, the qualitative and unquantifiable, complexity and uniqueness, and an awareness of the context within which the specific under investigation takes place'. Valentine (2007) updated this statement by advocating that Geography must consider and examine intersectional dynamics to provide a deeper view of spatialized oppressions and identities – an idea later reinforced by Lykke (2010) regarding feminist research as a whole.

Questions about the traditional ways of doing Human Geography, criticising the traditional positivist approach, have been permanently cultivated by feminist geographers, in a movement that aims to embrace, and foment, inclusive research. Consequently, the commitment to social change towards gender equality must be on top of feminist geographers' horizon when designing research; data and results are the basis to showing gaps, mapping locations, and pointing solutions, thus fighting inequalities.

4.2. Methodological Approaches

The present research is positioned at the intersection of digital geographies and gender and feminist geographies. The choice of a case study helps to materialise and approximate the research questions by posing them in their setting, which provides much useful access to the context of the phenomenon. In the next section, the choice for a case study is explained in the context of this research, sewing philosophical approach and methods together.

4.2.1. Multiple Instrumental Case Study

Case studies are specific instances that illustrate how a general principle fits reality, providing a narrow and intensive focus on a specific problem (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014). Research benefits from this unique instance of analysis when the phenomenon needs to be observed in its context, prioritising participants' experiences (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The data corpus is strengthened, and its credibility is increased using multiple sources (i.e. triangulation). Additionally, case studies may foment changes on an adverse reality through the critique to practices and the exposition of particular weaknesses.

The rationale for choosing a case study in this investigation lies in the relevance of the context to the research question, as boundaries between context and phenomena in online settings are blurred. Furthermore, it is impossible – and meaningless – to control participants' behaviour in the field (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Gender dynamics are localised and must be examined in their context, with the least possible control or influence on participants' behaviour. Moreover, when related to online gaming, these relations are necessarily tied to a certain game program and connected to the Internet; the slightest change to the configuration may represent important changes to interactions, population, and consequent relationships. By looking at phenomena and context and considering the overlapping of both, a case study can provide accurate images of reality and consequent insightful reflections on causes, consequences, and future policies. Additionally, the choice of one case also helps to frame and fasten a broader research question and topic by placing it in a specific time, place, program, and activity, giving the study a reasonable scope (Baxter and Jack, 2008), being particularly useful for exploratory, base research.

The choice for a case study is grounded in the primary intention to understand the role of gender relations in the construction of virtual spaces. In the present research, the case was chosen to give support to the understanding of a particular phenomenon – gendered spatial practices in online places; therefore, the case is instrumental, as it is not intrinsically the main interest (Stake, 1995). As two contextually different cases are compared in a search for differences and similarities, thus revealing important contrasts within one case, this is also a multiple, or collective case study (Yin, 2013).

Drawbacks in performing instrumental case studies include low generalisability and replicability. Additionally, multiple-case studies present a risk of precision loss, in some degree, due to inherent complexity, and the researcher needs to find a balance

between breadth and depth. Another general disadvantage regards to sampling, as case studies usually require sizeable samples to ensure consistency (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014).

As previously mentioned, case studies prioritise the use of multiple data sources and types; consequently, a mixed method approach was chosen to reflect the complexity of the setting, its population, and social relations. However, the use of multiple data sources is time-consuming and often overwhelming by prioritising the collection of vast amounts of complex, rich data. The next section explains the choice of mixed methods, presenting the rationale and detailing the approach, finally forming the foundations for the research design and methods.

4.2.2. Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods approach

The collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data in a research project is known as a mixed methods approach. In this strategy, data collection and analysis is organised into distinct phases occurring sequentially or concurrently, and where each method serves a function; generally there is full integration of the data corpus for analysis and discussion (Creswell, 2014). In the context of this research, a mixed methodology was chosen to bring up a stronger understanding of the object and phenomena, while the joint methods complement and strengthen each other. Sequential designs provide an overview of the research problem, followed by an in-depth exploration of participants' views on those results (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). Alternatively, explanatory designs increase the validity of qualitative results when similar questions are asked along with the various methods, by confirming trends and themes or revealing complexity through contradicting trends (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Still, mixed methods studies come with drawbacks that include a longer time to collect and analyse two types of data, and increased complexity in integrating findings. The research purpose and questions presented in the Introduction guided the procedures on the design and conduct of the present mixed method study.

Provided that the study aims to identify and explore the nature and extent of gender relations, this investigation demanded an incursion into meanings and perceptions; therefore, the emphasis was primarily given to qualitative data, with design and conduct of semi-structured interviews in the second phase of the study. Additionally, qualitative participant observation ran in parallel to keep up to date with possible

changes in the setting, and to provide additional clarity on languages and customs that appeared in data collection.

Traditionally, explanatory sequential designs are presented in the literature as starting with collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data, following a predominantly quantitative design (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). However, in this study, the research problem and questions focus on subjective meanings, which requires rich qualitative data. For this reason, quantitative questionnaires surveyed the case and brought initial information about players' perceptions of the topic, alongside descriptive statistics that charted the exploration. Even though the online surveys reached a large sample, the questions were broad, and the analysis was general, with the use of basic statistics and hybrid technique (i.e. content analysis). Besides, the strategy of starting with a mass survey created a bottom-up approach where a larger number of people indicated trends that informed the further research phases. The consecutive qualitative phase was extensive and focused on collecting data from several different sources, followed by a complex examination that included content and thematic analysis, individually and across sources, sentences, and themes. Figure 45 shows the schematic diagram of the research design, with the weight difference between quantitative (in lowercase) and qualitative (in uppercase) methods.

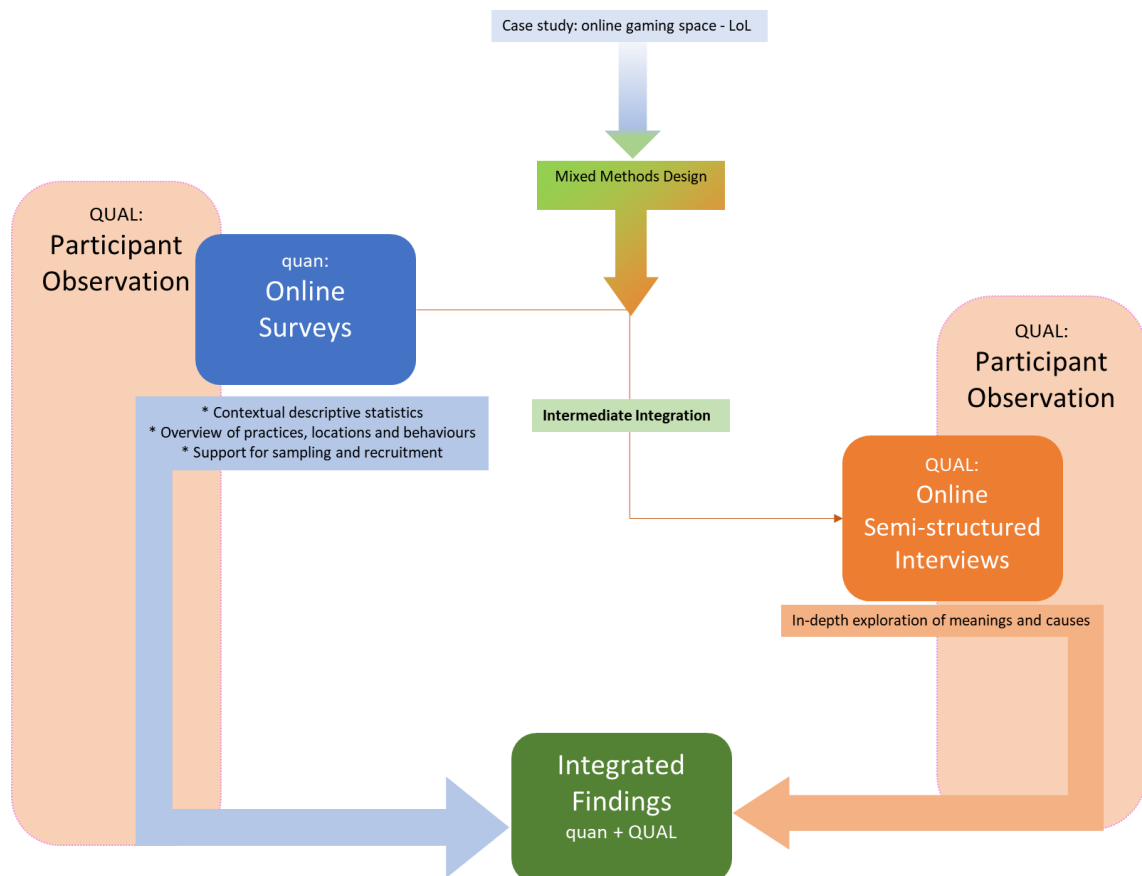


Figure 44: Explanatory Sequential mixed methods approach as applied in the present research project.

An important distinctive feature in mixed methods studies is the integration of approaches, findings and discussion (Creswell, 2014). As presented in Figure 45, integration happened first in the intermediary phase as a broad analysis of survey data has informed interview design and recruitment. Following, quantitative and qualitative phases were finally joined in the analysis phase, in which quantitative and qualitative datasets were scrutinised together to bring up extensive findings.

The surveys were applied to a broad, typical sample, and the in-depth interviews included a range of typical and outlier participants. This decision was also informed by the philosophical grounds founding this research, bearing in mind the exploratory nature of the research questions.

4.2.3. Research questions and associated methods

Recapitulating the research specific objectives presented in the Introduction:

1. Are League spaces gendered? If so, in what ways?
2. Are there any gendered homosocial spaces inside League? Why were they created and how are they organised?
3. What is the nature of gendered relations and gendered agency in the digital spaces of League?
4. Comparing players' experiences and attitudes in Brazil and the UK, are there any differences in gendered relations within national/regional spaces of League?

As preconised in the mixed method approach, all chosen methods aimed at responding to all research questions. As shown in Table 3, participant observation was employed as a design aid, and did not yield analysable data. Following, online surveys generated data to be examined through content analysis (qualitative data) and descriptive statistics (quantitative data), while interview data (qualitative) went through content and thematic analysis, respectively.

Specific objectives	Data Collection	Data analysis
Aid to Design	<i>Participant Observation</i>	N/A
1, 2, 3 and 4	<i>Online Survey</i>	Content Analysis Descriptive Statistics
1, 2, 3 and 4	<i>Interviews (primary and secondary)</i>	Content and Thematic Analysis

Table 3: Research methods and their association with the research questions.

The following section explains the choices that led to the use of participant observation as a design aid and describes the activities in the first phase of research.

4.3. Participant Observation – Informing Research Design

As discussed in Chapter One, the chosen case is complex and features intricate spatial and social arrangements. Observation methods are a good choice for studies conducted in complex natural settings due to their efficiency in discerning behaviours by exploring non-verbal communication in its context (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Intimately connected to case studies, participant observation is a strategy that often facilitates data collection, and helps to unravel fine relations and points of friction through which physical and digital spaces are produced (Morrow, Hawkins and Kern, 2015).

Participant observation consists of engaging in an activity as the setting's natural population usually does and taking structured notes as a form of gathering data. Other data collection methods may be employed during observations, such as interviews and surveys, making participant observation more of a strategy than a method (Cole, 2005). The choice of participant-as-observer role is grounded in the need to be part of the setting to understand its *modus operandi* and peculiarities (Nørskov and Rask, 2011).

In general, participant observation in online spaces is a low-risk activity for informants when the researcher does not act deceptively towards the users. Regardless, ethical data collection through participant observation in digital environments is hindered by significant challenges posed by the venue and the method. For instance, the use of aliases and avatars, although inherent to online gaming, can be interpreted as covert observation, a highly controversial approach in both online and offline settings due to the potential deception of participants. Alternatively, the choice of not disclosing a researcher's position may be particularly useful in settings where full consent is not always possible (van Amstel, 2013); and the technique can be useful for uncovering natural practices while avoiding issues of observer effect (Spicker, 2011). Nevertheless, the right to informed consent was judged inviolable regardless of the potential benefits of the technique (European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), 2011). Due to Riot Game's strict rules about the use of identifiable personal information, it is also not possible to identify players in the lobby or maps. Allied with the insufficient time available for communication and rapport before and after matches, the presented issues ruled inviable obtaining informed consent for observation in solo matches.

Due to the present ethical challenges, participant observation was employed as an unstructured activity of environmental examinations and autoethnographic exercises aimed exclusively at research design. To ensure participant protection, no recordings, screenshots, and quotes were produced during observations, and users were not identified.

Participant observations started in March 2017. Prior to any match, the Summoner's Code and the Terms of Use were fully read, informing the researcher's actions, and preventing any misuse of the gaming tool. The researcher was entirely new to the gaming community; a gaming account was set up with a gender-neutral login, a secure password and an equally gender-neutral in-game name. After the account setup, the game application was downloaded, installed (and frequently updated) to the researcher's personal computer. As an exploratory strategy, this activity aimed at provide familiarity and intimacy with the setting, its population, languages and practices (Cole, 2005). Moreover, based on content naturally generated by people in gaming arenas, it was possible to draw initial insights about the game's spatial organisation and social dynamics.

The researcher engaged with the Tutorial play to familiarise with the gaming tools and commands; after a couple of tries, she started playing matches in solo Coop vs AI and PvP gameplay. Matches duration varied with the choice of map, the longest ones placed in Summoner's Rift (average 60 minutes long), and the shortest in Howling Abyss (average 20 minutes long). Although champion choice is restricted to those owned by the player, the researcher alternated champions (using those available for free) before each match, when possible. As a player can only see in detail their lane in a match, lanes and roles were also alternated in each session whenever possible, ensuring observation of as many interactions as possible.

The main communication means during a League match is via text chat, but visual communication through avatar choice has prime importance in CVG for it showcases a participant's level, engagement, skills, and abilities. Avatar representation has a symbiotic relationship with the game environment, being invaluable to understand representation, perceptions and restrictions that drive human interaction in those spaces (Williams, 2007). For this reason, allied to the observation of text chats, avatar observations in this research focused on the investigator's experiences in contrast with her mates' champion choices, as well as a more general observation of avatar visuals

and movement throughout the maps and configuration choices (i.e. champion/role, skins), and consequent interactions.

The observation was guided by semi-structured digital field notes that included information about date and time, chosen map/game mode, chosen avatar, chosen role/lane, as well as nature (not contents) of any relevant communication addressed at the researcher, and the researcher's reflections and feelings about that session. Each field note was completed as soon as possible after the observation session to minimise information loss.

Although participant observation is useful to generate thick descriptions of settings and behaviours on and offline, its data is not enough to gather complete and reliable accounts of observed phenomena and should be complemented with robust quantitative and qualitative data from preferably diverse sources (Nørskov and Rask, 2011). Other disadvantages include the possibility of 'going native', i.e. researcher's deep immersion in the community and over-identification with their informants, an especially high risk in this context (see section 4.1).

Although impaired by the ethical reservations, participant observation was a rich experience that aided to the design of surveys and interviews employed in subsequent phases; it has also provided rough themes that contributed to the narrower data analysis. This strategy served as an autoethnographic exercise that bore important reflections about research ethics and positionality. Following, this chapter presents the data collection methods applied in the research.

4.4. Data Collection

4.4.1. Online Surveys

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through two web-based cross-sectional surveys, using two self-developed and pilot tested questionnaires. The instruments were tailored to amateur and professional League players, focusing on the public's experience and practices, the locales, and players' perception of gender relations in gaming spaces. As an exploratory tool, it was applied in the second phase of the study with the intention of uncovering practices and behaviours. Within the mixed methods design, the surveys aimed at providing a contextual overview of the case through descriptive statistics and qualitative description. The surveys also contributed to sampling and recruitment strategies for the Interview phase.

Online surveys were chosen for various reasons. For instance, the sample was selected from an online-natural, digitally literate population, making this instrument a prime choice. Online surveys have a broad reach, optimal for wide geographical coverage, making them ideal for use with large, multinational samples (David and Sutton, 2011). Aside from the wide reach, other advantages to online surveying include the low cost in development and distribution (Evans and Mathur, 2005), and suitability to address sensitive topics due to potential anonymity and no physical contact between researcher and respondent (Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

Software dedicated to online surveys is easy to use. Features like automatic design reduce the time spent on development and formatting (David and Sutton, 2011). Once distributed, data collection tends to be swift, easing and reducing the time dedicated to the instrument's piloting and evaluation as well as to raw data collection. Question formatting is diverse and includes the use of text boxes (for open-ended questions), as well as categorical multi-choice, matrix, and scale (for closed-ended questions), among others. It is easy to replicate a digital survey and make different versions, including translations. Another advantage of online surveying is the simpler data management, achieved by automatic data filing into a computer server. This feature reduces the time spent on filing and organising, facilitating further data coding and analysis (David and Sutton, 2011).

Although more flexible, easier and quicker to answer (Galesic, 2006), closed-ended questions commonly over-simplify potentially complex responses (Wright, 2005) and facilitate the falsification of answers (David and Sutton, 2011). To enrich it, open-ended questions were added to the questionnaire aiming to ameliorate that drawback by giving depth to participants responses. Nevertheless, the efficiency of unstandardized questions in surveys is often questioned as being more time-consuming and relying on the respondent's knowledge and experience, which may not suffice if the survey is the only data collection instrument (David and Sutton, 2011). Additionally, qualitative questions often generate participant burden, which can increase online surveys' already high dropout levels (Galesic, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

The surveys were developed considering best practices of questionnaire design, aiming to the production of an intelligible, accessible text, with increased reach and response rates, and reduced dropout occurrence. Due to the sample and topic characteristics, gamified surveys were considered as an alternative in the early development of this

methodology. However, surveys developed with this technique are more complex to develop and answer, having the same or lower effectivity and response rates when compared to traditional online surveys (Harms *et al.*, 2015).

As mentioned, one important drawback in the use of surveys are the low response rates (Wright, 2005). Mobile devices are preponderant amongst the UK population between sixteen and twenty-four years old (i.e. sixty-one per cent penetration rate), and this trend drops to thirty-two per cent when it reaches the population of forty-five years of age and over (Ofcom, 2016). In Brazil, these numbers are significantly lower, whereas only twenty-five per cent of the country's population has Internet access via mobile handhelds (Brasil, CGI and NIC, 2017). To increase reach and access, and consequent response rate, the instrument was developed for computer and mobile handhelds (i.e. smartphones and tablet computers). Consequently, Brazil and UK-aimed instruments were tested in the most popular web browsers, i.e. Chrome, Explorer/Edge, Firefox, Safari and Opera, both in computer (i.e. Microsoft Windows and Mac iOS) and mobile (i.e. Android and iOS) systems.

Survey's design also focused on respondent burden reduction. For instance, ten minutes is considered an acceptable timing for face-to-face questionnaires; however, that pace is reduced to half when it comes to online surveys (Toepoel, 2016). Specific question types (i.e. matrix and open-ended), long loading time in web pages, unpleasant visual design and question positioning also contribute to respondent burden (Galesic, 2006). There is no consensus on practices to prevent and reduce survey dropout; nevertheless, good design practices including audience-tailored questionnaires, shorter answering time and the use of incentives are widely recognised (Galesic, 2006). Even though page scrolling visual design ensures the respondent a full visualisation of the instrument paging, the automatic recording of responses at page-turning was considered an important advantage as it reduces data loss. Checks and routing are also improved in page-turning in contrast with scrolling design (Toepoel, 2016). Unfortunately, this instrument was not developed or tested towards visual impairment accessibility, which may have admittedly hindered the participation of disabled people. Nevertheless, League (as the majority of video and electronic games) relies on primary stimuli (i.e. visual), which makes it unsuitable for visually impaired people (Yuan, Folmer and Harris, 2011).

Question preparation also considered language; aiming at two different populations, the main instrument was translated and adapted to each public. A single, bilingual

instrument was first considered; however, piloting revealed that this strategy could increase the incidence of false or misunderstanding responses, as participants were free to choose the survey's language. To avoid that, two different files and web addresses were developed and distributed to each corresponding sample. Questions were written in a colloquial language and used accessible terms and population-specific terminology (slang and jargon) whenever possible.

Sequencing of questions can contribute to a better response quality if the survey is designed with the aims of good flow and logic (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Inadequate sequencing is also considered a source of respondents' burden (Galesic, 2006). The questionnaires started with easier/gentler questions to introduce the topic, tapering down to more demanding or delicate questions that form the inquiry's core (Manfreda and Vehovar, 2002; Vehovar and Manfreda, 2008; Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Evidence disagree whether personal/demographic scanning questions should be presented at the beginning or at the end of the survey (Galesic, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Notwithstanding the best practices leveraged by the literature, decisions regarding question positioning were demanding and carefully reflected upon before releasing the final version. Considering the sensitive topic and the questionnaire's length, demographic questions were positioned at the end of the surveys, after the main section, to increase responsivity to the main questions. Nevertheless, it is understood that these choices may have impacted on responsivity and dropout levels, and consequently on the demographic statistics presented by the end of this chapter.

As discussed in section 4.6.1, informed consent was sought at the beginning of the survey. In the instrument, a welcome page featured a short text introducing the project, with clear and detailed information about anonymity, data management and withdrawal of participation. Instead of a legally binding signature, two mandatory multiple-choice questions were added before the main questions: 'Do you understand what the survey is about?', and 'Do you agree to participate in the research?'. A negative response to the first question opened a window with more detailed and accessible information about the research aims, and the participant was again asked whether they wished to proceed. A negative answer to the latter directed the participant to the end of the survey, and no other responses were collected. This strategy aimed at ensuring respondents' awareness of the implications and guaranteed free acceptance to participate, but the risk of misinformation due to inattentive

reading, as well as deceitful practices such as identity fraud must not be ruled out in this type of research.

Although limited, the right to withdrawal (see section 4.6.1) was guaranteed and participants were readily informed of it. As stressed in the information page, survey completion could be interrupted at any time by closing the web browser. However, as the online form registers responses at each page turn, a full withdrawal was impossible after each response was submitted, a limitation of which participants were informed of in the information and consent page.

After the information page, the survey started with three single-answer, multiple-choice questions reflecting variables like involvement levels, personal preferences, and habits. The core survey part comprised four multiple-choice questions (three single-answer and one multiple-answer). Questions in the main section aimed at provide initial clues to answering the research questions (see section 4.2.3), by referring to the following factors: player's perception of gender in all spheres of the gaming space; sociocultural conflicts within the gaming community; acts and practices of agency as response to gendered conflicts; team formation and related gendered dynamics. These factors were identified during the participant observation and in the literature previously reviewed in this thesis.

The surveys' final section focused on collecting data regarding the demographic characteristics of the sample. All demographic items, except age and country of residence, were not mandatory. An option "Prefer not to say" was available to ensure participant's right to privacy regarding sensitive or socially undisclosed information, i.e. gender identity and sexual orientation.

In the Age topic, five multiple-choice options were presented with age ranges between eighteen years of age and fifty-one or older. Aside from drawing a sample profile, this question had a twofold aim: first, to reinforce the legally binding status of the minimum age of participants (although it does not impede younger people to falsify their responses, as discussed earlier); second, to reveal potential intergenerational conflicts within the dataset.

The Residence item comprised different options for each national sample: Brazilian participants chose one of the twenty-seven federation states³⁷ from a drop-down menu; in the British drop-down menu, participants chose a country within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland sovereignty³⁸. Due to researcher familiarity, contrasts between Brazilian federal states were easier to identify; alternatively, classifying participants by country within the UK could unveil interesting regional contrasts.

As for the Gender Identity topic, eight different and interchangeable gender identities³⁹ (Walkley, 2013) were presented in a multiple answer question type; the same structure was used for the item regarding sexual orientation, where five options⁴⁰ were available for multiple-answer. This tactic was informed by the feminist standpoint guiding this project, being anchored in the principle of respecting, and giving visibility to marginalised groups. Provided that gender is a central topic in this research, questions evoking gender identity and sexual orientation were developed to be as inclusive as possible, thus increasing responsiveness from and representativeness of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other (LGBTQI+) participants (Walkley, 2013). Due to the vast number of possible categories, the “Other” option was available alongside text entry fields. Moreover, although acknowledging issues of sexual difference, this investigation does not focus on physical or biological bodies. Therefore, terms evoking physiological sexual characteristics, i.e. female, male, or intersex, were ruled out as inappropriate.

After data collection, limitations were identified with regards to the questions using the term ‘Gender’. Some responses evoke a lack of knowledge or confusion regarding some terms used in the survey. For instance, several participants mentioned issues of sexuality when asked about gender; when asked to talk about their single-gender team configuration, one participant said "heterosexual", and said that they are "all of the same gender". On another case, a participant said that his single-gendered team was formed by male players "*because I identify as a man*". Although these responses did not impair data analysis, they raise important reflections about question design, the

³⁷ Acre, Alagoas, Amapá, Amazonas, Bahia, Ceará, Distrito Federal, Espírito Santo, Goiás, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Minas Gerais, Pará, Paraíba, Paraná, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondônia, Roraima, Santa Catarina, São Paulo, Sergipe and Tocantins.

³⁸ England, Isle of Man and Channel Islands, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

³⁹ Woman, Man, Non-Binary, Gender Neutral/Neutrois, Androgyne, Genderfluid, Bigender, and Agender/None.

⁴⁰ Heterosexual, Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual, Asexual, Bisexual, Pansexual.

use of jargon and the state of gender and sexuality discussions in different countries and cultures.

Finally, official ethnic categories and races were utilised in the item regarding ethnicity. The Brazilian instrument presented the six categories⁴¹ utilised by the Government in the latest census (IBGE, 2012); the British instrument presented the five ethnic groups⁴² surveyed in the latest census (ONS, 2012b). Official categories were chosen first due to a higher familiarity of terms amongst each sample, and to reflect the survey results on available demographics, thus permitting a comparison of the sample to the wider national population profiles; given that some categories are unique to one country (e.g. Indigenous in Brazil and Gypsy/Irish traveller in the UK), ethnicity-based, inter-sample comparison is limited.

The goal of the quantitative phase was to characterise the population and identify recurrent patterns regarding gendered dynamics in the community; nevertheless, provided that qualitative data hold a higher weight in this study, the surveys were not fully quantitative. The instrument's main section presented six text-entry type (open-ended) questions focused on participant's individual and collective experiences, and expectations of conflict and agency. While ensuring the collection of rich qualitative data that honours participants' words and accounts, open-ended survey questions are useful for uncovering patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013a), and can help to identify issues otherwise ignored by the researcher (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009). In the context of this research, a mixed questionnaire helped to raise initial themes, facilitating interview design and posterior integration of findings. This study benefited from open-ended survey questions for they helped to reveal important, unique information about the sample, which heavily informed posterior recruitment strategies.

A first draft of the questionnaire, in English, was prepared for evaluation by the Ethics Committee; after ethical clearance, the questionnaire was further translated and adapted to Brazilian Portuguese, and each version of the questionnaire was distributed to respective samples in Brazil and UK. The instrument was piloted amongst a small sample of the target population (n=4) to verify relevance, intelligibility, and applicability, as well as to spot any malfunctioning in the digital instrument. Pilot

⁴¹ Black, Indigenous, Mixed background, Pardo, Yellow/of Asian descent, White.

⁴² Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British, Mixed or Multiple, Other, White or White British.

participants were also prompted to give feedback on visual design and question positioning.

Participants' physical, psychological and interactional feelings of privacy breach (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009) can arise any time from recruitment to filling the survey forms. The researcher took the responsibility of developing questions and choosing and addressing recruitment sites in a manner to reduce possible distress, considering participants' autonomy and voluntariness, as well as researcher's and respondents' protection (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009). Details of the ethical considerations can be found in section 4.6.

Sampling and Recruitment

As this study focuses on gamers' lived experiences and their perception of gender relations in gaming spaces, the population of interest comprised League players. To achieve comparison between countries, this population was then narrowed to those players residing in the UK and Brazil, respectively. Participants also had to be eighteen years of age and older, for the sensitivity of the topic could trigger dangerous psychological responses on younger participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Cross-sectional data were collected within a fixed timeframe between April and July 2017.

A fully representative sample was not viable in this project, for the field characteristics hampered the selection of a fully stratified sample (i.e. the absence of detailed demographical statistics about League's number of players – impact on probability and representative samples; players' enforced anonymity – impact on sampling frame). Consequently, the sampling process for online surveys comprised a combination of sampling strategies which aimed at the most representative sample and ethical recruitment as possible.

Envisaging further recruitment, specialised online communities were targeted at the beginning of the design. These groups, located in social media websites and online fora (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit), were tracked and observed during the early stages of research. This strategy can be classified as purposive cluster sampling, as relevant groups were defined according to purposive criteria when a complete population list (i.e. census) was not available. Group size was an important factor, as representativeness levels are directly proportional to cluster size.

After the survey's final design probes and piloting, the communities were picked according to further purposive criteria, i.e. accessibility, social and political diversity

(e.g. not only feminist groups), size, location, participants' autonomy, and relevance of discussions. In this phase, recruitment practicalities were also at stake, such as the possibility of communicating the research and advertising the survey. Due to practical issues, some groups (i.e. those hosted on Twitter) were dropped from the sampling pool at this stage.

Opportunity sampling followed when, from the narrowed pool, rulebooks and gatekeepers were consulted prior to advertisement. When applicable, some groups were excluded from the pool due to internal rules or negative responses from gatekeepers. Based on local knowledge and past experiences, opportunity sampling is often portrayed as less demanding and weaker in external validity (David and Sutton, 2011). However, it is a powerful strategy to approach unframed, uncooperative, and hard-to-access samples like the one in this research (Jupp, 2006). Furthermore, low response rates for this method are widely documented (Galesic, 2006; Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2013a), as purposive samples are more likely to provide higher responsiveness.

After recruitment strategies were defined, tailored advertisement pieces (Figure 46) were posted in each selected site, inviting respondents, and encouraging survey propagation. This practice can be classified as voluntary associated with snowball/cascade sampling, in which samples are self-selected and follow participants' willingness and interest. Snowball/cascade samples often rely on the researcher's local knowledge and past experiences to find a small group of participants and encourage them to invite new ones. Snowball voluntary sampling is effective for reaching vulnerable subjects from an unframed sample in uncooperative settings, as well as for addressing sensitive topics such as gender and sexuality (Jupp, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

Although successful, the sampling strategies employed in this project bear important limitations with significant impact on the dataset. First, cluster samples can be a source of bias because group characteristics may influence subject characteristics (and vice versa); for that reason, groups may not be fully representative of the population (Jupp, 2006). Problems with purposive samples also lie in biasing; however, a strong internal consistency with the epistemological basis, allied with reasonable selection criteria are powerful tools to mitigate misrepresentation and bias (Jupp, 2006). The use of voluntary samples is ideal for ethical reasons; however, every participant who voluntarily attends to recruitment carry their drives which, depending on the topic,

may distort the dataset with purely antagonistic or agreeing accounts. This issue is virtually irrepressible regarding ethical research with human participants but must be acknowledged in data analysis and any generalisation made from the data. Finally, although every care was taken in the choice of adult-centred recruitment sites, the nature of remote, online data collection makes it impossible to assure every participant's age adequateness. It is important to stress that identity fraud is a risk in all forms of online communication.

Sample size is critical to achieve a comparison between both groups and to address the complexity of details inherent to the data. Nevertheless, a qualitative study has different aims and standards when compared to hypothetic-deductive studies (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014), which justifies the choice for the overlapping of several approaches in this activity's design. In large projects, a survey sample must not be smaller than one-hundred people (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Due to the large worldwide population, the surveys aimed at a minimum of two hundred full responses each.

Recruitment in social media has advantages, including country-wise approach, invaluable for this research (Toepoel, 2016). This method can be used at very low costs, although costs may apply for wider advertising in those websites. The most popular social network websites in the UK are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Google+ (Ofcom, 2016); in Brazil, Facebook is the leader with sixty-three per cent of all users (Statista, 2018b). Reddit is reportedly the most used public forum amongst League players in Brazil and the UK. Survey respondents were then recruited from selected subgroups on Facebook and Reddit as identified in Phase 1. To minimise ethical issues about spam and unwanted electronic contact (Evans and Mathur, 2005), announcement posts and invitations were adapted for each site accordingly, and when the target site was a 'walled garden' (i.e. open for viewing, but closed to participation and commenting), the researcher asked gatekeepers for permission to post such material.



Figure 45: Miguel Haru Acioli (2017). Bespoke digital flyer for online participant recruitment (Brazilian Portuguese and English versions). Image source: game screenshot (Riot Games).

As aforementioned, an initial pool of six Facebook groups, twenty Twitter profiles and three subreddits were drawn from both samples. The profiles on Twitter did not accept private messages, which hindered the attempts to ethical communication; therefore, these groups were dropped from the recruitment pool. Aiming to respect participants' right to privacy in online sites (see section 4.6.2), recruitment sought to avoid unwanted and intrusive contact means. Before proceeding to advertisement in the identified groups, gatekeepers were individually contacted through the available means; when the person ignored the message, no further communication was attempted. Starting recruitment, each group's manager/gatekeeper was identified and contacted via less intrusive means (i.e. Facebook message/Wave tool; Reddit's private messaging tool); a short text apologised for the intrusion, introduced the researcher, explained the reasons for contact and the research aims in general lines. If authorised,

entrance to the group was requested and, once granted; the flyer was posted alongside a short text comprising the topic and researcher’s contact details.

To avoid early depletion of the sample pools, announcements were made in purposive intervals according to demand – if not enough responses were achieved after a certain period, more groups were contacted. The first recruitment round started in late April 2017 and lasted for twenty days, with a turnout of only thirty responses from the UK sample in contrast with one-hundred and forty-five responses from the Brazilian sample. This outcome forced a change in the recruitment strategy, with a need for the expansion of pools and a more regular advertisement. As a result, Reddit was excluded from the recruitment pool, as Facebook proved to be the most prolific of all listed sites.

The second recruitment round focused on daily purposive searches for relevant groups on Facebook. After identified, relevant groups were then registered beside gatekeeper’s name and web address. Details of processing – i.e. ‘Gatekeeper contacted’, ‘Authorised’, ‘Denied’, ‘Advertised’, ‘Dissolved/Discarded’ and ‘Reported’ per day – were digitally filed, allowing for simple and effective management of recruitment sites and activities. Finishing recruitment, the total pool of groups was of seventy in Brazilian sample, with fourteen reached; forty-seven in UK sample, with nineteen reached in total.

Online surveys were conducted between 27th April and 28th June 2017; participation and responsivity indicators are shown in Table 4. Participants were mostly young, male, heterosexual, and White, as shown in Figures 47, 48 and 49.

	BR	UK
Total valid responses	395	249
Fully completed	301	167
Fully completed (percentage)	76.2%	67%
Waivers (unanswered validation questions)	40	77
Average response time (minutes)	13.7	16.4

Table 4: Surveys responsivity indicators

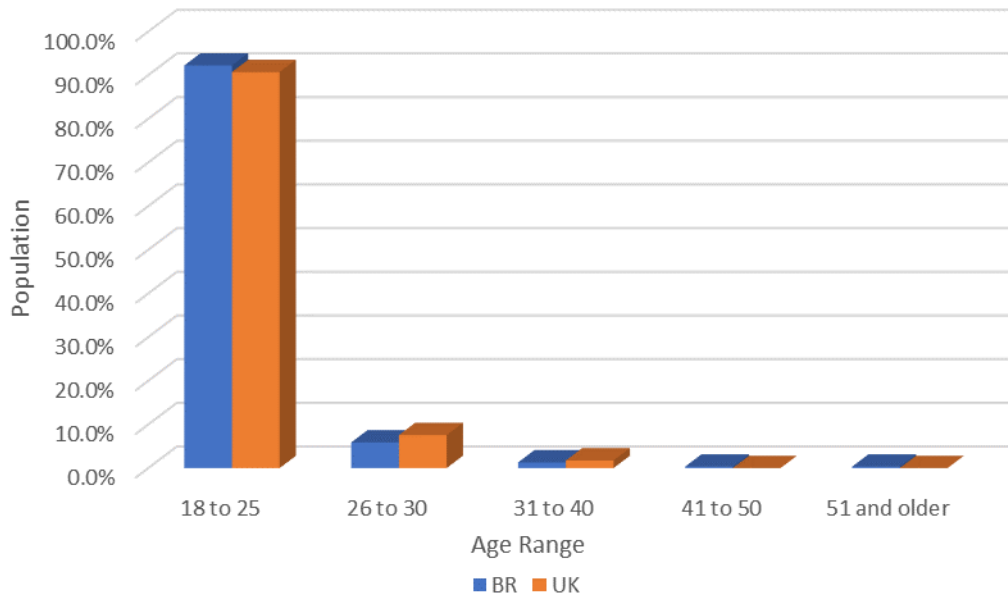


Figure 46: Survey participants – Age range (per country)

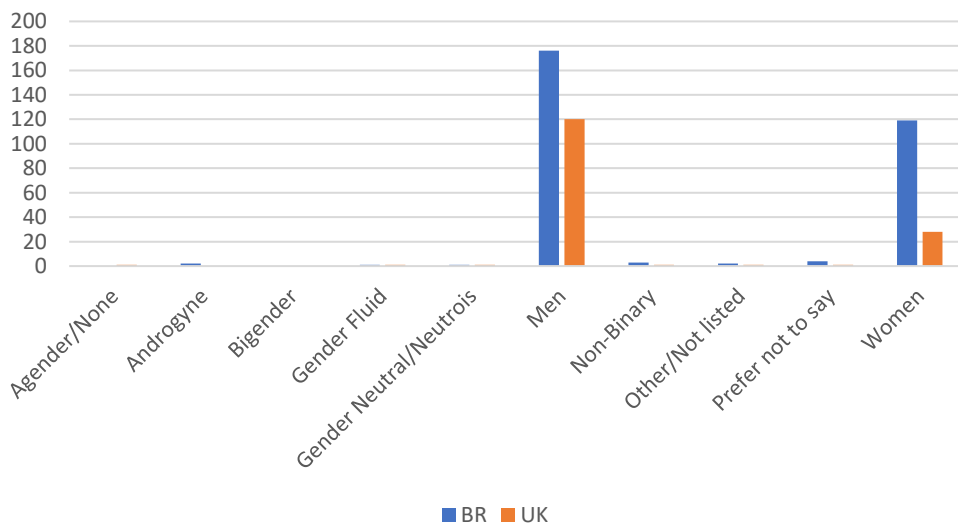


Figure 47: Survey participants – Gender, per country

Survey response rates dropped; this limitation is noticeable in the absence of responses to non-mandatory, open-ended questions in both samples, but more striking in the UK sample. It is uncertain, but the dropout may be a consequence of the longer duration of the surveys (more than 10 minutes).

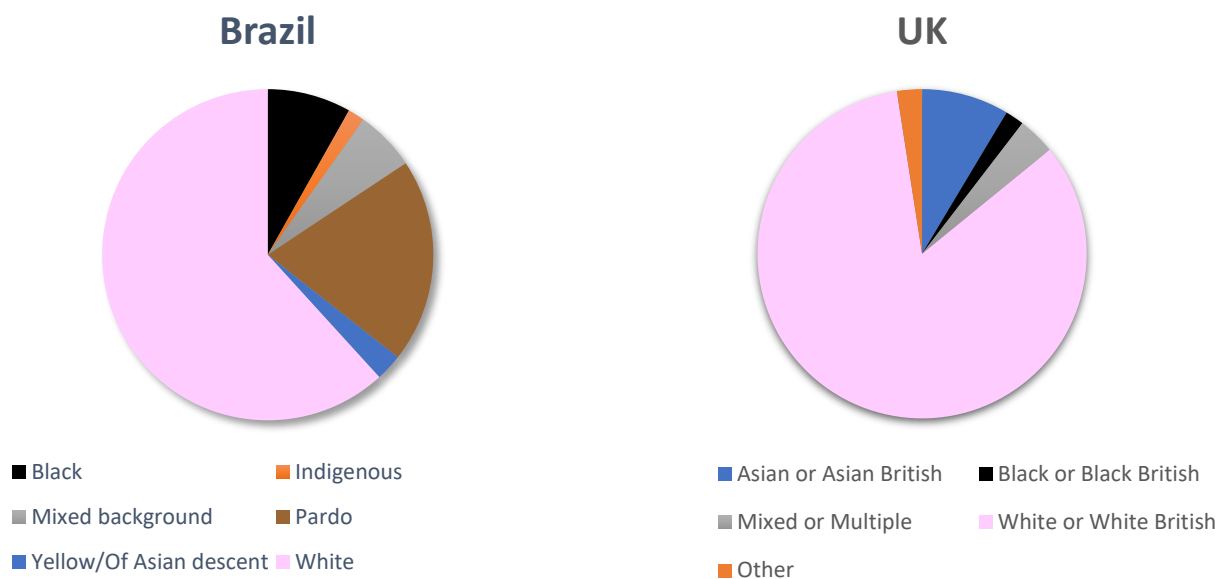


Figure 48: Survey participants – Ethnicity, per country

4.4.2. Online Interviews

The most common qualitative data collection method, interviews are ubiquitous in contemporary life, often regarded as the best method to personalise data collection by honouring individual voices (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Enclosing a myriad of different styles, online or face-to-face interviews provide a flexible design that enables the interviewee to express her point of view with relative freedom, although with a given focus, specified by the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). In contrast with surveys, unstandardized/reflexive interviews have higher response rates and provide richer results because they facilitate a tailored approach to each participant, focusing on representativeness and expertise/experience, thus balancing the weaknesses of structured questionnaires (Evans and Mathur, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2013b). Advantages also include high researcher control over the process, a need for smaller samples and high accessibility, as it can be performed with virtually any population (Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

In this research, interviewees contributed, as insiders, by providing their understandings, perceptions and interpretations of the phenomena (Braun and Clarke, 2013a) to confirm patterns identified in the early stages, clarifying entangled dynamics and potential misunderstandings occurred in the previous stages (Nørskov

and Rask, 2011). Additionally, they contributed by evoking topic-related themes, later used to construct an interpretative framework (Marshall, 1996).

Online digital interviews increase participation by consistency with the sample's familiar setting and habits; furthermore, it coheres with the encompassing digital methodology, adapting established data collection methods to the reality of online settings. Another advantage of this modality is the reduction of costs and time spent on approaching informants from the two sample pools.

Nevertheless, online, or offline interviews bear a potential loss of focus and rapport between interviewer and participant; potential identity theft and fraud are also concerning for any interview type. Additionally, interviews generate rich but considerably large amounts of data, being a major source of researcher burden; although supported by modern computing software, interview transcription and coding are highly time-consuming. Similarly, informants can feel burdened, as drawbacks to participants include a sense of exposure, with increased discomfort in disclosing sensitive information (e.g. feeling judged or evaluated by the researcher). Due to the small sample size, lack of generalisability is another disadvantage of qualitative interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Issues regarding risk assessment and prevention are discussed in depth in section 4.64.

Interview design, recruitment and conduct considered the same ethical frameworks concerning face-to-face interviews (see section 4.6.2). After an initial successful approach, with a positive response from the prospective participant, a digital information and consent form was individually e-mailed; to secure participant's identification, a unique weblink directing to the instrument was generated for each participant. Information and consent forms contained thorough and clear information about the researcher's identity and affiliation, the study's nature and aims, principles of data management and use, privacy, and identity protection. Participants were informed about their unconditional right to withdraw from the study any time before data analysis started⁴³; equally, participants were made aware of the impossibility of withdrawing after the set date. The digital form sought age and identity confirmation from the participant, and they also had to confirm awareness of, and agreement with the information provided. A digital signature was collected from all participants, aside from participants' approximate location, automatically collected via IP identification.

⁴³ For most participants, the final date was 11th January 2018

All information present in the form was confirmed and debriefed by the researcher at the beginning of each encounter.

The interview guide was structured around the spheres of influence identified in the literature and online surveys (see section 5.1). Each sphere comprised up to four open-ended questions developed to prompt conversation or transition between themes. To ensure fluidity and flexibility, questions were not asked rigidly, being used as prompts, or skipped as necessary. Conversations explored individual experiences, perceptions and feelings around a player's preferences and habits, social behaviour, language, and representation, contextualised in each sphere.

Due to the nature of the research question and the participant profile, the questions were elaborated in Brazilian Portuguese and English and adapted where necessary. The interview guide was drafted several times and tested with a small sample (n=2) drawn from the survey participant pool and colleagues in the field. After piloting, the protocol was approved with small changes in question sequencing and jargon used. As discussed in the literature review chapters, the interview guide was developed with the support of theories on spatial practices, but also in observance of demands and discussions from LGBTQI+ and feminist movements in social fora. Questions were elaborated in an inclusive language; however, as observed with the surveys' experience, controversial terms were avoided unless brought up by the participant.

The protocol started with a conversation where the informant's identity was confirmed through cross-checking personal information. Following, participants were reminded of the conditions posed in the informed consent form (i.e. their freedom to interrupt and/or withdraw, and information and data use) and were motivated to avoid formalities and use slang, patois, jargon, emojis, abbreviations, and static and animated images (i.e. GIF) as form of communication. This was to ensure a more relaxed conversation by using a language familiar to most participants. An initial question regarding their relationship with the game and its importance to their life started the interview and proved to be an excellent rapport-building question, often revealing the responsiveness and interest of the participant; it also prompted answers to many of the guiding topics. The interviews finished with a debriefing question that propelled informants to pose their questions, clarify any issues or raise their concerns.

Interviews' conduct was informal, adapted to participant's location, responsiveness, and experience level; to ensure a natural conversation flow, questions did not rigidly follow stated wording and order (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Each encounter lasted an

average ninety minutes, and most participants were keen to talk, as shown by the rich information present in the transcripts. Due to the intensity of focus, no more than two interviews took place each day, as more than this was significantly tiring for the researcher. To avoid interviewer's burden and data loss, each interview was processed and filed as soon as possible after each session. Although encouraged to, no participants used images; a few used emojis/emoticons and a couple of participants enriched their information by sending hyperlinks to videos and websites they found relevant.

No transcription activity was necessary, given that the chats were conducted electronically via text. Each text was transported from the voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service⁴⁴ screen to an individual MS Word document where all identifying features were removed and replaced with pseudonyms. The documents were then saved under a unique identifier, and the code was tied to the participant in a secure MS Excel spreadsheet. Due to the nature of VoIP services, both participant and researcher had access to automatic records of the conversation. This is particularly useful for the means of filing and coding, but also for providing the participant with the chance to have a say about the contents and protect themselves from information misuse.

Sampling and Recruitment

The online surveys conducted in Phase 1 of this study also contributed by raising a voluntary sample pool from which interview participants were primarily recruited (Brazil: n= 152; UK: n= 48). In this case, survey respondents were invited to enter contact details for further call. A second source, totalising fifty people, was composed by informants identified in fora, social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter), and specialised websites (i.e. YouTube and Twitch), and considered relevant for their experience/expertise and key roles on the field, or acquaintance to the researcher. Looking to achieve data depth and richness, interviews were performed within a purposive sample of 21 (twenty-one) people. This sample has a convenient size for generating enough detailed data, but its volume and complexity is still manageable (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

Ethical principles and research questions guided the sampling strategy in this study. Participants must have displayed some basic demographic characteristics: being 18

⁴⁴ Communication technology in which voice is delivered through IP networks (e.g. the Internet).

years of age and older, natural of or residing in Brazil or the UK, Portuguese, or English speakers; participants must also have current or previous gaming experience in League. As further discussed in Chapters Five and Six, the surveys revealed a population mainly composed by White, young men; however, due to the research question, an equal number of men and women were recruited, as well as people identifying with other gender identities. Participant's ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation were also drawn from their responses in the survey; when recruited from social media, participants were not asked about these characteristics⁴⁵. Overall, priority was given to recruiting participants from all backgrounds and locations within the pool, whenever possible.

From the prospective list, participants were informally approached through non-intrusive means, e.g. webchats, e-mail (when voluntarily provided) and social network websites. Informants received full explanations of the aims and purposes of the research, the interview process was clarified along with data management and confidentiality policies; participants were prompted to ask any necessary question. The initial approach also confirmed their details and demographic characteristics. After informally acquiescing, each informant was prompted to read thoroughly, fill in and sign the digital information and consent form. Informants were also asked whether they were willing to invite other people to participate, also contributing to snowball recruitment. A total of 121 invitations were sent, mainly via e-mail (fewer via social media private messaging), from which 41 were responded. Of those, 25 provided consent, and 21 were finally interviewed.

Interviews started in October 2017, and each instance lasted 90 minutes on average. Participants' profiles are presented in Table 5.

⁴⁵ Some participants declared their ethnic and/or gender identities, or sexual orientation during interviews. In these cases, this information was included in the participant profile.

Alias	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Ethnicity	Age	Region of Residence
Augusto	Man	Not Declared	Not Declared	31-40	Centre-West
Camila	Woman	Bisexual	Pardo	18-25	Southeast
Diana	Woman	Bisexual	White	18-25	South
Diego	Man	Homosexual	Pardo	18-25	Northeast
Fernando	Man	Heterosexual	White	18-25	Northeast
Flora	Woman	Heterosexual	White	18-25	South
Letícia	Woman	Heterosexual	White	18-25	Southeast
Rodrigo	Man	Not Declared	Not Declared	26-30	Centre-West
Rosa	Woman	Bisexual	White	18-25	South
Viviane	Woman	Not Declared	Not Declared	18-25	Southeast
Vladimir	Man	Heterosexual	Pardo	31-40	Southeast

5. a. Brazil Sample

Alias	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Ethnicity	Age	Region of Residence
Alistair	Man	Not declared	White or White British	18-25	South West England
Alex	Non-Binary/Agender	Homosexual	White or White British	18-25	North West England
Flynn	Trans Non-Binary	Not declared	Not declared	18-25	Greater London
Imogen	Woman	Heterosexual	White or White British	18-25	East Midlands
Lucy	Woman	Bisexual	White or White British	18-25	East of England
Luke	Man	Bisexual	White or White British	18-25	East Midlands
Mason	Man	Heterosexual	Black or Black British	18-25	West Midlands
Saoirse	Woman	Heterosexual	White or White British	18-25	South West England
Sebastian	Man	Heterosexual	White or White British	18-25	West Midlands
Simon	Man	Heterosexual	Black or Black British	18-25	Greater London

5.b. UK Sample

Table 5: Interview Participants Profile - per sample

Recruitment pools reached saturation in January 2018. To ensure an even number of female and male participants in each sample, thus achieving a more suitable minimum sample size, and to cover other perspectives besides those from casual players, publicly available interviews of four elite informants (two for each sample) were downloaded/transcribed accordingly. Aside from the need to fulfil a sample size, the choice of using selected secondary data increases representation through a deeper look at public figures' views promoted in popular outlets, offering a comparison with everyday practices of casual gamers. Although often straying from the intended questions and aims, secondary-sourced interviews offer insights with minimal ethical

concerns due to the publicity of the material. Nevertheless, basic ethical standards of respect and integrity were preserved during the use of this material.

4.5. Formal Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is not a discrete, sequential task completed after data collection (Richards and Richards, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2013a; Spencer et al., 2014b). Rather, research design, literature review and data collection presented their tools for questioning pre-existing assumptions, and building new approaches, iteratively. Regardless, a formal data analysis took place after data collection, being structured as an integrative exercise that interwove data from Phases 1 and 2.

This research was designed to follow a traditional mixed-method approach; however, the nature of the research questions and emergent themes led to a higher weight being attributed to qualitative data and findings; hence, any frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to enrich descriptions and provide contextual information. In allaying lower weight quantitative and higher weight qualitative data, each datum is led to yielding rich descriptions and understandings without detracting from the value of participant-generated meanings (Spencer et al., 2014b).

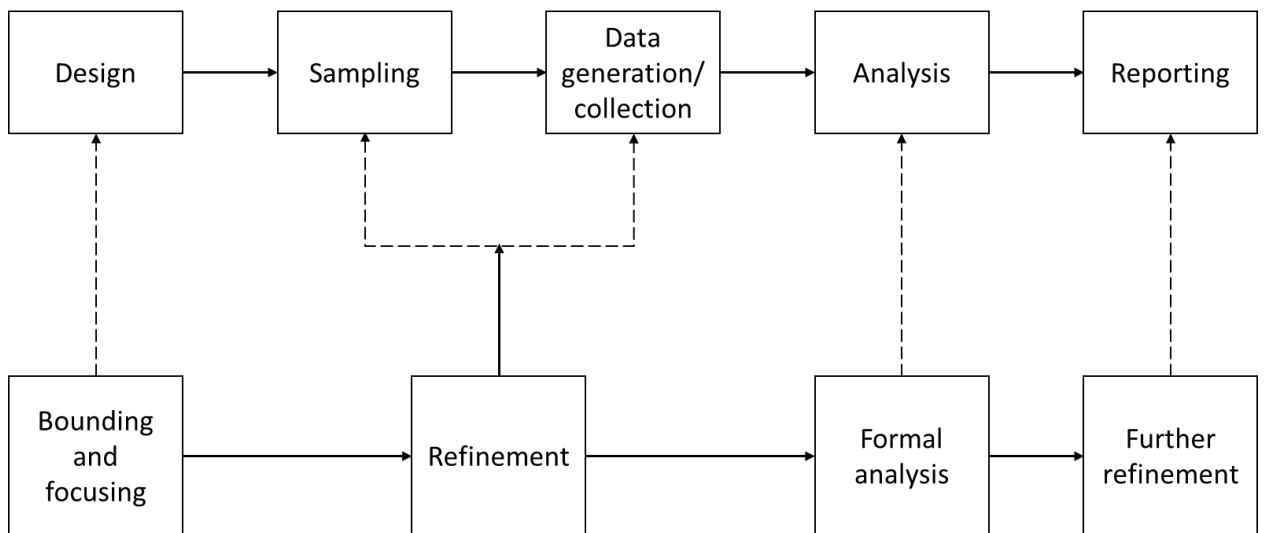


Figure 49: Spencer et al. (2014, p. 276). *The Analytic Journey* (reproduction).

Formal analysis process followed Spencer and colleagues' (2014a) structure comprising two overlapping stages. On Data Management, data is handled and organised with tools allowing for a deep understanding of the underlying meanings and logics, whereas Analysis & Interpretation dive into the organised data to yield

detailed descriptions and consistent explanations. This process is data-driven and substantive, centred on the dataset, its context and background information; the analysis seeks to uncover and discuss the text meanings. This section describes each step of the formal analytical process in a linear way, but due to the intricate and iterative character of the inquiry, Data Management and Analysis & Interpretation were concurrent processes which followed Phase 1. Figures 50 and 51 illustrate the process: while the standalone steps are shown in static boxes, the arrows show the sequence, precedence, and number of times the same task was undertaken.

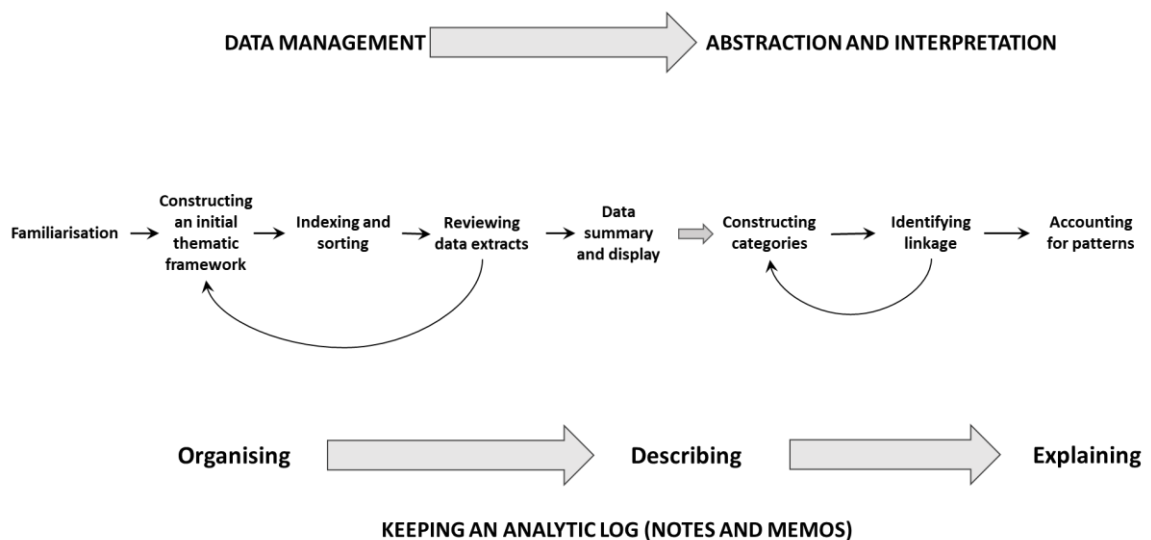


Figure 50: Spencer et al. (2014, p. 281). *The Formal Analysis Process* (reproduction).

4.5.1. Data Management

The activity of organising, sorting, labelling, and classifying data aims to prepare the raw dataset for interpretative immersion. In this project, raw data comprised tabulated survey responses and running text interview transcripts; reflective memos represented a very small portion of the data. The sheer size of this dataset and the fragmented character of participants' discourses urged for a careful organisation of the data, from filing to coding.

Every document in this project was digitally filed and systematically labelled under a structure of electronic folders in the Windows operational system. Following the Data Protection Act and institutional rules, all data and related documents were filed in a password-protected personal computer, a university-provided drive space (with virtual access), a cloud-storage service with automatic synchronisation, and a portable hard drive. Whenever used, hard-copies of participant-generated data were filed in a

private, locked cabinet. Regardless of storage, data were anonymised before filing. Interviewees were given a pseudonym.

Familiarisation

The first analytical approach to data, familiarisation provides the researcher with a wide view of the data contents and coverage, rendering her intimate with the dataset (Spencer et al., 2014a). This iterative task includes reviewing sampling strategies and sample characteristics and reading any transcripts and memos multiple times. In being independent, this project allowed for a deep immersion, happening in multiple instances throughout data collection and analysis.

As discussed in section 4.4.1., Phase 1 was a standalone task of data collection that preceded interviews. In different moments during survey distribution, the growing dataset was skimmed to ensure the instrument and recruitment strategy were working; this unstructured inspection exposed raw themes, included in an unstructured, non-hierarchical list. Afterwards, the open-ended responses were compiled and used to generate word-clouds which illustrate some of the superficial themes revealed in the most frequent terms (Figure 52).

After the surveys, interview guides were developed with the help of research questions, observation memos and topics from the surveys. Interviews were conducted via VoIP real-time text chat, a technique that allows for automatic text filling, thus saving time usually allowed for transcriptions. All chat records were saved both manually and automatically. Each interview transcript was then edited to obscure identifiable information and replace names with aliases. The fully anonymised documents were then filed. Prior to filing, précises were written about each interview participant, including methodological notes on the atmosphere of the encounter, any particularities of the interpersonal rapport, and participants' perceived sentiments and reactions.

During each interview, memos were jotted down for future reference, constituting a preliminary visual sketch of the data and future analytical codes. The raw themes identified during these iterative moments of familiarisation turned into a list of themes which formed a first codebook, used as an incipient system of thematic labels for content analysis, further refined at the final, integrated thematic analysis.

or auditory information (Neuendorf, 2017). Although growing in breadth and techniques, this method is often considered neither fully quantitative nor fully qualitative; for instance, Braun and Clarke call it ‘small Q qualitative research’ (2013a, p.5), due to its rather superficial approach to counting and measuring frequencies within rich qualitative data. For the purposes of this study, a conventional inductive qualitative content analysis was employed (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008).

Survey data was disaggregated between open and closed-ended questions. As mentioned in section 4.4.1, the surveys aimed at providing simple descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative data; therefore, content analysis was purely descriptive in nature. Due to its structured nature, descriptive statistics on sample characteristics (including demographics and metadata) were first devised from closed-ended responses. Formal content analysis was then employed on open-ended questions, where the content and context were scanned in search for more established themes, whose frequency was then counted. Initial content-coding was performed analogically, through manual symbol and colour-coding on hard-copy survey data. This technique permitted a closer reading of each sentence, with better mobility and a more natural interaction through side-notes. However, downsides to manual data manipulation include vulnerability to accidents and loss, demanding constant backups and logging of partial and final codebooks.

To facilitate integration with posterior thematic analysis, units of analysis were devised from the questions’ interrogative statement and reported specificities, generating a list of categories (Figure 53) used to organise the inductive themes.

In both survey datasets (BR and UK), a mix of in-vivo and emergent themes were listed. Contrary to the first raw themes, this cycle of labelling aimed for more analytic, interpretive codes that could be either descriptive or of value (i.e. capturing and labelling subjective perspectives) (Saldaña, 2009). Although value coding often encompasses deeper interpretive efforts (e.g. to define whether one participant talks about sexism or homophobia without mentioning the terms), this form of coding helps to build future links with the broader data for integrated analysis. Drawbacks of individual coding include low reliability and pure description, limiting the conclusions of this specific analysis to its context and content.

- Reasons gender and sexuality may influence on players' performance
- Difference in social interaction and in-game choices
- Criteria for champion and role choices
- Classification of negative gendered experiences during gameplay
- Strategies and devices to deal with negative gendered experiences in play
- Classification of positive gendered experiences
- Motivations for Single Gender Teams
 - Characteristics of unintentional mixed-gender teams

Figure 52: Content Analysis - Initial thematic categories

As mentioned in section 4.4, difficulties in attaining a random sample led to the strategy of using a mix of purposive cluster, opportunity, and cascade sampling; cleavages to this strategy include low or inadequate representativity, weaker external validity and bias. Considering all the downsides of the available sampling strategy, the sample size was based on the reviewed literature and stretched to minimum two-hundred respondents. However, not all participants responded to open-ended questions (a known disadvantage of both chosen sampling and data collection methods), which impacted negatively on data quality and analysis reliability. Since the surveys' prime purpose was to provide support for interviews, this problem is mitigated by further data integration, where both quantitative and qualitative analysis provide further explanations. Nevertheless, content analysis of the survey data has revealed the contours of several main themes refined through the deeper phase of thematic analysis.

Indexing and Sorting

After content analysis, the initial thematic framework was employed to systematically label (i.e. code) and sort cross-sectional interview fragments (Spencer *et al.*, 2014a). This process was done manually, by applying rough codes across interview transcripts in search for common trends and similarities within and across cases, refining and

replacing the codes. By the end of the first round, a more refined tree of labels, clusters and sub-clusters was finally generated. The final version of the analytic cluster tree can be found at the Appendix. This system of labels was then used to electronically index transcript fractions (i.e. verbatim data). Throughout a reading in fine detail, one same segment was coded several times under many different headings if necessary, until the finer indexing was depleted. In further rounds, indexed data was sorted for more detailed, repeated coding.

Detailed in-depth findings resulted from a quasi-variable approach (Richards and Richards, 1994; Spencer et al., 2014b) where participants' background and demographics (i.e. gender, sexual orientation, age, location and ethnicity) were combined and crisscrossed with analytical codes, revealing patterns across the dataset.

4.5.2. Abstraction & Interpretation

Once the dataset was fully indexed and sorted, cases and themes were revisited under the light of the research questions. Some themes cut across the four proposed questions, while others persisted as foundational for the understanding of the case and its spatialities. The data segments were first analysed semantically, with special attention to the use of jargon/patois, and to explicit mentions to gender, sexuality, inclusion, exclusion, and devices/strategies employed by participants. This reading was done close to the data, considering the interview context and atmosphere, and the level of engagement with the participant. This close reading aided to an extrapolation from pure semantics to substance, since each participant's perspective changes the data essence and wealth (Spencer *et al.*, 2014a).

Due to the nature of the case and the positioning of the project (see section 1.1), the analysis demanded a deeper look at lines and circular references between themes, places, and cases. These 'patterns of association', or *linkages* (Spencer *et al.*, 2014a, p.318) emphasise relationships and interactions between themes, places and cases, instead of focusing on hierarchisation and differentiation. With this technique, it is also possible to uncover spaces of shadow, or absence of interactions.

Interpreting and explaining the integrated findings and their links was a complex iterative task comprising a revisit to categorised data, their linkages and absences, and the underlying meanings evoked by the literature. At this point, the organised dataset was interrogated, framed, and snipped in different ways in order to unearth the

motives, meanings and reasons for the identified practices – behaviours, emotions and perceptions – derived from explicit and implicit explanations. The result of this interpretive work is presented in discussed detail in the next chapters.

All phases of this research project were framed and sustained by a carefully considered ethical scaffolding based on fundamental principles of rigorous research with human subjects, enhanced by timely discussions about research practice in ever-evolving digital platforms. Following, this chapter presents the ethical considerations of data collection and analysis.

4.6. Ethical Aspects

Research with human subjects is framed within (often overlapping) principles of respect, responsibility, integrity, and competence. When compared to research conducted in physical sites, online research poses complex ethical issues, which demand careful examination and adaptations when necessary.

The principle of respect rules issues of informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality, to which factors involving risk assessment for participants' and researcher's protection are often entangled. Participants must be respected in their right to information, fully voluntary participation, complete and unjudged withdrawal from the study if desired, as well as identity protection. Considering the nature of online venues and their autonomy, each venue's code of conduct and terms of use must be respected in recruitment activities as well as any observation activities.

Attentive to the principle of responsibility, digital researchers must incorporate positionality and reflexivity along the whole research cycle, considering their position – often power-laden – within the field and in relation to their participants. These exercises are fundamental to ensure the application of the principle of respect, culminating in design which avoids and/or mitigates any possible harm to participants, especially those in a vulnerable situation, who may utilise common online practices such as adopting nicknames and fake identities, and avatar-use.

Qualitative research must also stand for integrity, based on honesty and accuracy in approaching participants, collecting their discourses, and reporting the results. Integrity relates to informed consent and risk assessment; researchers are compelled to be open about their identity and practices all times. For instance, while recruiting participants, the researcher is expected to always be clear about her affiliation, aims

and sources; in observational studies, this process also includes requesting authorisation from gatekeepers and being accepted by the members of that community. In case of user-generated voluntary data, information sheets must contain clear and accurate contact information, ensuring that the participant has the means to reach the research team to solve any doubts and verify the interlocutor's identity if necessary.

There is no fixed ethical code for online research, but several guidelines were employed. The UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) recommends full ethical review – addressing issues of informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality (ESRC, 2012) – for research projects conducted online, regardless of setting, including email, chat rooms, web pages, instant messaging, fora, among others. In response to the principle of competence, this research project was submitted to the evaluation of the Ethical Research Committee at the University of The West of England and got clearance on the 27th of January 2017⁴⁶.

As the ethical aspects of this investigation were covered with the help of the supervisory team and the faculty's Ethical Research committee, the general principles were constantly reviewed and reflected upon, and adaptations were made when necessary. Strategic decisions around these topics have a significant impact on data collection and analysis, pushing for the careful but incisive practices described in the next subsections, which expand on specific ethical issues related to the employed methods, as well as the appropriate responses and alternatives taken.

4.6.1. Informed Consent and Withdrawal

Rightful consent is only achieved when both parts voluntarily agree to engage in a certain activity; thus, the key to legitimate consent is full and clear information. As in traditional research, participants in online research have the right to receive complete, accurate and intelligible information about the researcher's identity and contact details, as well as the project's aims, methods, and data management practices. Questioning and clarification is also a participant's right, and the investigator must be attentive and available to provide explanations upon request. In this project, best efforts were applied to ensure participants understanding and agreement to the surveys' and interviews' aims and features; web-based information and consent sheets were developed especially for the aimed sample and environment. Information and

⁴⁶ Ethical Clearance code UWE REC REF No: FET.16.10.015

consent pages showed detailed contact information with the research team's full names, addresses and e-mails, thus ensuring participants the freedom to communicate any queries and opinions.

However, gathering full informed consent in online research is an arduous task (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009; Toepoel, 2016), and there is no unanimity in academia regarding tacit consent in research performed in online spaces (Markham, Buchanan and Ethics Working Committee, 2012). As online communications are often swift, informed consent is not possible in all situations, which can hamper the protection of privacy and confidentiality.

This matter is also binding when it comes to choosing a certain method or technique. For instance, many researchers and institutional ethics committees deem covert research as an inherently dishonest practice as participants are deceived by not being aware of the researcher's presence and aims, thus losing their autonomy. However, informed consent is often unrealistic or even contrary to the research question and aims – usually, collecting informed consent can be risky to socially vulnerable or deviant participants, for example. Notwithstanding the common risk of deception to both overt and covert research, the latter should not be always considered deceptive; instead, a 'limited disclosure' approach is more suitable – given that the researcher is not lying to participants (Spicker, 2011). Furthermore, disclosure is not dual, and it is never complete, as overt research often has covert elements, e.g. philosophical standpoints, or data analysis methods, which are rarely discussed with the participants. Although controversial, covert research is particularly useful in online settings where full consent is not always possible, also uncovering natural practices and reducing the risk of Hawthorne effect, in which participants change or mould their behaviour due to the researcher's presence (Spicker, 2011; van Amstel, 2013). The controversy around the topic is far from over, and ethical decisions must always weigh research practicalities, methodological rationales, and risk assessment. These factors had a substantial impact on the design of this research project, as discussed in section 4.3.

Having identified the prime recruitment site (i.e. Facebook), an attempted recruitment round was based on the creation of a purposed Facebook page. This strategy was discarded after failed attempts that shown the advantages of using the pre-existing personal profile, including higher chances of rapport development with gatekeepers

and participants, which was paramount for more thoroughly informing prospective participants about the researcher's identity.

Participants' self-determination is central to consensual, voluntarily collected data. In this regard, a prospective participant has the right to decline to or simply ignore the researcher's recruitment attempts. The right to withdraw is also paramount, and it must be clear that the participant has the right to reconsider after providing consent, or even after participating in the activity. Nonetheless, data validity must also be ensured, and for this reason participant's withdrawal should always be framed within a certain time span. For instance, withdrawal from individual, online interviews can be a straightforward process, as the researcher only needs to delete the transcripts upon request; alternatively, withdrawal from massive, online surveys is often virtually impossible after the form is completed and submitted, for the data there collected is anonymous and untraceable.

Notwithstanding the good practices available for researcher and participant, identity disclosure is always a risk when participating in research, especially in online settings. Despite the researcher's best efforts to defend the participants' right to confidentiality, the risk of anonymity breach and potential harm derived from it must be informed by the investigator. Information pages utilised before surveys and interviews sought to assure participants of the practices employed to ensure their anonymity in data analysis and reporting, as well as data confidentiality after the end of data collection.

Qualitative research is iterative, which can have downsides. For instance, informed consent is given to a project in its initial stages, in which analysis and interpretation standards may often change, as well as research questions and approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Interpretive and analytical disagreements can arise between researcher and participant, and it is seldom possible to inform recruited people about this issue beforehand.

4.6.2. Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are fundamental standards to research with human subjects. However, the Association of Internet Researchers' (AoIR) indicate that the matter of online public/private spheres is still under debate, and issues around the publicity of the information uploaded online are filled with grey areas (Markham, Buchanan and Ethics Working Committee, 2012).

Notwithstanding the grey areas that permeate the discussion about the publicity of uploaded information on the Internet, public consensus about personal image, privacy and anonymity were acknowledged during design and conduct (Markham, Buchanan & Ethics Working Committee, 2012). AoIR's guidelines, instrument design and recruitment followed the rules and codes of conduct established by Riot Games, Facebook, and Reddit (see section 4.4), thus minimising any risks related to confidentiality breach and copyright infringement as established by each venue.

As discussed in Chapter One, League's gameplay is organised with a geolocalised personal account generated with an email, login, password, and summoner name. In being password protected, these arenas are closed to the external gaze and players can presume a certain level of privacy. Additionally, although any person over 13 years of age can register, Riot Games rules that players are not allowed to reveal their offline identities as this can create issues to their online and offline safety. As a general recommendation, online venues' rules, and popular perceptions and expectations of privacy and anonymity must always be acknowledged in online research.

Privacy is a delicate matter when it comes to participant recruitment in online sites, especially on social media. Access to these websites is password-protected, but the personal profile is often visible to any person with an Internet connection. In this regard, unexpected contact from an unknown person is often perceived a privacy breach, which can be interpreted from merely uncomfortable to harassing (European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), 2011), which narrowed researcher's attempts to advertise the research and invite relevant people to participate on it. Non-deceptive introductions, gatekeeper contact, reflections on researcher's positionality and expected behaviour, and public advertisement of the research were useful strategies to minimise these issues.

Participants recruited online usually report security-related fears as survey invitations are often seen as spam, and clickable links raise concerns about malware (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009). To reduce participants' security anxiety, invitation flyers/banners and informed consent pages displayed authoritative institutional e-mail address, as well as clear statements about the safety of links. Nevertheless, clarification was readily provided to any interested individual upon request.

The researcher decided not to visit the same social media group after recruiting participants, as she was not a regular member and her presence was expected to be

short and purposed⁴⁷. She would only go back to the groups when tagged on posts to respond to participants' questions and clarify issues related to the research.

Important challenges in the application of web-based questionnaires include the collection of personal, localised information, i.e. IP number, and generation of meta and paradata – i.e. electronic administrative data generated during the completion of online forms, including the time of the day, and completion time length. As these can be a source of privacy concerns, participants were informed of data automatically collected by the software.

After data collection, anonymity is primarily used as a tool to enforce participants' right to confidentiality upon the obscuring of their personal details, thus protecting their identity. When collecting quantitative data – e.g. demographics – anonymity is usually guaranteed⁴⁸. For qualitative data, collected verbatim, the use of pseudonyms is a widespread tactic in academia, but it comes with drawbacks such as a perceived silencing of participants, especially those in a politically vulnerable position. Moreover, anonymity is never complete in interviews, for any direct quotes used may increase a person's identifiability, especially in small groups and communities. Finally, as every research must comply with institutional rules and guidelines, and also with national and international laws, data may be subpoenaed upon authorities' request and must be handed over to competent organs in case any unlawful or unsafe activity is openly declared by a participant (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Again, these issues turn back to the matter of information, as participants must be informed of all limits to confidentiality before agreeing to engage.

Security measures were employed to ensure the confidentiality of participants' information. As information and consent forms collected personal data from participants, every filled form was downloaded and saved in PDF format; after that, each document was encrypted and stored in an external hard drive, kept in the researcher's possession. Recruitment and sample profile were organised and processed in an MS Excel spreadsheet; this document was also password-protected and stored on a dedicated hard drive. After the interviews, documents containing the

⁴⁷ However, during a recruitment activity on social media, the researcher noticed that the participants of a group were posting about feelings of depression and inadequacy. For responsibility principles, she responded to this by posting contact details of charities and support groups (Braun and Clarke, 2013a), which was very well received by the group's participants.

⁴⁸ Although not fully, as electronic data collection instruments often collect identifiable data – e.g. IP numbers.

conversation transcripts were saved under unique identifiers; any information that could identify participants was erased and replaced by pseudonyms, thus diminishing the chance of quotes being associated to individuals in the results and discussion of this thesis and future publications.

4.6.3. Participant Protection

Comprehensive literature on the inherent risks of engaging in online activities often focus on children or adolescents, including exposure to sensitive material, unwanted personal contact, generation of harmful or unlawful content, and all forms of cyberbullying (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011; O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson and Media, 2011; Brasil *et al.*, 2014). Comparatively, little is published about the potential risks to adult Internet users aside from those related to online privacy and personal data misuse. However, physical, and psychological risks are present in online interactions, with potential discomfort or stress as outcomes, and the assessment of potential risks in online activities may not be straightforward. For instance, more experienced Internet users perceive lesser or minor risks in online activities, including shopping (Maceira, Carvalho and Lima, 2011); alternatively, the exposure to uncivil online comments significantly changes the perceived risks of new technologies (Anderson *et al.*, 2014).

Aside from the perceived risks and methodological reasonings, feminist research also cares for social justice and non-discriminatory practices. Whenever the research question permits, participant recruitment must be inclusive and open to people from all classes, ethnicities, sexual orientations and genders, which increases the researcher’s work on finding suitable recruitment sites and strategies (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Non-discriminatory research includes measures to provide information access to those with visual or hearing impairing. Equally, avoiding the use of academic jargon is a strategy to make sure most participants understand the information provided. The use of gender-neutral expressions and pronouns, the inclusion of more options for gender identity and sexual orientation in survey demographics, and permission to use social names are important tactics for equal participation (Walkley, 2013), besides bearing important political statements, as discussed in section 4.1.1. The principle of non-discrimination must be extended to data analysis, with special attention to avoid simplified causal interpretations that can be biased and inaccurate (Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

As discussed in section 4.1, power imbalances are part of the researcher-participant relationship, as researchers often stand on financially, educationally, and socially

privileged grounds, or at least are often perceived as such. Moreover, investigators must always frame their work within the principle of ‘no harm’; for this reason, participants are usually treated as vulnerable subjects. Before any research with human participants, any real or perceived risks must be surveyed and acknowledged, and the researcher must make efforts to avoid or minimise harm, informing participants about potential hazards. However, the perception and understanding of harm can be very fluid, and potential risks may only be partially acknowledged (Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

Gender is often perceived as a sensitive topic, if not undesirable in certain social groups. Therefore, data collection instruments were painstakingly conceptualised and piloted with the aim at avoiding any distress to participants, regardless of their gender and sexual orientation. For instance, LGBTQI+ participants could also be offended by the absence or misplacement of terms related to sexual orientation and gender identity. To ensure effective rapport with the participant, and to avoid possible distress from the use of derogatory or insulting expressions, instruments considered niche jargon and specialised language, with special attention to sexualities and gender identities terminology, considering the best practices of LGBTQI+ inclusivity in research. Nevertheless, this choice had to be balanced with the use of intelligible wording, for language choice, including the use of some pronouns, can be the limit between inclusivity and confusion to the reader. When possible, the general language employed in the survey and recruitment texts sought to be as gender-neutral as possible⁴⁹. In interviews, the researcher was attentive to individual gender identities/designations, and always utilised the interviewee’s preferred pronouns. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that language choice in research design is often a political statement, since research is never value-neutral (Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

Equally, questions regarding demographic characteristics can often be unsettling to the respondent, e.g. asking their sexual orientation, and choosing to differ biological sex from gender identity is an inclusive strategy that may have negative outcomes. Burden, psychological stress caused by the upsetting nature of the questions and language utilised are important potential risks to participant’s wellbeing, with an important impact on the data health due to possible, consequent dropouts (Galesic, 2006). Acknowledging the sensitiveness of the topic, the researcher highlighted

⁴⁹ This task that was especially challenging when aimed at the Brazilian sample, for all nouns in Portuguese have masculine or feminine gender.

participants' freedom to skip any potentially uncomfortable questions (with the option 'Prefer not to say' on the surveys), and the interviewees' right to take a break or quit the interview at any moment.

Aside from thoughtful question development and language use, good research practices include damage prevention and reduction. In this project, the researcher applied debriefing, a common practice which consists in opening space for the participant to express their feelings about the activity, ask questions or add any other information they need. This moment was also used to provide and gather information about the next phases of the research (inviting survey respondents to engage in the later interviews) and offer support if the participant manifests need and interest (Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

Furthermore, since Gender may be perceived as inappropriate to certain populations, i.e. children and adolescents, it was the researcher's responsibility to advertise the research in the appropriate venues, using equally appropriate means. However, this responsibility is limited by the possibility of deception from participants, that can falsify or misrepresent their identities and demographics during recruitment and data collection. False identity use is a limitation of every research with human subjects, arguably facilitated by the relative anonymity of online settings, as online research focuses on self-presentation (Marwick, 2015).

As aforementioned, there are limitations to the idea of full integrity and accuracy when it comes to data analysis. The researcher is performing interpretations of participant's accounts and experiences, and these might not find an echo on participant's ideas about their discourses; in that sense, data analysis can be seen as a misinterpretation of participants' speech. One tactic that might be used to diminish this conflict is triangulation, either via data, methods or researchers, on an exercise that brings many voices to the same phenomenon, strengthening the argument and raising richer data (Braun and Clarke, 2013a).

Albeit framed within the best practices for ethical digital research, fieldwork was faced with some challenges and limitations inherent to the setting and the methods. The next and final section of this chapter addresses the difficulties encountered in the field and their impact on the dataset and the researcher's life.

4.6.4. Risk Assessment and Researcher Protection

As discussed in the previous topic, issues regarding psychological and physical risks to the participant, including potential computer security exploits, were carefully acknowledged. Nevertheless, as the researcher's identity is exposed, research on this topic and setting pose specific risks to researchers' safety and wellbeing. For instance, as discussed in the Introduction, women who recently addressed issues of sexism, gender relations and feminism in online settings, especially related to the gaming community, have suffered retaliation from the public (Hattenstone, 2013; Aronovich, 2015; Bustle, 2015). This scenario has posed important ethical challenges to researcher protection. Hence possible threats to the researcher's wellbeing were acknowledged, and protective measures were taken to avoid them before approaching the field.

A central matter in this discussion is the recruitment process. Adult users need to trust a source before engaging with it in online arenas, and social media is often used as a means to increase perceived trustworthiness (Hajli, 2014). As confirmed during the pilot, the need for rapport has informed the researcher's decision to keep and utilise her personal online profiles for recruitment. However, this decision had important drawbacks and potentially increased risks to her safety and wellbeing, as she was then vulnerable to psychological risks (e.g. related to online misbehaviour, prevalent in online gaming (Slonje, Smith and Frisé, 2013; Kwak, Blackburn and Han, 2015) that could, in an extreme case, escalate to physical risks.

To resolve the impasse, safety measures were implemented before the first recruitment round. Procedures included: reinforcement of passwords for all online accounts; detachment of online accounts, i.e. the researcher did not use social media accounts to log in to other websites; enforcement of high protection and privacy settings to social media accounts; enabling of two-factor authentication tools; removal of all sensitive data from online services; creation of a unique email account, with pseudonym, was used to register and manage the gaming account solely for the research; and increased attention to potential phishing attacks that could sidestep security measures.

Besides the choice of gender-neutral login and IGN, the researcher chose to not interact with players during participant observation, nor respond to occasional gendered communication. These practices were put in place to avoid any potential risks to researcher's privacy, confidentiality, and mental health. There was no

gendered textual communication during observed matches, and no psychological distress was experienced by the researcher during this activity.

Despite the careful instrument design and approach to the field, it was not possible to avoid hostile responses from participants during the online surveys. As the initial analysis unfolded, the occurrence of aggressive, abusive, and sabotaging behaviours was remarkable. Some participants (6 occurrences) reported discomfort with the research, feeling excluded by what they called a '*misandric survey*'. To these participants, the presence of women (especially feminists) is a source of discomfort and displacement. Although these behaviours hindered data analysis in some levels, they were not discarded but understood as important manifestations; in fact, online misbehaviour often provides insights about the sample characteristics by revealing common behaviours in each community. Additionally, some of the comments provided useful critiques to chosen tactics and language, invaluable to inform the next phases (Alonzo and Aiken, 2004; Hickman and Ward, 2007; Marczak and Coyne, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010; Kirman, Lineham and Lawson, 2012; Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017). The responses did not follow a pattern of placement in the surveys but were found in response to all open-ended questions available, including debriefing questions. Using electronic and analogic coding, hostile responses were semantically coded under the cluster-theme Online Misbehaviour and further narrowed into the codes Trolling, Cyberbullying, Flaming and Negative Word-of-Mouth, according to their characteristics and meanings. On Chapter Six, some examples of these occurrences are discussed. The rare quantitative responses with traces of online misbehaviour (mostly attempts of ballot stuffing in the demographic questions) were removed from the dataset prior to analysis, thus avoiding data contamination.

Semi-structured interviews are considered a low-risk activity for both participant and researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Nevertheless, some measures were taken to guarantee the researcher's and participants' safety and security. Aiming to protect the researcher's privacy and personal information, dedicated e-mail, Skype, and Discord accounts were set up solely for data collection, thus preventing unwanted contact. However, risks related to identity disclosure in online settings are present if any identifiable data is exposed at any moment.

The unpreventable, harmful practices of online misbehaviour are recognised as digital criminal activities, rendering them subject to law enforcement as posed by the United Kingdom's 'Protection from Harassment Law' (1997), often used in bullying and

cyberbullying cases. In Brazil, online crimes are encompassed by Law n.12,737. Aside from protective measures aiming to avoid unwanted contact, the researcher was also attentive to saving and filling any suspicious communication, thus documenting the process, and ensuring the correct measures to be taken in case of need.

Nevertheless, protective measures are not enough for preventing distress from online misbehaviour, as reflected in the patterns of backlash and trolling shown in survey data. Although expected and deemed relevant for the topic, dealing with these contents was deeply unsettling and caused psychological distress to the researcher. University's mental health services were reached to assist on this issue, and alongside a period of recess, self-care techniques were invaluable for the researcher's recovery. The supervisory team was aware of the occurrence and its outcomes.

Although every effort was taken to ensure respect to participants' rights, research with human subjects is not perfect. Regarding any hindrances tied to the very nature of online settings and interactions, the researcher is aware of her limitations, and of the limitations to her responsibility towards people reached by her research topic and activities.

4.7. Chapter Summary

This research employed an exploratory sequential mixed method approach with an emphasis on qualitative data to engage with a multiple instrumental case study aimed at a binational comparison of gendered spatial practices of inclusion, exclusion, and agency in the online game League of Legends. This chapter detailed the methodology employed to interrogate whether, and in what ways League's digital spaces are gendered, the nature of the gendered relations enacted in these spaces, and the existence of gendered homosocial spaces within these social arenas. These questions are asked of two cohorts of adult gamers recruited from Brazil and the UK in a 9-month period.

Due to its highly iterative character, this project ended up using an abductive (i.e. iterative inductive) approach. Participant observation provided proto-explorations of digital sites, in-game and social media/fora interactions and emotional response during matches, all from a *gamer* perspective. Online surveys provided the initial controlled explorations by offering rough themes and *noticings* (Braun and Clarke, 2013a) that formed the codebook's base; this coding was totally data-driven (inductive). Interviews then deepened the exploration by refining and specialising the

themes and reframing them to the conceptual boxes suggested by Lefèbvre, Harvey and Maddrell, and presented in Chapter Three.

Finally, as preconised for mixed method approach, research findings are integrated and discussed under themes in the next two chapters, where the research questions are fulfilled through the exploration of four grand themes: Identity, Meaning, Antagonism and Rapport. Chapter Five expands on the spatiality of the case study and discusses the production of digital places through processes of identification, and Chapter Six presents the role of relations of antagonism and rapport to the territorial disputes of identity in these digital arenas.

Chapter Five: Identity and Meaning in the Production of Digital Places

As discussed in Chapter Three, online places are quintessentially digital due to their construction as pieces of code – ‘as the set of algorithmic instructions underlying software systems’ (Cockayne and Richardson, 2017, p.1642) – and their location on the web, but also socio-spatial due to the mutually constitutive relationship with the material and social spaces with which they overlap, intersect and interchange. Chapters Five and Six present integrated results and a discussion of the data collected, handled, and analysed according to the process described in Chapter Four, and framed by the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Three.

All the quotes presented in this and the next chapter were transported verbatim from the data collection instruments and are respected in their format and content (i.e. maintaining capitalisation and typos, when present). When the quote comes from surveys and interviews collected from Brazilian participants, loose translations and adaptations to English are presented; original quotes in Brazilian Portuguese can be consulted in the Appendices. Due to the nature of online text chats, several texts are discontinued by a paragraph break; to improve readability, a forward slash bar (“/”) is placed between discontinuous sentences. It is important to highlight that the quotes often present profane or offensive language, and some content may be distressing.

In this chapter, League is presented as an online gaming space formed through the assemblage of digital and physical places shaped by identity and meaning that has risen from their founding social arenas. The first section discusses League as a space of multiplicity, produced through the intersection of identities and practices in dynamic, overlapping spheres; section two of this chapter presents identity as the driving force in League’s digital spatial organisation. Integration is done through weaving quantitative and qualitative data with a discussion of the nature of these practices within and across the context of each gaming sphere and, more broadly, in the context of each country in the binational comparison.

5.1. Unpacking League of Legends

As discussed in Chapter Three, the production of space is a process of assemblage. Maddrell (2016) presents physical, virtual, and embodied-psychological spaces as permeable (for they inflect each other), dynamic (for they change in shape and importance with time and according to meaning) and overlapping (for they intersect each other and change positions). The material, emotional and interactional substance of these spaces make them extensions and foundations of one another, in a permanent process inflected by socio-economic and cultural factors.

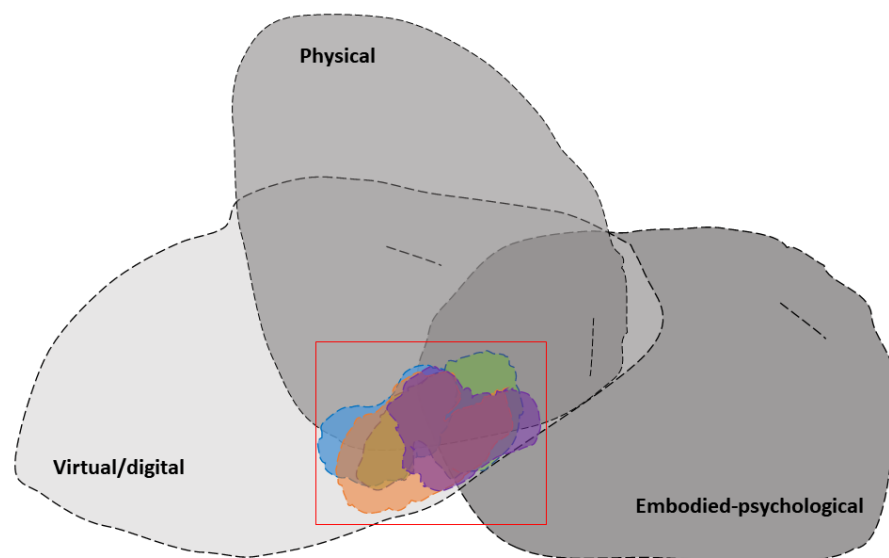


Figure 53: League's Overlapping Gaming Spheres, as seen from Maddrell's (2016) diagram of overlapping spaces (general view).

Indeed, Maddrell's conceptual map of overlapping spaces allows for the location of the game League as a 'virtual space'. Observation, literature, and survey data carved out the presence of four gaming spheres which, just as demonstrated by Maddrell's diagram (Figure 44), are interlocking and interdependent, being punctured by digital, physical and hybrid practices and sites (as seen in Figures 54 and 55). The relationship between the four spheres confirms Leszczynski's assertion that, although positioned within the 'virtual space' category, these spaces are not distinguishable from the physical but are 'multiple conjunctions of code, content, social relations, technologies and space/place' (2015, p.732). Like all spaces of meaning, online gaming spaces are constituted by a dialogue between 'affectively charged spaces' which cross the gamer's

trajectory, and those spaces are consciously and actively designated as significant by the gamer.

In grounding game-related practices in spaces within and beyond League, these spheres are fundamental to the understanding of spatial practices in the case study. Like the spaces they are spawned from, League's spatial spheres are hybrid, mobile, change in shape and size, intersect each other and, more importantly, are interlaced through gamers' embodiment.

Each and all of League's spheres are first produced as code, by itself loaded with materialities epitomised by the regional servers (section 1.3.3). Furthermore, this code is socially inflected, being enhanced by, and reproducing the social reality from where it comes. The product of this code is then lived and perceived in and through the social, which inflects and changes how the code is employed. The relationship between code and society is cyclic and co-constitutive, and all four spheres of League are social productions derived from and encompassing the experienced, the lived and the perceived.

League's physical dimension presents a range of material sites which are simultaneously present, but whose presence fluctuates when shifted from one sphere to the other. The minimum requirement to play the game is a computer with peripherals and Internet connection, which allows for each player to connect to their server. The equipment can be located at the player's house, a LAN house or Internet café. The equipment's physical location shifts when the gameplay is professionalised – now the player may be based on a purpose-built gamehouse as well. The computer also travels to different physical spaces when it is time for professional tournaments and may return (or not) to the original sites for streaming sessions. Servers, organised by region in the globe, are probably the most fixed physical structures which make League, for these cumbersome computers must be stably located in rooms with the correct temperature, humidity, and electricity to avoid malfunctioning. The primary space of gaming is, however, embodied by the gamer, for emotions and stimuli are all perceived in one's body, the emotions of which 'can be inhabited and inhabiting' (Maddrell, 2016, p.176) and are deeply rooted in certain sites and contexts. As discussed, embodiment refers to an overlapping space between one's body, a material space itself physically located somewhere in the world, and the emotional-psychological space; the body is where all lived experiences, perceptions and emotions are located, irradiating the other material and digital sites. The articulation of physical

and digital sites within and across gaming spheres renders them co-dependent moments of space (Halvorsen, 2017), in which the lived, the experienced and the perceived make each other. More detailed discussion on locational shifts in each sphere is presented in the next subsections.

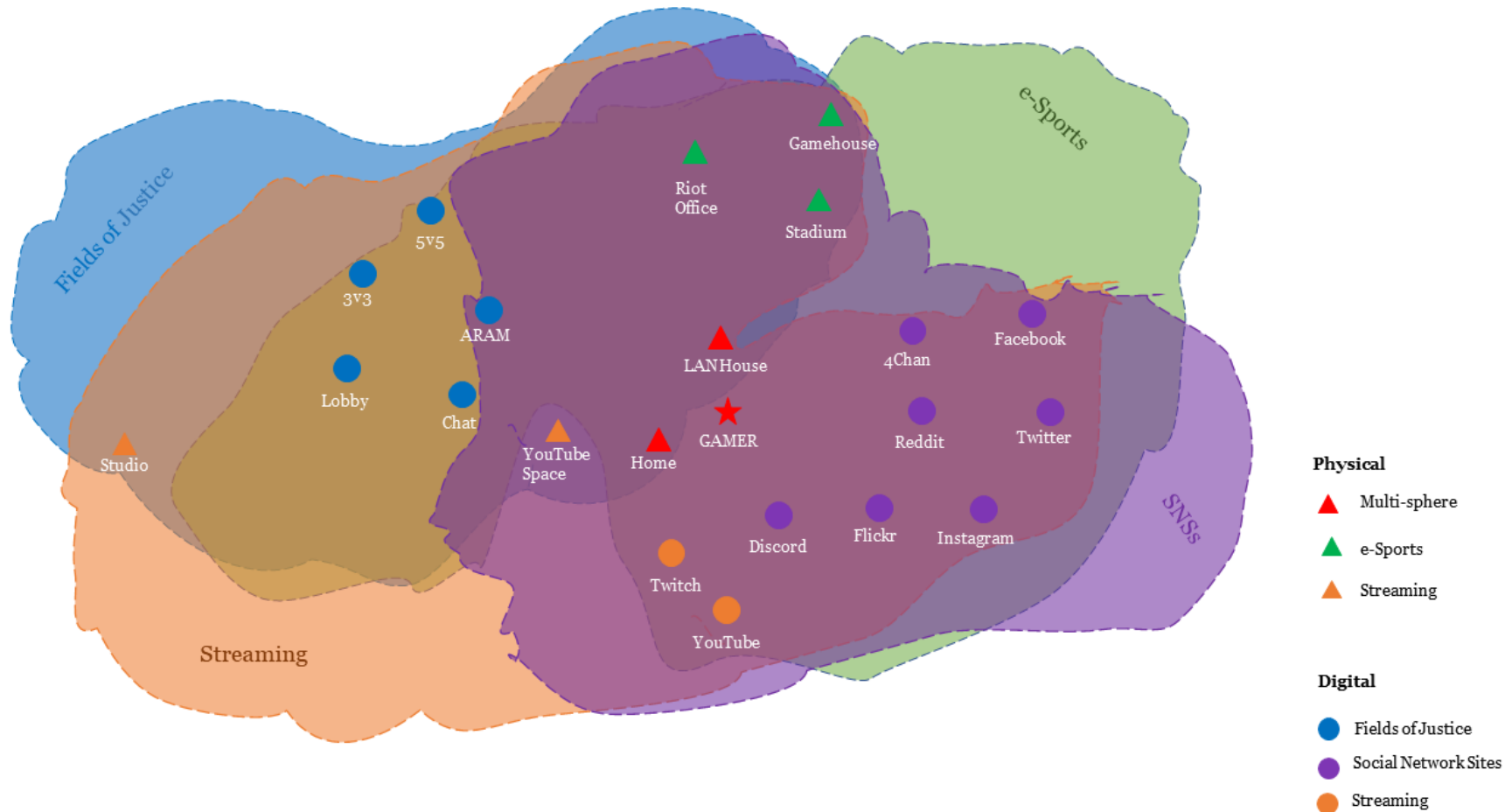


Figure 54: League's Overlapping Gaming Spheres, as seen from Maddrell's (2016) diagram of overlapping spaces (close-up).

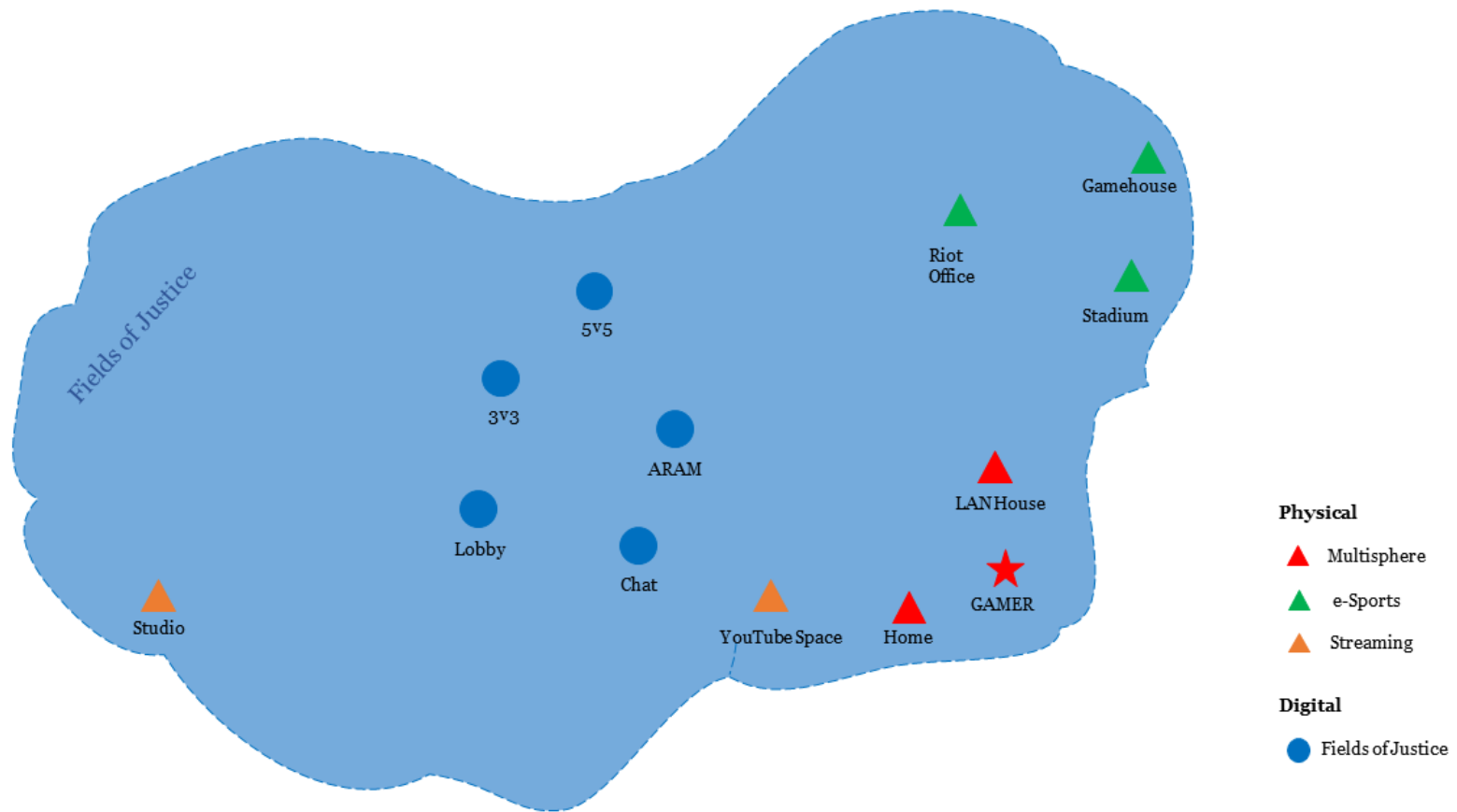


Figure 55: Sphere 1 - The Fields of Justice.

a. Sphere 1: The Fields of Justice

As discussed in Chapter Three, to play is a material practice, even when performed digitally and online, because playing is an embodied activity anchored in materialities:

'play is situational and reliant not simply on abstract rules but also on social networks, attitudes or events in one's non-game life, technological abilities or limits, structural affordances or limits, local cultures, and personal understandings of leisure' (Taylor, 2009, p.156).

The act of playing League constitutes the most basic routine, shaping space from the game's code, turning lanes, turrets, and inhibitors (see section 1.3.2) into places produced by spatial practices full of meaning. In sum, play is not only the core material spatial practice in the making of online gaming spaces, but it also defines the social arenas from which these spaces are constructed.

As introduced in Chapter One, the Fields of Justice (FoJ) are the fixed 3D gaming environments where players engage in League matches, representing the culmination of League-related interactions, for it is in the gaming maps where players make their most significant and numerous interactions, and from where other practices extend to the intersecting spheres. Designed and built by Riot Games, these maps cannot be altered by the player, who associates with human or artificial intelligence (AI) players of variable number according to the chosen game mode. The first phase of data collection (i.e. online surveys) revealed that in Brazil and the UK around 62 per cent of all respondents (n = 644) engage in both solo and group (preset teams) play, of which 78 per cent are gender-mixed. From the three available in-game maps, Summoner's Rift is the most popular, gathering 78 per cent of all respondents (77 per cent of Brazilians, and 81 per cent of Britons), as shown in detail in Figure 57.

Aside from the expected turnout due to popularity, the preference for Summoner's Rift among both samples may reflect Brazilian and British players' interest in the competitive arenas. The numbers suggest that League is, for most players, competitive, as expressed by this interviewee:

I find 5v5 way more competitive / it seems like in the other maps people take it less seriously, more like fun / which should be the standard on any map, you know / you play to have fun – Flora (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

Indeed, Summoner's Rift is considered the most competitive of the three maps due to its centrality to the ranked ladder and to its position as the preferential map for professional

gameplay (section 5.1.c). For this reason, most Brazilian participants perceive Summoner's Rift as a stressful place, where it is necessary to be able to withstand high levels of toxicity and abuse (see 6.1). British participants did not compare 5v5 with the other game maps.

Howling Abyss (ARAM) is the second most popular map in both samples. Less popular in the UK, ARAM is mostly played by men; this map is more popular amongst women in Brazil (27.7 per cent), where this demographic makes up more than twice the number of men playing in the same map (11.6 per cent). Participants describe ARAM as a friendlier map, where they play for pure fun since its matches are not ranked; it is also a place to practice with new champions, test gameplay and communication strategies, or simply unwind after a season of stressful ranked matches:

I'd say much less [rage] / It's more of a fun game mode that doesn't seem quite as competitive. I mean it's all random so anyone could end up with a champion they've never played before or really don't like / (...) they're just more fun and don't affect your rank at all / people still want to win but it doesn't matter as much – Imogen (Heterosexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

I love playing ARAM, it's my favourite mode for playing solo. / I can test champions I'd normally not use without getting rage, and there's hardly any sexist imbeciles there. I think they only play normal to pick a Champion who has mastery and to be retarded. / cause there's a lot of difference in the rage on aram to the one in sr – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

I spent a long time interned in ARAM because the competitiveness and pressure in SR did not please me. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)



Figure 56: Survey data - League map choice per gender (frequency, per country).

The least popular map in both cohorts is Twisted Treeline, mostly frequented by men (2.9 per cent in Brazil, 3.2 per cent in the UK). Only three interviewees mentioned the map, mostly to state that its inconspicuousness often makes it less fun due to the lack of peers to share a match:

*Twisted Treeline feels clunky compared to SR now / Just because its been mostly ignored by Riot – **Sebastian** (Heterosexual Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

Twisted Treelane is a wonderful lane. / (...) it's a shame that there are so few people. / So it takes a long time and you don't want to wait that much. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

As mentioned, the practice of play is, first, embodied in the gamer herself – in League, the *summoner* (see 1.3.1). Traditionally, embodiment in computer and videogames (CVG) is especially expressed by avatars; in the FoJ, players utilise the champions as digital extensions of their bodies. Although unmodifiable, these avatar-like characters carry skills, stories and personalities that may represent part of a summoner's:

I love bard for example because he's musical and seems to just be an incredibly calm character which I guess I associate myself with. (...) it's an example of someone you'd like to be. (...) bard is calm even in his death animations he just deflates and whistles his tune with me when I get into a very stressful situation I start to stress and panic I guess the bit of me that wants to be more like bard is probably the bit that remains calm through out everything (...) – Alex (Homosexual Non-Binary/Agender, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., North West England, UK)

Most players have a main champion and other secondary/alternative choices, and the criteria for champion choice is complex, as detailed on Table 6.

Participants' views on champion and role choice can be classified as contingent to personal factors, team relationship, commitment level, game technicalities, or strictly related to the champion character (not mutually exclusive). According to participants in both samples (Brazil = 315, UK = 166), champion and role choice are fundamentally tied to the chosen game mode, as asserted by 4.4 per cent of Brazilian respondents, and 12 per cent of British. Casual or normal game aims at fun or skill training, whereas ranked competitive game aims at rank climbing, essential for those with professional goals. Ranked matches demand team commitment, a reason why casual players may choose to stay in the solo queue.

Provided they have the means (often financial – see 1.3.1), summoners are free to choose their champions and form a pool). However, that must be done carefully as a misplaced champion can hinder the team's winning chances, as each champion has specific abilities. Therefore 13.2 per cent of British respondents and 5.7 per cent of Brazilians say that champion choice comes after lane/role choice, and team composition needs/strategy is among one of the most important criteria (15.8 per cent in Brazil and 22 per cent in the UK). Team strategies also depend on the opponent's strategies, as argued by around 6 per cent of both cohorts. With that, both cohorts assert the

importance of collective practices (since the game is played in teams) allied with a sense of expertise.

	BR = 315		UK = 166	
	n	%	n	%
Aim (casual or competitive/ranked play)	14	4.44	20	12.05
Champion status on meta/patches	7	2.22	23	13.86
Champion's strenght	1	0.32	6	3.61
Champion style, lore or mechanics	44	13.97	18	10.84
Fun and enjoyment	38	12.06	66	39.76
Gender representation	2	0.63	N/A	N/A
Individual personality and playstyle	33	10.48	29	17.47
In-game skills and abilities	51	16.19	49	29.52
Knowledge and experience level	5	1.59	15	9.04
Lane choice	18	5.71	22	13.25
Opponent picks	20	6.35	11	6.63
Personal taste/affinity	161	51.11	29	17.47
Team composition/needs/strategy	50	15.87	37	22.29
Visual/aesthetic identification	5	1.59	11	6.63
None/I don't know	3	0.95	N/A	N/A

Table 6: Content Analysis - criteria for champion and role choices (per country)

As discussed, in-game choices are also dependent on one's aims in the game, either to play competitively or for fun only. Yet, for British players, fun and enjoyment are the most important criteria for champion and role choice (39.7 per cent of the cohort), regardless of game mode. For Brazilians, it is taste and affinity (51.1 per cent), with perceived enjoyment (12 per cent) coming after, for instance, individual skills and abilities (16.1 per cent). 29.5 per cent of British players agree that in-game skills are crucial for champion and role choice, the second most important criterion for that cohort; personal taste and affinity come later, as stated by 17.4 per cent of British players. Participants also believe that champions must match one's personality and playstyle (10.4 per cent of Brazilians, 17.4 per cent of British players), and a few others believe that full knowledge and larger experience with a certain champion must guide the choice (1.5 per cent in Brazil, 9 per cent in the UK). In both cohorts, personal factors, especially perceived fun, and affinity with the character are the most important motives for champion choice.

Figure 58 shows the avatars of four champions (male, female, and two non-human creatures, for comparison). Avatars are a clearer artistic depiction of League champions as seen in the game lobby, just before the match starts, and in the official website.



Figure 57: Riot Games (2019). Champion avatars (clockwise from the upper left): Darius, Evelynn, Gnar and Fizz. (riotgames.com)

Aside from the small avatars, champions are depicted on more complex splash art (Figure 59) also available on the website. These digital images are beautifully made to visually communicate the champion's physical characteristics, but also to hint to their lore and in-game behaviour. As shown in Figure 60, despite the rich imagery of the avatars and splash art, champions' body contours are not exposed during a battle, since the character appearing on screen tends to be very small and move rapidly.

Interview participants seem to agree that the champions' visual aspects exert a certain influence on players, either for picks or for buying skins, confirming Li and colleagues' (2018) study relating avatar's visual characteristics and gamer's loyalty. In the surveys, aesthetics is mentioned by only 1.5 per cent of Brazilian respondents, and 6.6 per cent of British respondents. Agreeableness and attractiveness, however, may have different interpretations; for instance, interviewee Sebastian, who plays mainly with a female champion in a marksman role, justifies his and his friends' choices by saying that '*men love big tits*'. Other champion characteristics, such as perceived strength, are not as important to the whole cohort (0.3 per cent in Brazil and 3.6 per cent in the UK). Although champions' lore and style traits were regarded as important for participants

(13.9 per cent in Brazil, and 10.8 per cent in the UK), there is no evidence that these characteristics are a factor for inclusion or exclusion.

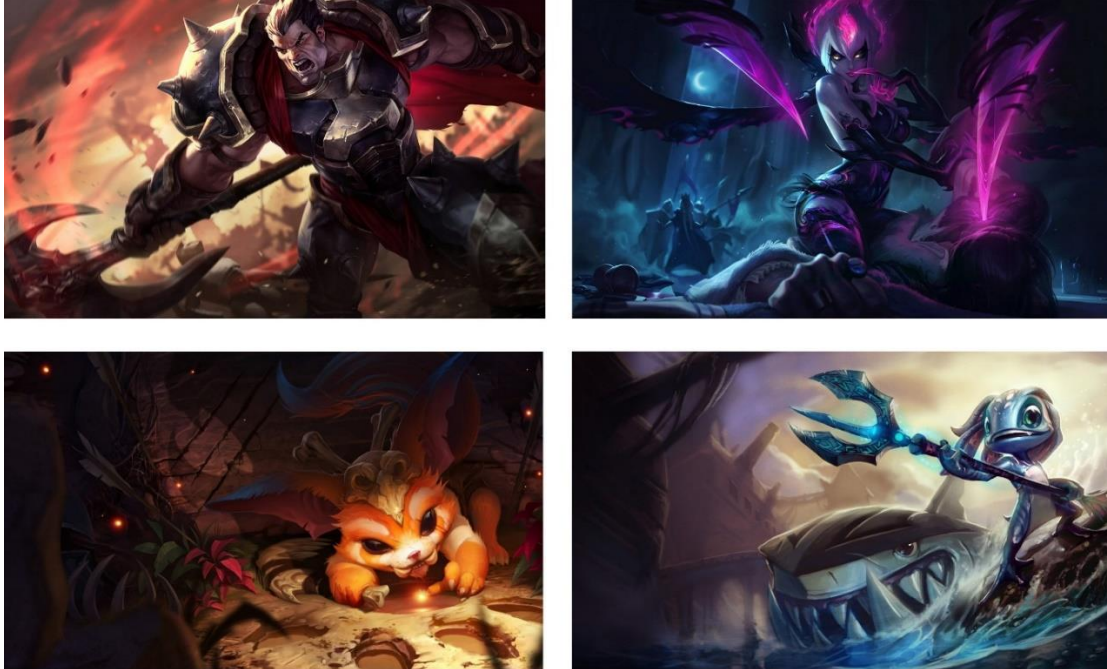


Figure 58: Riot Games (2019). Champions' default splash art (clockwise from the upper left): Darius, Evelynn, Gnar and Fizz. (riotgames.com)

Champion or skin choice can sometimes be related to agency, i.e. avoiding, or conforming to stereotypes. For some female respondents, choosing and mastering a strong female champion can also be a kind of confrontation; as Viviane says, her favourite champion often outplays stereotypically male champions, serving as a form of reprisal against a male player who flamed on her during the match. This practice of negotiation is perceived as effective in challenging and undermining the already unstable unspoken rules for gendered performance in the game.

This survey participant makes a remarkably feminist analysis of how gender may influence playstyle and in-game choices and adds:

(...) I believe that champion, skin, and, in some cases, item choice, are used due to a social construction historically divided by gender and their respective social roles. (...) – Anonymous (Gay Man, Mixed background, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)



Figure 59: Riot Games (2019). Champions in-game appearance (clockwise from the upper left): Darius, Evelynn, Gnar and Fizz. (riotgames.com)

Gender representation is mentioned as a criterion for less than 1 per cent of Brazilian respondents, and none in the UK.

All in-game and lobby communications are carried through text chats (see Figure 61), displayed in the player's screen, and a summoner is located and summoned through their nickname. Chats are the primary communication sites in the FoJs, rendering language a powerful asset in the shaping of identities within the game, as well as the identity of the game itself. The summoner chooses an avatar and in-game name (i.e. nickname) which are visible to the interlocutor, usually being the first information

The relationship between player and champion does not change much between both cohorts. Although Brazilian players consider personal taste and affinity (a broad criterion) as the most important when choosing a champion, British players' focus on champions who are fun to play with underscore the importance of feeling comfortable with that character, for both cohorts. Likewise, Britons and Brazilians further agree that mastery of a champion is the next most important criterion; this feeling of comfort with and mastery of a champion assert the avatar's role in extending the players' body towards the virtual world, providing them with the double embodiment of play during a match. Finally, both cohorts agree with the importance of being attentive to the team's needs. Although focusing on comfort, champion choice must also aim at completing a team; albeit often temporary, this sense of community is central to how spaces of play are produced during a League match, which is true for both Brazilian and British players.

The four gaming arenas identified in this study exemplify the production of space by the trialectic articulation of the lived, the perceived and the imagined, through the mutually influencing and co-producing interaction of the physical, the embodied-psychological and the virtual. The dynamics of play centres the production of space in the gamer's body, and disperses it across the four spheres, generating spaces of socialisation, labour, entertainment, and identification. While the FoJs only allow for a limited representation of the game's spaces, its co-production with the champions and the in-game chat create complex spaces of play for the duration of a match.

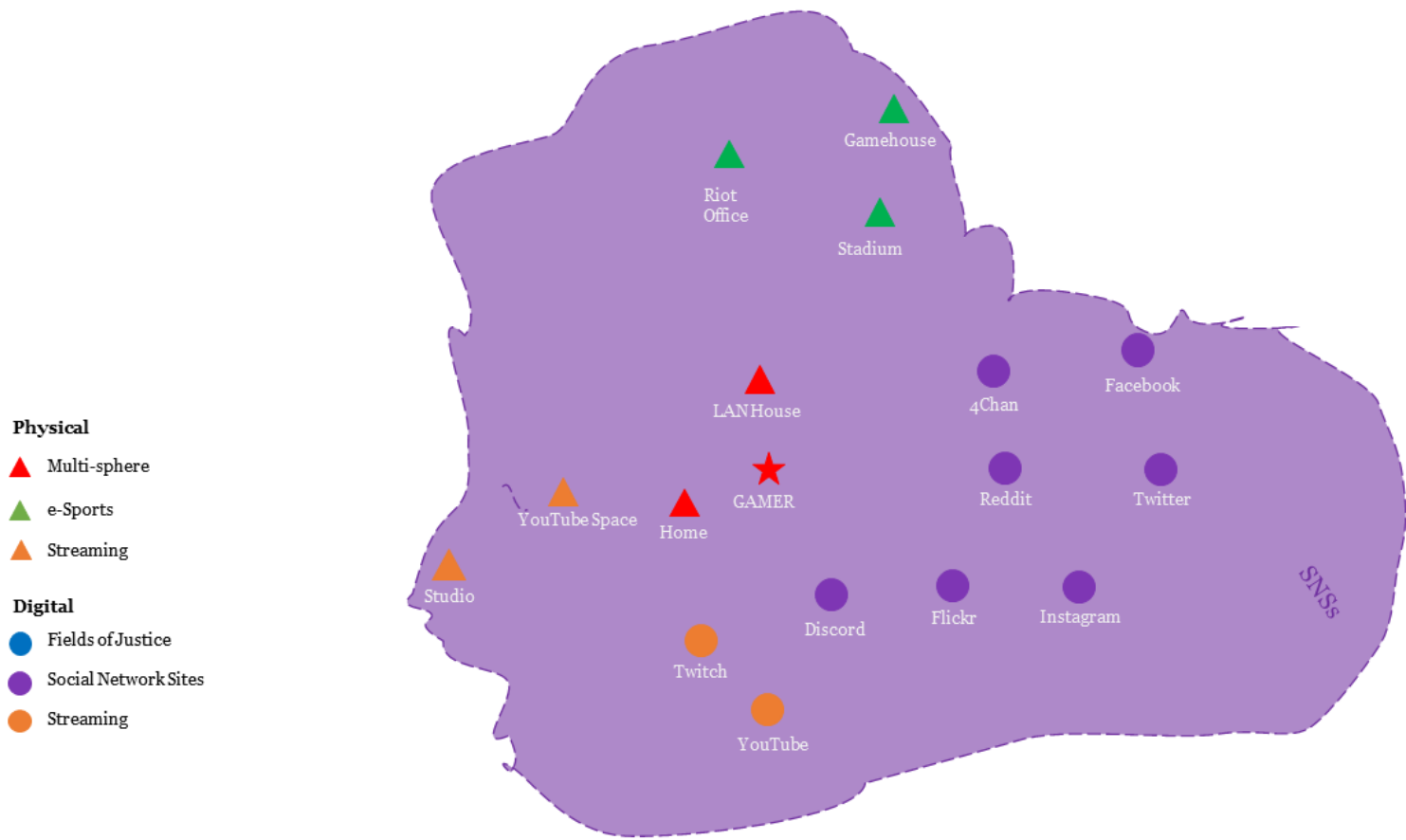


Figure 61: Sphere 2 - Social Network Sites

b. Sphere 2: Social Network Sites (SNS)

Social network sites (often referred to simply as social media) are web-based applications designed to connect people based on their similarities and alterities. SNSs facilitate the creation of communities by loosening the constraints of distance and are increasingly becoming sites for political engagement. In this research, SNSs were observed to be the sites of social engagement and organisation around social practices related to League. On SNSs, League players create and find places for congregation, discussion, and information in the shape of groups, pages, profiles, forums, rooms.

Early in the research design, SNSs appeared to be the most accessible spaces for identifying and reaching League players, this accessibility being one of the reasons for the choice of SNSs as the prime recruitment sites for data collection. The most popular ones in Brazil and the UK – namely Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, respectively – are followed by specialised forums such as Riot Games' official League forum and gather astonishing numbers of players and enthusiasts who interact in distinct and complementing ways. In this research, the term Social Media is used interchangeably with social network to refer to both social networking sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), and news aggregation and discussion forums (e.g. Reddit). Although YouTube is often classified as an SNS, the video hosting service is located within the Streaming sphere, discussed on section 5.1.d.

Due to its inherent mobility, SNSs are ubiquitous; spawning, obviously, from their basic physical sites – the dedicated computer servers located in different places on the Earth – SNS are present in most or all physical sites related to League. The audience can engage via SNS during professional tournaments; likewise, most streaming platforms are connected to popular SNSs and replicate some of their mechanics in their sites (see sections 5.1.c and 5.1.d). In SNS, the digital sites comprising the FoJs are only symbolically present, represented in participants' expressed views and emotions. More importantly, SNSs were observed to be important sites for the negotiation of individual and collective identities, while practices, performances and expressions related to League are co- and recreated, fundamentally altering the social arenas through which each sphere comes to be.

SNS offer insights into the mutual constitution of the technology and social spheres through the material practices of social relations (Massey, 2008; Leszczynski, 2018). The acts involved in SNS use – posting, lurking, debating, creating, joining, and leaving

groups – are not only very effective allegories of spatiality, but are themselves effective producers of a spatiality mediated by the physical spaces and their digital extensions generated via the same mediation. On SNS, players reflect on their very grounded experiences of play in the FoJ by employing tools which are grounded in their identities; the spatiality of League SNS may spawn from experiences based on a certain place-based server, but they transcend this location by creating digital spaces based on micro-cultures (Ash, 2018) organised around players' emotional and affective spaces, and grounded in their embodied experience.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, survey respondents were recruited from purposed SNSs; thus, SNS are part of their experiences with League, even if in distinct ways and intensities. Although the instrument did not specifically ask questions about their SNS use, Brazilian participants (n = 9; none in the UK sample) spontaneously mentioned SNS when talking about interaction with other players. In the dataset, Facebook and Twitter (first and third most popular SNSs in Brazil as of 2015) (Statista, 2018b) were introduced as the main sites for social interaction, either positive (i.e. congregation and assuagement) or negative (i.e. sexual harassment). To expand on the issue, interviewees were asked about their SNS engagement and uses related to League gameplay. Nine British and six Brazilian interviewees had experiences with SNSs (namely Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. In their interviews, participants confirmed their motivations to join and or follow purposed SNS sites (i.e. groups, pages, profiles, forums, *subreddits*⁵⁰).

SNS interaction is more often based on congregation around similarities – the main one is to be a League player or enthusiast. The act of joining and participating in an SNS site is usually a response to the need for strengthening a sense of belonging to the wider League community. This sense of belonging is frequently inflected by each participant's intersecting identities, the first one being their country of residence or mother language, as participants do not report being part of SNS sites centred in other languages or countries (identification within and across League spheres is discussed in depth in section 5.2). SNSs are also used as sources of education about basic and advanced gameplay, as well as for information about game updates, being frequently used by participants who seek to improve their game skills. Brazilian interviewee Letícia summarises what she sees and experiences in her favourite Facebook groups:

⁵⁰ Reddit is organised into user-created boards called *subreddits*, which aggregate user-generated/curated material on a diversity of topics

*it's mostly shenanigans, to be honest. / there are people calling you to play, people speaking their mind, people picking fights (hehe) / it's cool 'cause you end up knowing all League news without having to search for it / and there are a lot of people who enjoy educating you, so every time I have doubts about, say, gender and sexuality, there's someone very patient who explains it to me / exchange experiences – **Letícia** (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

SNSs aggregate discussions and debates about all topics regarding League, including social issues. For that reason, practices of occupation and negotiation are often based on those sites and expressed through the creation of spaces (e.g. groups and pages) or the use of existing spaces as outlets for expression and dispute of ideas. One patent example was the public declaration of a Brazilian professional player who used his Facebook page to come out as gay to his public:

*(...) then people would ask 'are you gay? are you gay? are you gay?' and I would always dodge the question, I didn't like to dodge the question, I wanted to be free to answer it. (...) so when I did the post, 'cause what I wanted with that post, it's 'cause I know I have a lot of visibility, I was a public person, I still am, but to, like, lower this prejudice thing, 'cause in fact people on the Internet will say anything 'cause there's no problem, right, you're behind a monitor, a keyboard, a mouse, etc, you will post anything you want on the Internet, so there's a lot of evil people on the Internet, a lot of people who disseminate hatred, prejudice, this kind of thing, so I tried to use the fact that I am a public person to lower this, to put in people's mind that the proplayer you like is gay, that doesn't change anything in their lives, it doesn't change anything in your lives, it's perfectly normal, you know. So there was this side too. (...) – **Gabriel 'Kami' Bohm** (Gay Man, 18-25 y.o, pro-player and streamer, Brazil)*

On that day, Kami's Facebook page became a site for dispute and negotiation of narratives; although he intended to demonstrate that his sexuality would have no influence on his professional abilities, his coming out received negative and positive reactions from the public, about which he reflects:

*(...) people's reception was super positive, I think that... you can see the Facebook page's data, and on that day when I posted it I lost 800 likes, I think, but I won 2500... I don't even say this 'cause of the number, like... I got 2500 likes, whatever, but the 800 people who disliked my page because of that... go away, you know, you won't be missed (...) – **Gabriel 'Kami' Bohm** (Gay Man, 18-25 y.o, pro-player and streamer, Brazil)*

On SNS, the exposition of identities is perceived by participants as a public matter, which may be understood by some as a practice for the occupation of spaces, whereas

others may see it as unnecessary exposition and victimisation. For instance, this participant reflected on North American proplayer Maria ‘Remilia’ Creveling, who was trans, disclosing her experiences of psychological distress on SNS:

(...) [Remilia] did herself ZERO favours by whining quite so much on social media / (...) I'd not be surprised if that was a factor that lead to her being removed from that organization, super unprofessional in my opinion / (...) stop posting personal stuff on what was quickly becoming an official twitter feed / (...) like idk surely there's gotta be someone within the brand that can provide some basic social media help / "I played badly this game will focus on playing better next time" – Luke (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

Kami and Remilia’s experiences also relate to identity-making and identification on League, a theme expanded on section 5.2. Unfortunately, Remilia’s experience ended tragically (see 1.3.4).

As seen, the relationship between League players and SNS is productive of meaningful spaces of the digital by challenging and (re)constructing place-based identities (Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski, 2016), while adding other identities based on affective and emotional relations which spawn from a game. The spatialities of SNS are revealed when computer-generated environments simultaneously embody and disembody one’s identity, and transform the physical spaces wherein they are embedded – including one’s body – into spaces for community, and therefore political engagement (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011; Jenzen, 2017).

Some SNS users prefer to avoid direct interaction for many reasons, including a lack of connection to the wider community, simple unwillingness to interact, or even fear of online misbehaviour, characterised by negative or harmful interactions which are a significant part of SNS – and, according to participants, of all League spheres. More importantly, online misbehaviour in SNS is a highly gendered, shape-shifting practice (see 6.1). Antisocial SNS interaction includes the use of sexist, racist and heterosexist slurs, either as reactions or as a provocation. Rosa explains how these behaviours have discouraged her participation:

I used to participate [on social media], nowadays I just check the news on Twitter / (...) it got to something that’s just for the memes, personal attacks, stuff like that. nowadays I just follow lol’s official page / (..) yes, but there are some groups that are more aggressive. there are groups where they call women shitwomen,

jizz deposit, this kind of absurdity. / (...) in closed groups – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

No woman on the British cohort has mentioned feeling discouraged or excluded from SNS due to antisocial behaviours, and only one has mentioned its occurrence. In the dataset, these behaviours are largely perceived as reprehensible, but are also seen as inherent to the activity or the community:

none of these people have a job or care about their self image enough / like you never hear of some £120k a year stock market dude posting "kill yourself fag" on Remilia's twitter feed lmao / (...) it's because they don't know what professionalism is / or how to present themselves / (...) but I think you have to factor in that these people don't KNOW the consequences / like can you imagine if one of these kids becomes like prime minister or president or something / and some data miner pulls up him dropping racial slurs on a friend's photo because that's how they joke around / and it gets pulled out of context and the media starts going crazy / like 12 year old me would have no idea about that / but people say all kinds of stuff when they think nobody cares/is watching / I know I definitely do lmao – Luke (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

What I see is society being replicated in the game. Same external problems we have, we have them in the game. / (...) The guy who comments rage on a Facebook group will certainly do it in game. 'Cause that's how they react to things. Just because they're on the computer, some people think they can do more than they would do outside, I know of some cases. – Vladimir (Heterosexual Man, Pardo, 31-40 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

For some participants, identity markers may change how people interact with them in all League spheres. This survey participant tells what she thinks would happen if native voice chat would be introduced in League:

I'd probably suffer with sexism. I think it'd be like this: 1) They'd straight ask my Facebook or some other social media. 2) Of course I'd say no, I don't know any of them. 3) They would start cursing me 'cause I didn't give them my Facebook. It'd be things like 'you must be fat, you must be ugly' as if that's the reason I'm not giving it to them or as if that was some sort of offence. – Anonymous (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

In her account, being recognised as a woman through voice chat would open opportunities for sexual harassment, for which SNS would be (and in some participants'

accounts, were) the vehicle. The formation of social groups in SNS and issues around sexual harassment and other negative interactions are expanded on Chapter Six.

In the face of negative encounters across League's spheres, participants find ways to feel included and tackle possibly harmful consequences. SNSs are sites for constructing networks of care and inclusivity through the creation of spaces aimed at assuagement and support for those who suffer from unwanted antisocial behaviour. Facebook groups and pages, and Discord servers are meaningful places for Brazilian players, for they represent spaces where their collective identity is reinforced, and their participation secured by an increased sense of safety (see Chapter Six). This phenomenon was not encountered in the UK sample.

Notwithstanding the inclusionary potential of SNS within the wider gaming community, experiences of exclusion, marginalisation and segregation are stark reminders of how identity markers can be employed as dividers within and across socio-spatial spheres in and beyond the digital. SNS thus may offer space for counteraction through agency which can be expressed in manifold ways, including strategic segregation through the formation of homosocial spaces (expanded on Chapter Six).

Group managers on Facebook report their (sometimes frictional) interaction with *Rioters*, Riot Games' employees who have an online presence and, reportedly, participate in popular groups created by players. Their presence is sometimes perceived as surveillance, other times as a welcome attention. In the latter, players utilise this platform to express their complaints or their satisfaction, expecting the company to respond by making changes in the game. When a Rioter's presence is perceived as surveillance, that digital space becomes one of dispute. Viviane, a Brazilian group manager and player, had two separate spaces on Facebook, a fan page, and an open group, focused on discussing and exposing perceived sexism on League. She reports how her spaces changed in meaning with one encounter:

(...) the group was meant for us to take refuge, to vent, for us to play together / it became rioters' propaganda / (...) on the other hand, the page had the idea that, if rioters are not listening to us / (...) we will publicly denounce it / (...) the group died to me 'cause a rioter seized it and turned into company's propaganda / but the page stayed with me, we kept it for as long as possible with the help of my girl friends – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

If the presence of Rioters in players' SNS spaces is a portrait of the intersection of spheres, the dispute portrayed in Viviane's account reveals more intricate politics

involving many actors, including the company and antagonistic groups. Indeed, SNSs are central to some of the most significant contestations within League, especially regarding gendered relations. The antagonism, often expressed in different ways within the game maps, gain new and more stark contours when transported to SNS, whose arenas are a place for heated debates, foul discussions, and overt attacks. Viviane's tale of her experience as a SNS manager ends with her group and page being disrupted by antagonistic groups opposing her denouncement of sexism in League, to the point where these spaces were knocked down by these groups' actions. Online misbehaviour and its consequences to gendered space production in League are discussed in depth on Chapter Six.

Participants' accounts of SNS use confirm these arenas as fundamental spaces for their affective attachment to the game and to the community. The profuse production of languages, creation of content and power struggles do not only express players' attachment to League but shapes it. These experiences confirm Ash's take on these emotional relationships as a 'key currency of micro-cultures on various digital platforms' (Ash, 2018, p.149), rendering SNS as central to the formation of individual and collective identity and experience, conduct and perception of the world.

As seen, both Brazilian and British participants engage with SNS and, in both cohorts, their multiple identities intersect. SNS allows for the exhibition of their physical features (which may expose their gender and race) and can open opportunities for other identity axes to be exchanged – e.g. class, location, sexual orientation. Thus, SNS can be a prime site for processes of negotiation and occupation of spaces through the frequent discussion of the fluidities of what can be considered personal or public. The existence of closed and secret groups, as well as of purposely segregated communities materialises these negotiations.

There are differences, however, in how Brazilian and British players engage with their peers on SNS. Within the explored cohort, Brazilians have shown a more meaningful relationship with their Facebook groups, which tend to be used more frequently as outlets for communal sharing of experiences, enabling more nuanced practices of spatial negotiation. Contrastingly, British players see their SNS groups in a more instrumental way, as places aimed at education and information about the game; for this cohort, sharing personal experiences or complaining about negative in-game experiences is more frequently associated with murmuring, which, for them, should be kept private, especially if one intends to be respected as a player in that community.

For British players, individual identity markers (and their intersections) are perceived as irrelevant or even harmful (when wielded and negotiated) to the production of online microcultures and spaces; for Brazilian players, it is the opposite – one's identity is central to how these spaces are produced and negotiated; this is especially clear when gendered experiences with harmful interactions on SNS are compared (see Chapter Six). For participants who feel excluded by online misbehaviour, SNS presents itself as a place for agency, underscoring the politics marking SNS use among League players.

As seen, SNS mobilises in-game interactions and provides room for deepening the relationships in League's social arenas. When mobilising players' embodied-psychological spaces, sites such as Facebook create digital extensions of physical spaces such as cities or countries, but also create spaces centred on emotional experiences, either positive or negative. Through this mechanism, SNSs are powerful generators of identification and belonging, being prime sites for political struggle which generates or reinforces the meanings invested in all gaming spheres.

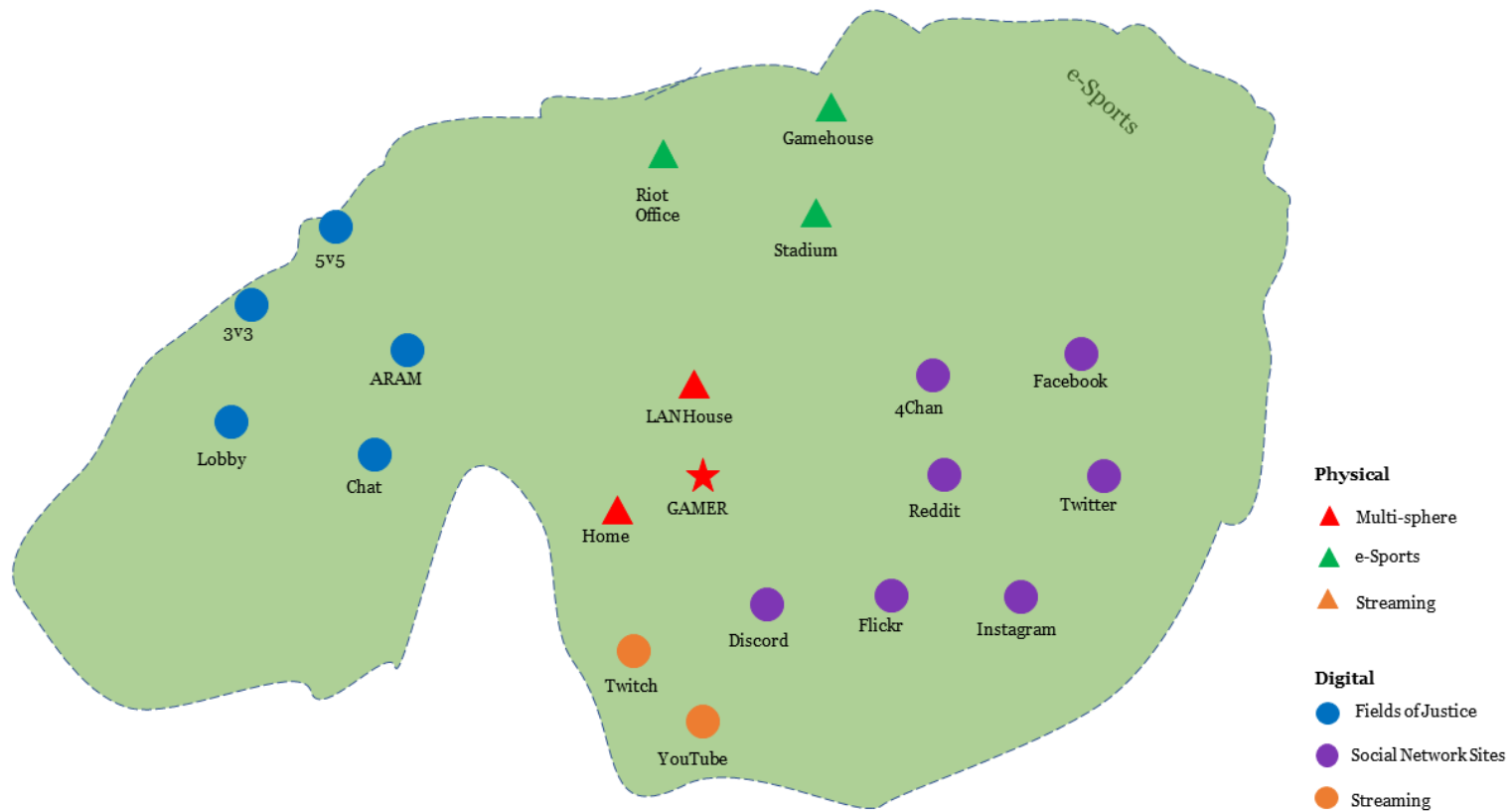


Figure 62: Sphere 3 - e-Sports

c. Sphere 3: e-Sports

With the advent of professional gameplay, League became one of the most prolific electronic sports (e-sports) in the world, a billion-dollar worth industry (see Chapter One). The material practices involved in the e-sports sphere are most diverse. Here, the central practice of play is performed by professional gamers, whose outstanding skills, and qualities reserve them a separate place in the arena, usually organised, again, by nationality, skill level, financial resources, and gender. Professional practice has the gamehouse (i.e. training centres for professional players) and the tournament arenas (ranging from large gamehouses to stadiums) as their central physical sites. The wider audience, spread across the globe, may follow the matches and tournaments in person by travelling to the arenas (which often presumes a significant financial commitment) or by watching real-time transmissions and recordings on television or via live stream from a range of places, including their homes (section 5.1.d). SNS use is deeply related to e-sports for it is the central space for commentary and debate, and publicization of matches and streams.

Physical spaces related to League e-sports can be mobile, from the player or the fan's body which travels to a gamehouse for practice, or to a stadium to compete or watch, to personal devices such as the computer and mobile which allow them to engage in SNS and streaming activities. Regardless of being a still-burgeoning work and sports⁵¹ field, professional League gameplay is already cemented in participants' views of the community and the game, and it is seen by participants as a very important activity which mirrors practices from amateur gameplay while dictating practices that extend to the other spheres.

Most survey respondents (75.4 per cent in Brazil, 93.4 per cent in the UK) engage in non-professional play, a trend that was followed in the interview samples (n=3). Table 7 presents the distribution of the 6.6 per cent of survey participants who claimed to play professionally, and their gender. Although this limitation hampers a wider analysis of practices in e-sports, most interview participants shared their perceptions of gender relations and the blatantly unequal gender ratio in League's competitive arenas.

⁵¹ E-sports are in process of being legally recognised and regulated in Brazil; up to the moment of this research, the law project n. 383/2017 was in process of instruction and analysis by the Brazilian parliament.

	BR = 10		UK = 12	
	n	%	n	%
Women	N/A	N/A	1	8.33
Men	9	90	5	41.67
Non-Binary	N/A	N/A	1	8.33
Unknown demographics	1	10	5	41.67

Table 7: Survey data - Participants who claim to play professionally (per country).

The process of becoming a professional is perceived as intricate and exclusionary by nature. Besides outstanding skills, professional League gameplay demands high time commitments and financial support, which are often perceived to be a privilege of younger players:

*I'm far to bad to play professionally! / I wish I could on some level, I am very competitive / But I don't have the lifestyle that could facilitate it, nor the talent haha – **Sebastian** (Heterosexual Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

*I'm probably never going to hit that form or ability / (...) / I mean obviously / everyone wants to be Faker / be that guy that's just infallible / (...) wow-ing crowds etc / but I know that's not a feasible future – **Luke** (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)*

Professional gameplay is also associated with changing the nature of playing League. For instance, those seeking the professional ranks must be able to make strategic in-game choices of role and champion which are less related to enjoyment and more to team success (see section 5.1.a). Additionally, transitioning to the e-sports scene reportedly demands a behavioural change which culminates in a change of identity for many players, since issues like online misbehaviour from professionals are severely frowned upon:

*language I feel should be a non-issue outside of semi/fully professional play / if you're climbing Diamond, looking for a serious/semi-serious group of people to approach cash tournaments or find an org with / you should act professional / I guarantee I've never dropped anything harsher than the occasional question mark in BM in a game where I represent the University [blank] / (...) I'm on the committee for our eSports society, that aspect of professionalism is very important to me – **Luke** (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)*

i think the most peaceful place / is genuinely like 600 LP ish / so very very top of challenger / only people who want to tryhard/pro players are there / pro players have more restrictions/pressure on their behaviour, and the scene as a whole is bigger so there is more at stake – Flynn (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

Notwithstanding, most respondents in both surveys and interviews claim that the e-sports sphere presents blatantly unequal rates of gender participation, which for some respondents is a direct consequence of the mostly male demographic of players. Still, this survey respondent believes that the overall unequal gender rates do not suffice as an explanation for the absence of women in the professional ranks:

(...) There are obviously less women playing LoL, but still, it would be an incredible and magical coincidence if, amongst so many opportunities in so many different places around the world and in teams of so many different levels, with 7 different possible functions available within them, that not even one single time, not one single woman has been more able to fulfil these opportunities than all the current male pro-players, nowhere in the world. Pigs might fly. – Anonymous (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

Other respondents believe that fewer women venture into ranked, thus competitive gameplay, and the numbers get scarcer the higher one gets in the rank ladder (see 1.3):

There are barely any females in challenger players so, that also means teams are less likely to pick them based on skill. I think the top challenger leaderboards (NA) is male centrated too. – Lucy (Bisexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East of England, UK)

In being a player who also acts on other servers, Lucy offers an interesting comparison between the UK and the North America (NA) server. Professional teams in the UK did not include female players (active or past roster) at the time of this research. In Brazil, only one team had a single female player (Monica ‘Riyuuka’ Arruda, at PaiN Gaming). Between 2015 and 2019, six Brazil-based teams and three UK-based teams had women in management positions (five in the latter, twelve in the former). All the British and Brazilian professional players acting in regional and world-class teams at the time of this thesis’ closure were men. (Leaguepedia, 2019; UKLC, 2019).

British and Brazilian participants seem to agree that the male hegemony in official tournaments is an outcome of processes of gendered socialisation (expanded on section 5.2), which impacts the overall issue of representation and representativity in e-sports.

Participants (mostly women, in both samples) repeatedly tell stories of their upbringing to illustrate how CVGs were depicted to them from an early age as a masculine activity:

*Gaming is seen as a guy thing. Most competitive scenes are male dominated. / The same way most people see the male football teams, the eSports scene is made up of teams comprised of male players / It's probably lack of representation at the higher end – **Simon** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)*

*women are not raised to chase the top / they don't wanna be the best or to be competitive / cause that's 'rude and masculine' / men are raised to be the best in everything / and the games are theirs, theoretically, you know / with incentive, in your own element and with no harassment or boycott it is easier to become a pro – **Viviane** (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

Viviane mentions lack of incentive, a theme brought up by other participants who speak of a certain negligence from Riot Games and other e-sport related corporations. Practices such as limiting the access of women and LGBTQI+ people from professional tournaments or prohibiting the formation of mixed teams (see 2.4.1) are mentioned as at least partially responsible for the lack of these demographics in professional ranks. This perceived corporate negligence crosses individual identities and structural issues related to them, increasing the difficulty for some groups to participate, and impacting the overall e-sports community:

*(...) and trust me its hard for a white teenage boy to make it in EUW for an example / it really is, for every [pro-player name 1] (young UK prodigy adc we have) that makes it / we have 10 [pro-player name 2] (ex challenger UK mid that could have made it) / just as an example / (...) so [pro-player name 1] makes it, 10 [pro-player name 2] don't yeah / ridiculous fall through/waste – **Flynn** (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)*

*(...) others say that there are not enough female elite players to join a pro championship / There should be a lot with potential, but there's not even a tiny incentive. / It's the same as saying that no Brazilian is good enough for a nobel. Being that our basic education is not a big deal. – **Diego** (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)*

As with the other spheres, hostile interactions dim the presence of women on League's professional ranks. Interviewees described situations of small scale, everyday sexism, and of clear, symbolic violence against women on teams and tournaments. Flynn, a trans person, shared their first-hand account:

there used to be girls / back when i first started competitive / around S4 / there were a few actually good ones who could keep up / and the scene as a whole being more unprofessional and more abusive towards its players back then well / it was awful for everyone but i definitely saw with my own eyes / how girls were / discredited/ignored/not considered equal / by management and players alike so / when a girl did make it onto a team like mine back then / management still shut her down during discussion / and she was eventually kicked unjustly for 'attitude issues' / it was bullshit – Flynn (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

As seen, hostile behaviours are a preeminent theme across the dataset and literature (developed in-depth in Chapter Six). However, the significance and impact of so-called toxic behaviours is a constant controversy among participants. The commentator Kelsey Moser criticises what she sees as an excuse, and not a valid reason, for the lack of women in e-sports:

A common thread of trying to explain why there aren't more female-sexed esports professionals keeps re-emerging. The BBC would like to paint the picture of women bullied out of the scene by constant harassment and a pay disparity, focusing on unreliable statistics to create a gender pay gap without providing rigor or explanation. (...) None of this is to dismiss claims made that women in esports experience harassment. Being a minority or an oddity under the spotlight will often generate a lot of attention, both positive and negative. Within a game, self-identifying as female or using voice chat will invite ridicule, regardless of expressed skill, but in a more public sphere, putting one's self in the spotlight will always engender some form of harassment. – Kelsey Moser (Woman, commentator, UK-USA)

Some participants believe that there are significant bio-psychological differences between men and women that can explain the gendered imbalance in professional teams and tournaments, but that these differences are very small and may not be fully responsible for the issue.

Professional players are perceived as highly influential people within the community. Amateur players look up to their favourite pro-players, whom they follow on SNS and streaming, to master tactics and enhance their gameplay. According to interviewees and survey respondents, this influence can go as far as the use of certain slangs and jargon, often crossing with the issue of toxic behaviours and corporate negligence – e.g. pro-players who practice online misbehaviour may be seen as setting a negative standard for amateur players, and the lack of a firm response from professional organisations is frowned upon by participants. Contrastingly, firm responses against undesirable practices are perceived as positive for both the community and corporations.

Indeed, professional players are seen as holding part of the solution for the gender imbalance in League:

*I think if pro players gave time and started publicly coaching female players who want to consider the pro scene, it could give the idea that it is indeed possible for female players to make it that far (...) – **Simon** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)*

The obvious gender imbalance in League's professional gameplay is often addressed through the creation of segregated teams and tournaments; however, this practice is highly controversial amongst interviewees. On one side are those who believe that this strategic segregation can open doors for talented women in higher ranks:

*I think at first it's important to incentivise female competitions, since it's not possible to insert mixed teams / and to give some visibility, to advertise, to highlight more female players with professional abilities (...) – **Camila** (Bisexual Woman, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

*I think initially, since we still lack a lot of representation for women, maybe the easiest way would be to create female leagues and support those leagues / cause if you let it as it is, women will always be disadvantaged due to the lack of this initial support – **Augusto** (Man, 31-40 y.o., Midwest Brazil)*

*in terms of competitive play I believe that there are loads of advantages to being a female professional. First of all you have online female tournaments and circuits - of which there are none for males currently. – **Anonymous** (Heterosexual Man, 18-25 y.o., England)*

Diversely, most participants (especially Brazilians) dismiss this practice as inherently either harmful and discriminating, or as proof of weakness:

*I think that's nonsense cause those are electronic sports, the mind of a man and of a woman are the same, we're not using physical force, we're not using, um, no physical aspect, so there's no difference between men and women there, and I think that's nonsense, um... so much that sometimes female teams of LoL or other games call me to coach or to give a talk, something like that, and I refuse cause I think that's nonsense, I think the way is to coach girls and enable girls to insert them in mixed teams, normal teams. The way is to join, not to separate. – **Raphaella 'Queen B' Laet** (Heterosexual Trans Woman, 18-25 y.o., streamer, Brazil)*

female tournaments are a joke and shouldn't exist unless they're literally for fun only / they hold back women without a doubt / they're a joke and everyone knows it, including the girls that play in it / all the teams are used as poster girls which is why you'll find female players who / don't even main top lane for example / main

support in soloq as a plat 4 player but / they'll play top in this 'professional female team' / its awful / a totally sad waste and ofc / most of the guys just sit back and laugh / in trying to create some 'protected' environment in which women can play without fear of bullying or something idk / they've separated themselves and made the idea of a female pro into a joke – Flynn (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

Kelsey Moser's remark summarises the ambivalence found in this dataset:

There's nothing wrong with creating all-female teams in the meantime if the goal of the team is actually to play seriously and improve, but women who succeed at the highest level in esports, at least initially, will likely have to do so alone without the support of several other women making the jump at the same time. (...) I'm dubious that heavy pushes to increase awareness of women in esports have significantly influenced this considering that, in some cases, all-female tournaments, particularly in China, have descended to pageant-like displays where women are judged for their appearances or simply mocked and ridiculed by their audience. – Kelsey Moser (Woman, commentator, UK-USA)

Team composition and the issue of gender-segregated tournaments are discussed more in-depth on Chapter Six.

Nevertheless, the growing presence of female professionals in e-sports is seen as a sign of evolution by participants, since, for them, gender should not be an issue in the game and less so in professional environments. This participant summarises what most British participants say:

tbh I think if you can play effectively on a team gender shouldn't matter / in that same understanding you should appreciate that you will be treated exactly as another player regardless of sex or belief or gender identification. No special allowances – Alex (Homosexual Non-Binary/Agender, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., North West England, UK)

Professional gameplay is often looked upon by gamers as the excellence gaming standard; for this reason, e-sports practice delineates spaces of complex identification, either of gender, age, or location in the world. The dynamics of identification in e-sports often fuels even deeper political struggles, which lead to the creation of gender - segregated spaces, which are themselves the focus of increased controversy.

In this study, Brazilian and British participants mostly agree that gendered socialisation and corporate negligence are responsible for the gendered imbalance in the professional

player pool. Both cohorts, however, are equally torn when it comes to strategic segregation as a mitigation strategy. Brazil has a better record of including women in their professional mixed-gender teams but, in both countries, professional League play is a masculine and inherently exclusionary activity.

Moreover, the dynamics revealed in the findings point to important class cleavages on the construction of e-sports spaces, for time, money, and broader conditions for developing outstanding gaming skills are assets tied to a certain position in society. Participants' experiences and perceptions are eloquent in bringing gender to this equation, for exclusionary practices at play in other spheres tend to hinder women's development in professional ranks, while the organisation of professional tournaments and teams push women to the margins of this system.

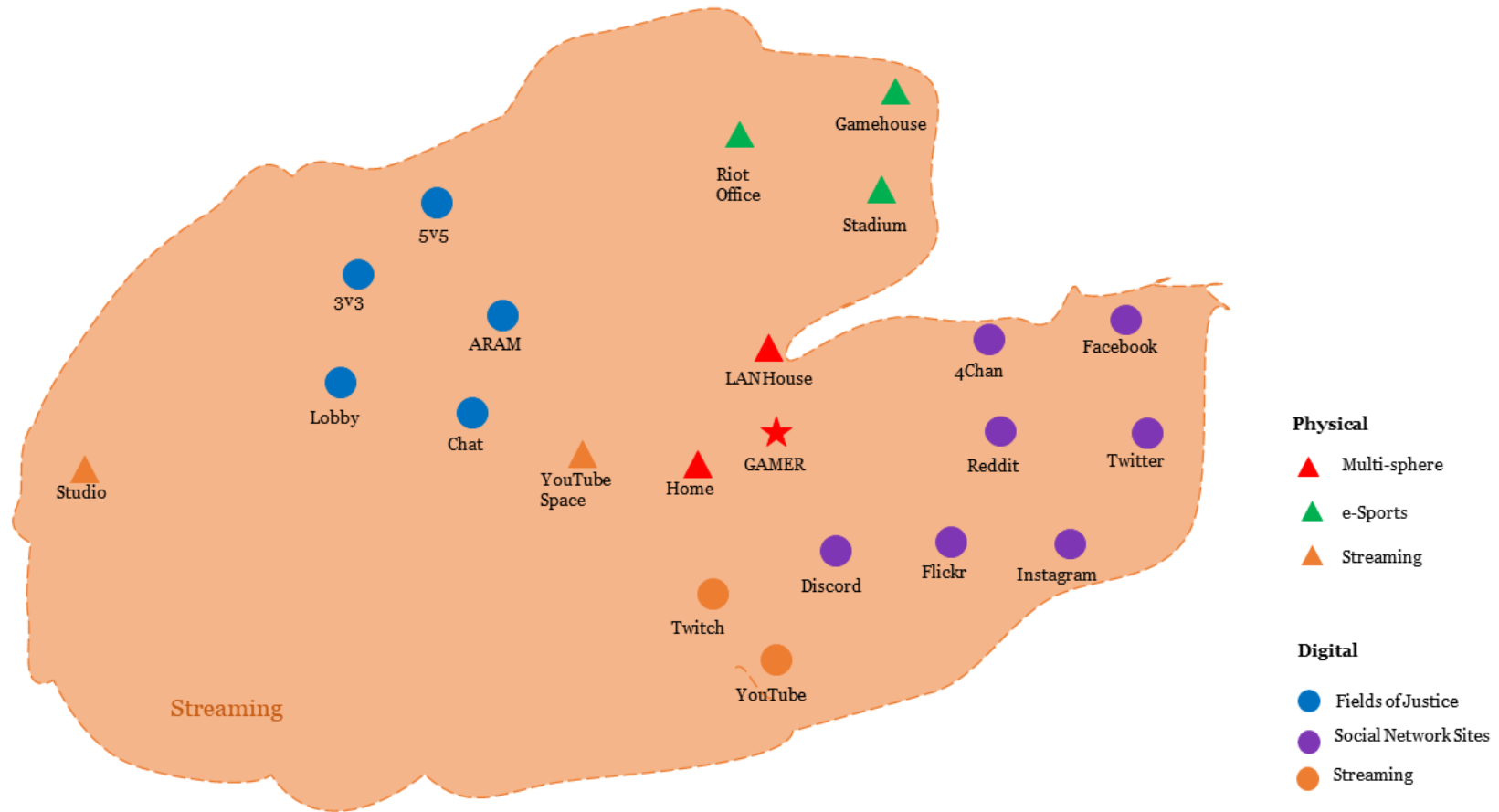


Figure 63: Sphere 4 - Streaming

d. Sphere 4: Streaming

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the surveys employed in the first research phase had the aim of surfacing practices and activities and their location across the overlapping spaces of League. Streaming, the practice of producing and broadcasting (often public-tailored) live videos of videogame play, was revealed by respondents to generate a fourth overlapping sphere spawning from the platforms (the most popular, in this sample, being Twitch.tv and YouTube) and spreading to the others. Streaming is thus an all-encompassing sphere, for it comprehends every digital and physical site constitutive of the other three. A streamer may be based in her bedroom in her parents' house; professional practising and coaching sessions can be streamed from the gamehouse; international professional tournaments are widely broadcast via streaming platforms. Streams are advertised and commented on via SNS, and most streaming platforms present interactive communicational platforms alike, and often connected to, other SNSs. More importantly, streamers' engagement with the game and the audience produces affect, which travels through the web and creates an intimate space with those on the other side of the screen; streaming translates and transmutes emotions, extends the intimate space of the bedroom/studio, and produces a sense of presence and proximity (Burke *et al.*, 2017) between creators and viewers.

Interviewees watch and follow streaming channels to be on top of game updates and current metagame, which increases their general knowledge of the game and enhances their playstyle and consequent in-game success. Streams also provide entertainment for the audience through amusing performances from independent streamers, and through the showcase of professionals' impressive skills in tournaments and training. Streamers often act as coaches for those amateurs willing to become professionals, or simply to dominate the gameplay tactics.

Survey participants in both samples argued that streaming platforms reflect the disproportionate gender ratio which marks League as a masculine space and introduced the contradictions of streaming as a gendered practice. Although no streamers were reached to participate in first-hand interviews, twelve interviewees (4 in UK and 8 in Brazil), including those whose accounts were collected through secondary sources, expanded on these issues.

Despite the unequal gender ratio perceived by participants, streaming is viewed as inclusive, a place where gendered practices can be seen as indicators of burgeoning

inclusivity due to the presence and prestige enjoyed by minorities in those platforms. The presence of women, and of LGBTQI+ as streamers is viewed as a sign of the community's receptivity and as a source of inspiration:

*However, with the bringing forth of streaming services such as Twitch, and other female gamers playing such games, it acts as a natural encouragement for females to play the game and not be discouraged by other players since at the end of the day, we're all human and can play games! – **Anonymous** (Heterosexual Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., England)*

*Nowadays I think it's getting to a level of equality / there are professional female players, there are famous female streamers, including a transgender, which I think it is important, that visibility (...) – **Camila** (Bisexual Woman, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

Nevertheless, streaming platforms are interactive spaces, and the judgement ultimately rests on the interaction between audience and streamer. This participant sees streaming platforms as bearing indicators of the community's inclusivity, but inadvertently stresses a caveat on this same community:

*(...) nowadays the community is very receptive ! / dunno if you follow forums! Or if you know twitch tv / there you can see that good people accept that they treat women the same way / and some times depending on the situation, even defend them / that's very cool / that obviously on places where the community is more united (...) – **Rodrigo** (Man, 26-30 y.o., Midwest Brazil)*

Rodrigo's account, derived from his experience in the streaming audience, stresses that inclusionary practices within those spaces are dependent upon the quality of the social relations there embedded. His experience covertly echoes what survey and interview participants see as a patently unequal treatment towards some streamers by their audience, depending on their gender. The treatment may be perceived as positive, although that may also be seen as veiled, everyday sexism:

*I don't really get discriminated against because no one knows I'm a girl, unless they visit my stream or I get to know them personally (...) If anything, I think I get more praise, because I'm highly ranked AND I'm not a support main, and that's something you don't see often from a girl for some reason. – **Victoria 'Vicksy' Doman** (Woman, 18-25 y.o., pro-player and streamer, UK)*

These quotes highlight that being perceived (and interacted with) as someone of a certain gender is a much more overt process in this sphere. Contrary to the FoJs or text-based SNS, bodily performance is central to streaming platforms, being expressed through certain markers such as clothing, body language and recording scenery. For this reason, gendered performance is more explicit and tends to more clearly demarcate spaces and behaviours within streaming. Due to its mainly visual character, streaming is centred on visual appearance, either of the gaming abilities or the gamer's bodily performances:

I got into this stream platform (...) cause I saw a pretty streamer girl on facebook saying she would go live, I even went there and liked her post. I watched some 10 min that day and never more. (...) I confess I got in due to her being pretty, she makes gameplay videos, but due to my lack of habit of watching and following I don't actually follow her or watch her anymore. (...) – Vladimir (Heterosexual Man, Pardo, 31-40 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

Participants' accounts bring visibility to women and LGBTQI+ streamers' gender; in these platforms, the gendered bodily performance is labelled upon *the other* streamers, rendering cis-gendered men as the genderless norm (Haraway, 1988). The gendered body present on camera is, as exemplified by Vicksy, immediately identified by its visual traits and, as described by interviewee Lucy, gender then makes a difference:

I think it's different if you're a streamer. / (...) it has its pros and cons (...) – Lucy (Bisexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East of England, UK)

Indeed, the dataset evidences how bodily performances of women streamers are central to their participation and are especially scrutinised regarding their appropriateness and attractiveness. Survey respondents affirm that, for instance, people might be inclined to engage with streaming if the presenter is female. Interviewees (especially British) are very critical of female bodily performance on streaming platforms since the body of a female streamer is often viewed as a prompt to improve viewership and revenue:

(...) they do exploit the shit out of people. / (...) e-girls, girls that play league for money / (...) yes, unlike a normal streamer, these girls will get lonely guys to pay them to play games. / and they stream the games. / twitch had a massive crackdown on it but, I am certain it still happens. / (...) You're offering a service, but I would say it's just exploitative behaviour. / I just don't agree with people like that, it's like people who pay others to boost their account. But hey, if

*people are willing to pay and it makes them happy, who am I to complain? -
Lucy (Bisexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East of England, UK)*

The nature of the exchange between a female streamer and her audience is perceived as inflecting the nature of streaming, for the existence of a ‘normal’ streamer and an ‘e-girl’ reveals a highly gendered reading of women’s streaming habits and practices – for instance, interviewee Flynn often uses the term *camwhore* to refer to streamers who showcase their bodies or engage in various levels of sensual or eroticised performance in their channels. Despite being a controversial topic, most participants in this research share the view that these somehow eroticised practices are inherently negative:

It’s good that people see you as a diva or a bombshell, but it’s good when people acknowledge your potential, you know. If I were doing this just for attention I wouldn’t be there playing night and day, I wouldn’t be devoting myself to it... I’d just be there streaming with my funbags and not doing anything else [laughs] – Raphaela ‘Queen B’ Laet (Heterosexual Trans Woman, 18-25 y.o., streamer, Brazil)

I find that very harmful / cause you know, men already say women can’t play since I started with online games, at 8 years old. / if they use their bodies to promote their work that’s because, somehow, their work is not good enough to stand out by itself. – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

As seen, streaming and SNS are deeply connected and the boundaries between them are blurred; for instance, YouTube is classified as a video-sharing website, but often referred to and analysed as a SNS. Due to this connection, streaming spaces are perceived as public, thus putting individual and collective gendered performances at the centre of scrutiny, debate, and criticism; this dialogue links the digital, the physical and the embodied-psychological (Maddrell, 2016), creating a complex digital space where gender performances are crucial for they embody the replication and reinforcement of power relations across the physical and the digital (Del Casino Jr and Brooks, 2015).

Unequal treatment and overtly gendered bodily performances revive the issue of online misbehaviour, the most evident theme among those who commented about streaming. Participants like Luke⁵² believe that ‘*It’s part of stream culture now, unfortunately*’ and, indeed, interviewees’ accounts affirm these practices as central to wider gaming culture, at least in the context of League in the two explored countries (see Chapter Six). According to participants, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, threats

⁵² Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK

and psychological aggression are the most common forms of online misbehaviour in these platforms; sexist and heterosexist slurs are commonplace among the viewers who engage in the comments section, and are often directed towards the streamer, who is targeted due to their bodily or gaming performance:

*(...) a lot female Twitch streamers face abuse almost every time they stream League about how they play, or experience sexual harassment (although in some of those cases, they aren't helping the issue with their cleavage clearly on display) / (...) I think it's just a whole bunch of discouragement for female players in general – **Simon** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)*

Simon's closing remark is confirmed by other participants in both cohorts, who see online misbehaviour as a deeply exclusionary practice alienating women from being streamers:

*I too do streams (of indie games) and I rarely do LoL lives and I can say with all confidence / if I suffer from harassment, if I am cursed or mocked for being a woman, it is ALWAYS when I'm playin lol, nothing else attracts that kind of behaviour / (...) and harassment is normal, but it varies a lot from each community / LoL's is the most awful / I for one refuse to do lol streams nowadays – **Viviane** (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

Because it is considered an integral part of the culture, abusive behaviours are expected to happen in streaming platforms. For that reason, those who venture as streamers are also expected to be aware of it, and to be able to behave in a way that impedes it, or else they must endure it:

*oh well from a streamer's perspective if you're willing to put yourself up there on camera you're opening yourself up to that sort of criticism – **Mason** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

*(...) I have a feeling, most of them [e-girls] have mentally prepared themselves and it's not over league either. / (...) like if you can tolerate people being sexual in your chat, you're being paid (...) – **Lucy** (Bisexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East of England, UK)*

Responsible for most online misbehaviour in these platforms, the stream audience is heterogeneous; however, participants perceive a gendered standard in the ways these practices are engaged with:

I think the anonymity brings out the worst in guys online, more so than women - although, women bully differently. For guys, it's more physical comments. / (...) well if it's more orientated towards social exclusion, or emotional / (...) females are far more cruel when they are intentionally harming, but you don't

see it online as much / (...) in fact, I can't recall a female attacking someone on a stream – Lucy (Bisexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East of England, UK)

Notwithstanding the viewers' role in these practices, participants also asserted the significant influence streamers exert over the general community. Streamers are seen as celebrities within the community, and their deep knowledge of the game, associated with SNS and communication skills, drag vast numbers of viewers to every livestream. For this reason, streaming platforms are seen as the birthplace of trends, current slang and patois and all sorts of behaviours encountered within the community, including practices of online misbehaviour:

It is where rages and tilts start / like/ there are youtubers who say some things all the time and those who watch them keep on typing those things in the game / (..) and they tilt the other players like that / there's where I see a problem (...) – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

As with renowned professional e-sports players, the socio-cultural capital embodied by streaming celebrities is central to the development of the game, both as a digital space and as a corporate space: hence, fame, celebrity, and influence are nodes articulating the physical, the virtual and the embodied-psychological spaces (Currid-Halkett and Ravid, 2012). Moreover, as discussed by Currid-Halkett and Scott (2013), the celebrity phenomenon is tied to corporate practices of commodification of desire and aesthetics, being central to contemporary cultural economies; indeed, celebrities demarcate social difference and further the system of 'social reproduction of cultural and symbolic capital' (p.3) through which they are made. Celebrities shape space by inflecting the emotional-embodied and the virtual which, in the end, are anchored in and deeply change physical settings – for instance, Faker⁵³'s presence in a tournament is enough to attract massive crowds to a gaming arena during championships.

This issue fuels more controversy in the relationship between corporations and viewers. Although some platforms (especially Twitch.tv) have been focused on tackling toxic behaviours with bans and warnings, interview and survey participants insist that they want to see more action from Riot Games, whom they often perceive as negligent. Regardless, some streamers are willing to set an example by avoiding toxic behaviours in their work.

⁵³ Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok (Hangul: 이상혁) is the most renowned professional League player, acting in Korea.

Through these rich examples, platforms like Twitch.tv and YouTube can be perceived as inclusionary spaces with consequences derived from their exposition of antagonism. These are spaces where the exposition of difference also discloses the exclusionary character of a community and its practices, which can be subverted and repurposed, through agency, creating spaces of inclusion. Furthermore, video-sharing and streaming platforms convey the audial and visual qualities providing a 'complex and haptic sensation of embodiment that is less about simple representation and more about being in space' (Jenzen, 2017, p.1638). In being connected to the web, these platforms expand discourses of gender and sexuality from games to other digital spaces, and from the digital to the physical, crossing national boundaries and expanding this culture across countries (Bailey, 2014).

Streaming practices encompass all physical, embodied-psychological, and virtual spaces in League. The streamer is a hybrid of gamer, e-athlete and entertainer, whose presence questions and establishes norms, but relies on the interaction with the audience. Once more, the body is central to the practice; however, bodily performances outweigh the others due to the visual nature of video streaming. This characteristic brings new light to gender and sexuality and brings non-normative bodies to the centre of a political struggle for the creation and maintenance of spaces in a digital arena.

Drawing together the analysis of the four gaming spheres discussed above it appears that geographically, League's gaming spheres differ in scale, but also in terms of time-space. League's social arenas are rich substrates of identities, performances, emotions, and power relations which give meaning to the interlacing spheres. Each of the four spheres represents not only one specific place, with unique meanings and uses, but also one specific moment in the practice of gaming. League exemplify how online games bring new multiplicities to the fore (Massey, 2008), when the technologies involved in game design and play, associated with ancillary technologies used by players to enhance their experience, mediate the relationship between embodied experiences in the collective and the individual (Leszczynski, 2015), inflected by difference and othering. The close analysis of these arenas within and across spheres helped unearth these meanings, leading to the understanding of how these arenas are shaped, where they intersect, which practices puncture and traverse them. In League, the spatial triad is rebuilt and contested through complex gendered relations of commitment, othering and interchangeable unequal/equal access and control. Ultimately, League and its spheres are a symbolic territory of gamers, and institutional

Identity is a category which evokes the nature of something or someone, their core characteristics which can be known and apprehended. Moreover, identity is shaped by, and changes with spatiotemporally dynamic cultural meanings (Downing and McKinnon, 2014). Gender(ed) identity relates to how the gendered person is classified (and defies this classification) through the definition of appropriateness and aberration, which are performatively expressed and challenged (see 3.1.1). Consequently, sense, identity performances are spatial practices, for the experience, perception and imagination of space are permanently inflected by and shifted with identity. Identity is also deeply entwined with power positions and struggles, and the exercise of power changes in shape very much depending on the identities at play on each scale.

As discussed in Chapter Three, gamer identity is constructed individually in relation to collective practices, performances and expressions; gamerness is an identity defined by belonging to a group that consumes certain media (in what are deemed adequate ways), constituting social capital that is valuable within certain spaces and times (Shaw, 2012b, 2013; De Paula, 2016). In League's context, this *gamerness* gains multiple facets as the gamer becomes a *summoner* (a *LoLzeiro*, in Brazil). More specifically, the summoner's identity changes across and beyond the digital spheres – where one goes from gamer to streamer to fan to pro – spilling and oozing to and from the physical. As discussed, League's spheres are defined by each one's central material spatial practice, but also by a certain time, a moment in which each activity happens – even though they often intersect. If the wider gamer identity is defined by consumption, the specific summoner identity is momentarily performed within other complex cultural intersections.

Besides displaying appropriate consumption patterns, the *gamer* has historically been associated with one intersectional demographic. Sample demographics collected via online surveys reveal a largely male, White, heterosexual population in both the UK and Brazil, as shown in section 4.4.2, resonating with the traditional image of the adequate or expected gamer (Shaw, 2013). This imbalanced image, drawn from participants' self-determined gender identities, begins delineating a broader identity of the gamer in the context of League; when crossed with other identities (e.g. *botlaner*, support, mage) the political character of a claimed identity becomes evident due to the conflicts and negotiations behind it (Downing and McKinnon, 2014). In sum, being a League gamer is more than being a White, heterosexual young man (or patently not being one): this is an identity shaped by one's relationship with the game

and the community. The understanding of identification in League is useful to illuminate the points of friction which make the cultural practice of online gaming while highlighting fault lines around which these politics rise and fall, dynamically shaping online gaming spaces.

Participants observe that the densest demographic profile has more access, time, or interest in the game. The heavy presence of males in League is thus constructive of a gamer identity but also suggests underlying reasons for this imbalance. For instance, Kleine (2018) pointed to a heavily gendered stratification of the digital divide, as women and children tend to have less or impoverished access to information and communication technologies, especially in the developing world, where their access is limited to times other than to activities of homemaking or studying, and usually contingent to the use of second hand, low-quality electronic devices. The dataset has not provided evidence for a deeper understanding of accessibility problems or imbalances within the community, but the low presence of women of all ages in the demographic points to possible gendered digital divides among other factors. Nevertheless, identification as a League player is inflected with gendered discourses (Shaw, 2013) regarding in-game and interpersonal behaviour across the four spheres.

Although consumption is central to the process of gamer identification, Taylor's (2009) argument on the social construction of play carries gender relations, not only class cleavages. What the demographics illustrate, and the in-depth participant responses clarify, is that the material spatial practice of playing League is inflected by gender discourses, as are all other material practices related to the game (i.e. to post or lurk on SNS, to work as a professional, to stream a live match). These gender-inflected practices are co-constituted with the representational spaces of individual and collective emotional relationships with play and other practices, as well as with those representations of space used to make sense of it all.

The majority presence of men in League has consequences for community configuration and behaviour. This Brazilian survey respondent describes it:

I guess for 'cultural' reasons straight men end up playing more, which results in men playing better. I say cultural in quotes because I think this word can mean several things, since imposing games as not for girls or even to the abuse women suffer in online games. – Anonymous (Heterosexual Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

His quote also cites other issues mentioned by survey and interview participants regarding the role of gender and sexual orientation in League. Participants see the unequal gender ratio in League as a consequence of gendered socialisation; nevertheless, the unequal gender ratio is, as a marked trait of League's community, a source for other traits and behaviours.

The first aspect of social interaction and the formation of social spaces in League is team formation. To play the game, players may choose to start on their own or with pre-set teams, formed beforehand (see 1.3.2). Surveys have shown that mixed gender teams are the choice for most players forming pre-set groups (detailed discussion can be found in Chapter Six). However, 13.4 per cent of Brazilians, and 28 per cent of British players form single-gender teams, from which 95% of Brazilians and 100% of British form men-only teams. When expanding on the issue, these participants deny any intentionality in the formation of their teams, referring to pre-existing social ties or other issues out of their control as the reasons for their team configuration. The spatial implications of social and emotional ties between players are discussed in detail in Chapter Six; nevertheless, participants' accounts reveal a fundamental influence of gendered socialisation on this aspect of play.

Team formation is underpinned by the socio-cultural structures underlying gendered relations; these relations shape social arenas and form homosocial spaces. More broadly, the aggregation of male participants in men-only teams is a direct consequence of gendered socialisation, which affects the construction of other practices and spaces related to the game. Participants see the unequal gender ratio illustrated by the demographics as a consequence of uncontrollable antecedents generally rooted in societal structures; less frequently, they see this issue as a result of perceived bio-psychological gender differences. As seen in Table 8, around 15 per cent of players in both cohorts believe that one's interpersonal interactions in League's social arenas may be influenced by their gender. For Britons, most differences will be found in one's in-game choices (e.g. champion or role), which they believe change with gender.

		BR = 324		UK = 175	
		n	%	n	%
Differences in social interaction		51	15.74	26	14.86
Differences in in-game choices		11	3.40	49	28.00
Unequal gender ratio - prevalence of men		2	0.62	10	5.71
Cultural/societal reasons		10	3.09	9	5.14
Biological reasons		2	0.62	4	2.29
Different psychological traits					
	more competitive	1	0.31	1	0.57
	more cooperative	N/A	N/A	1	0.57
	invest more time	2	0.62	3	1.71
Men	are more aggressive/ragey	4	1.23	3	1.71
	are better players	1	0.31	4	2.29
	outgoing	1	0.31	N/A	N/A
	good in single tasks	1	0.31	N/A	N/A
	more sociable/talkative	N/A	N/A	1	0.57
	too emotional	1	0.31	2	1.14
	less competitive	N/A	N/A	3	1.71
	invest less time	N/A	N/A	1	0.57
Women	are less aggressive	1	N/A	2	1.14
	are worse players	N/A	N/A	5	2.86
	are less confident	4	1.23	N/A	N/A
	have more self-control	3	0.93	N/A	N/A
	good at multitasking	1	0.31	N/A	N/A

Table 8: Content analysis - possible influences of gender on players' performance (per country)

In both samples, upbringing is mentioned as a reason for the lack of women in League and, more broadly, in computer and videogames (CVGs) as a whole. Viviane and Mason tell different stories, but similar in this aspect:

(...) when I was little I used to be one of the few girls I knew who played / not because women didn't like it / but we were forbidden from playing / my mum would say 'you'll get violent, masculine, can't do it' / it's 'a boy thing' / they teach us to enjoy other stuff, to have other interests (...) – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

(...) i think the reason for that is upbringing / usually girls are introduced to different hobbies than boys are / i have two sisters myself / it was all barbies and dolls for them / while for me it was stuff like remote control cars and a Gameboy (...) – **Mason** (*Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK*)

Gendered socialisation is a process rooted in and reproductive of essentialised gender identities, a process which symbolically marks certain activities as gendered, creating otherness and gendering spaces as a consequence (McDowell, 2013). Participants' accounts illustrate how League, as other CVGs, is gendered through socialisation, reproducing hegemonic forms of masculinity through the subjugation of femininities and other masculinities (Ohl and Duncan, 2012; Salter and Blodgett, 2012); as with physical spaces, digital spaces of gaming are further coded as masculine (Thornham, 2008).

The issue of gendered upbringing is directly related to unequal or stereotypical gender roles, as illustrated by this participant:

(...) but it's much more complex than that, to me it starts back in the early days / parents incentivise their sons to play videogames, but if it's a girl the incentive is not the same. / women shouldn't 'waste time'. They should study, learn how to cook, clean the house. / meanwhile the boys are in front of the PC and being handed their lunch cooked by their mum, so he doesn't need to leave the PC – **Rosa** (*Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil*)

The debate regarding gendered selectivity in League raises questions about the possibility of identifying players' axes of difference in the context of a match. For one, Riot Game's Terms of Use expressly forbid players to reveal their real names and other personal characteristics (Riot Games, 2016b); nevertheless, as mentioned by all interview participants, it is possible to identify a person's gender through their IGN choice. Stereotypically feminine nicknames or those associated with 'girly' or LGBTQI+ culture are usually attributed to women or gay men. Moreover, the fundamental difference between the UK and Brazil samples in that regard was related to language (see 1.3.3 and 2.4). For instance, Portuguese is characterised by the use of gendered nouns, definite and indefinite articles, and adjectives; when applied to a sentence, these terms point to the speaker's gender. Alternatively, some Brazilian participants mentioned certain niche jargon, slang words and patois (e.g. *pajubá*⁵⁴) as

⁵⁴ Yorùbá-based sociolect widely used by LGBTQI+ people in Brazil.

possible identifiers pointing to gamers' gender and sexual orientation. When asked how LGBTQI+ people are (presumably) identified in-game, this participant said:

*If you let slip something like 'yas queen' / the squad loses their shit – Viviane
(Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

Likewise, UK participants mentioned that refined, polite, or correct use of the language is often associated with women or gay men, a trend that was also identified by some Brazilian interviewees. Gendered assumptions of language use are thus employed as representations and elements of a new, located vernacular (Maddrell, 2012) which borrows time-old offline stereotypes to build a new, covert online code of conduct which ends up classifying and labelling people regardless of their physical constitution or actual identity. Regardless of corresponding to one's actual gender identity, the collectively constructed standards around language use in League constructs and erodes gendered performances in-game and beyond. The consequences of the use of in-game vernacular to individual and collective gendered experiences are further discussed in the next chapter.

Survey participants were asked about whether gender and sexuality influence League players' performance and participation and the role of gender is perceived ambivalently by the respondents. As shown in Table 9, Brazilian survey respondents (n = 324) mostly tend to say that gender and sexuality are not relevant or do not play a role in a player's ability, including mechanic skills and game knowledge (n = 255, 78.7 per cent). British respondents (n = 175) are ambivalent about the role of gender and sexuality in gameplay, as half tend to say that gender and sexuality are not relevant or do not play a role in a player's ability, including mechanic skills and game knowledge (n = 89, 50.8 per cent of the total). This ambivalence is however evident in both samples as many participants (often simultaneously) acknowledge the existence of gender-based conflicts and online misbehaviour that may negatively change personal experience. To make sense of this ambivalence, and unpack participants' accounts of gendered difference and conflict, open-ended responses were coded and organised according to possible gender- or sexuality-related influences on gamers' performances, as detailed on Table 9:

	BR = 324		UK = 175	
	n	%	n	%
Not Relevant	255	78.7	89	50.8
Stereotypical role/class choices				
Women/LGBTI+ (tend to) play support/mage	5	1.54	31	17.71
(Straight) Men (tend to) play ADC/carry	1	0.31	2	1.14
The presence of women/LGBTI+ affects men's behaviour				
Women (often) benefit from their gender	48	14.81	14	8.00
Sexism/homophobia				
Intimidates	14	4.32	4	2.29
Discourages	N/A	N/A	3	1.71
Excludes	2	0.62	3	1.71
Demeans	5	1.54	N/A	N/A
Negatively affects gaming performance	9	2.78	1	0.57
Stereotypical champion choices				
Women/LGBTI+ (tend to) choose female champions	6	1.85	14	8

Table 9: Content analysis - role of gender in social interaction and in-game choices (per country).

Regarding in-game choices, a small per centage of British respondents indicate that women and LGBTI+ players tend to or are compelled by others to play in less combative roles or classes, such as support or mage. There is a significant difference when comparing responses from Brazilian and British players since a much smaller number of people mentioned this issue in the former sample. An even smaller number of responses mentioned a tendency for men to play in aggressive, melee classes and roles such as tank or marksman; there is no significant difference between samples in this case. Eight per cent of British respondents believe that a player's gender or sexual orientation may influence their champion choice and that women and LGBTI+ players usually choose female champions. There is a significant difference between the UK and Brazil samples in this regard since less than two per cent of respondents believe that to be true, and no Brazilian respondent has mentioned women and LGBTI+ champion choices.

As shown in Table 9, a small per centage of participants in both samples believe that women play mostly in support roles – an old video gaming trope seemingly derived

from traditional gender roles positioning women as carers and lacking physical strength (Piscitelli, 2009). However, what is stereotypically seen as a natural tendency is laden with socio-cultural elements. This participant raises this trope when talking about gendered influences on play, and discusses why it may be true:

*(...) many female people end up leaning towards the 'Support' side because this is how they are introduced to the game (when they are done so by other people, commonly main ADCs and/or men – **Anonymous** (Bisexual Man, White, 18-25 y.o. Southeast Brazil)*

As a comparison, survey participants were asked about their preferred roles and classes in the game; their responses are summarised in the graphs presented in Figures 66 and 67.

Societal expectations of gender roles bleed into all spheres of social action and interaction. In positioning gender as a fixed and stable identity, expected performances are presented as the natural or only way to exist in a given space, material or digital (Butler, 2004; Piscitelli, 2009; Barker, 2016). The 'women are support' trope ends up being a self-fulfilling prophecy: it is often the first contact for women gamers with a new game, and the only role they feel safe to enact, even if, as Viviane's example illustrates, they do not enjoy it:

*When I started playing it I used to love mid and top, after I got more company to play (especially boyfriends and male friends) I ended up being, as always, pushed to be support, which I always hated. Do I play well as support? Like a goddess, but I don't like it – **Viviane** (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

As seen, some female participants reported being pushed towards accepting in-game roles they did not particularly enjoy or excel at. Viviane is a very combative gamer and militant, and expresses how she overcame the discontent with the imposed support role:

*Once I stopped caring about people's opinions, I changed, and now I am main mid and adc – **Viviane** (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

Viviane knew her chosen roles were not what her peers expected from her, but she made the active decision to exercise them while keeping her female identity in the

game. In a way, Viviane’s active resistance follows Ohl and Duncan’s (2012) stance on the feminised performance of hegemonic masculinity – in choosing an offensive role and taking a stand for her right to play it, she employs an emotional-psychological effort towards questioning the imposed roles and unspoken rules for female presence in the game. These quotes reveal that in-game choices can also be employed as agency strategies and devices. Likewise, participants reported active avoidance of gendered gaming stereotypes, to challenge and question the imposed, unspoken gendered rules of League community.

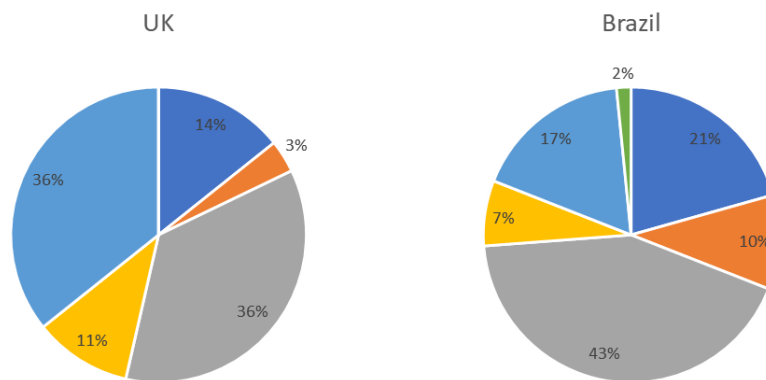


Figure 66: Women's first role/class choices in League (per country)

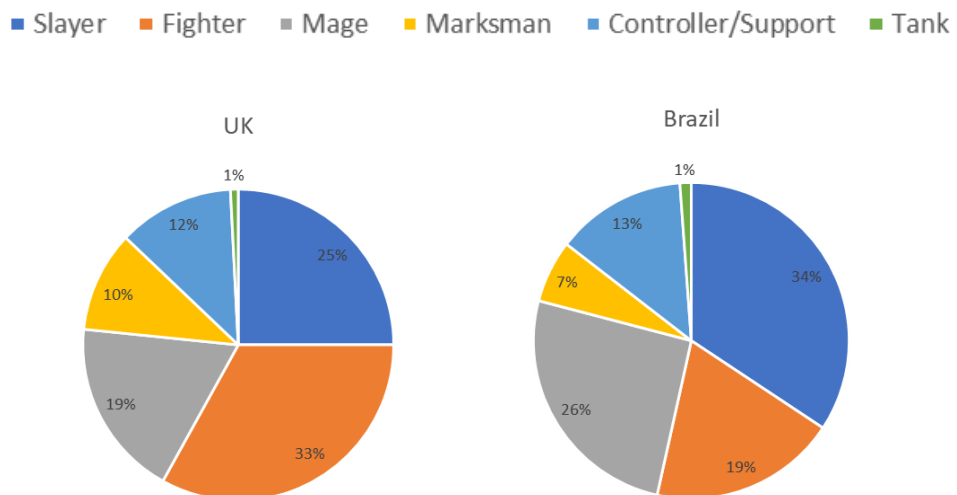


Figure 67: Men's first role/class choices in League (per country)

As presented in the former chapter, survey results show that female participants engage in both solo and team matches, revealing a commitment to ranked play, although no female respondent has claimed to play professionally. When it comes to role choice, as detailed in Figure 66, most women (43 per cent) play with mage champions or in support roles (17 per cent). Stereotypical gender roles trespass the material, offline day-to-day practices and contaminate online gaming. For Diana, the 'women play support' trope is a consequence of unequal upbringing and consequently unequal gender roles:

(...) what really bothers me is to be only sup and female / I feel that I only reinforce the stereotype, even though I know why it exists / women were not raised to kill but to care, our upbringing had this goal. I started playing when I was 14 and I never felt that I was capable and I always used support. I used to play as support a lot and would keep my clan alive like a mother looks after her baby. I'd like very much to overcome that upbringing and kill 'em all, you know. / I'd love to feel capable and a badass and pick a carry champ – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

As discussed in section 3.2, naturalised socio-cultural difference leads to inequality; manifestations and consequences of inequality within League are further developed in Chapter Six. There is a perceived unequal treatment of women and LGBTQI+ people in these arenas. Besides the already mentioned issue of hostile interactions, a few responses (Brazil = 4; UK = 7) refer to double standards or conflicting experiences, a practice that positions women within certain roles in society and consequently in the gaming arena:

I've had some attempts [of praise] but it is always an underlying insult. "You're quite good.. for a girl" – Anonymous (Bisexual Woman, White, 26-30 y.o., England)

(...) if a girl is found out to be that type amongst other girls who are not like that / generally speaking, she'll be ridiculed, they hide it, I have two sisters and have seen it the entire time / that's just the way it is, its more acceptable for men to be into it than women / even amongst women – Flynn - Non-Binary Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK

The articulation of gaming spaces around the gamer's body leads to questioning the meaning of being a gamer, and how this process of identification shapes spaces in the physical, the virtual and the embodied-psychological. Gamerness is defined in the

intersections, of which gender is crucial, and changes in shape and intensity depending on the sphere and the place wherein this identification is processed. Yet this process is not individual - it is relational and deeply tied to processes of social interaction which exert a definitive impact on the production of space. Gendered socialisation is at the core of what defines one's gamerness, shaping the production of digital gaming spaces with language and gendered gaming performance. The idea of identities being appropriate or expected in the gaming environments joins the established rules to make a conceived space, which controls, through the invested power, both the material and the lived.

5.3. Chapter summary

As shown, League, as space, is a complex assemblage of code and social arenas, the latter a fundamental aspect without which these games do not make sense. Gendered identities and meanings sprouting within social arenas, constitute and are constituted by League's gaming spheres, their technological constraints, and possibilities. In League, gamer identity and gaming performance are exclusionary by nature because they are related to intricate processes of identification, but also due to the power relations which particularise these performances.

Centred in the most fundamental spatial practice of League's spaces, the FoJs support temporary power relations expressed through one's in-game choices and interpersonal relationships. When transported to SNS, these relations gain deeper contours by enabling the negotiation of identities and the production of new, cross-sphere spaces. E-sports materialise the imbalances encountered in the FoJs and stressed by SNS by reinforcing unequal identity dynamics expressed in their deeply segregated physical spaces. Finally, by encompassing all other spheres, streaming offers a wide look into the multiple identities of a gamer, stressing the importance of bodily performances to the construction of gamer identities and gendered spaces.

The four spheres here discussed are built up from multiplicities of technology, individual and collective embodied experience, and identity. The latter, expressed and negotiated through the gamers' social interactions, is central to the understanding of how League spaces are gendered despite the apparent inconspicuousness of gender in the game's code. When looked at from the logic of their code, League's spheres do not show evidence of being conceived or organised according to gender constructions

(albeit reproducing hegemonic gender roles – see Chapter One). The gendering of these spaces is patent in their social arenas, which imprint gendered constructs in the fabric of these spheres through the interaction between individual and collective mediated embodied identities and experiences.

The binational comparison highlights the importance of context and cultural differences to the construction of identities in League. For instance, although single-gender teams are twice as frequent among British players, both countries have a similar ratio of male-only teams, which form the standard single-gender team. Although unintentional, this reveals League's deep gendering, later asserted as a consequence of a previous gendered socialisation that renders CVGs as male. Most participants, in both cohorts, stress that they do not believe that gender influences one's performance; the ones who do focus strongly on practices derived from gendered socialisation. For Britons, this is reflected mostly in in-game choices, whereas for Brazilians it can be seen in social interaction in the gaming arenas.

In League's arenas, being identified as a man or a woman, or as a gay man, or as a young person is a complicated, performative process. While British players mostly perceive women as engaging more with stereotypical roles (which often matches reality), Brazilian players mostly believe that the presence of women in the game has the power to affect one's behaviour. In both cases, there is a strong delineation and expectations of gendered roles in terms of what is perceived as a feminine behaviour, and not so for masculine behaviours. Nevertheless, accurate identification of one's gender and sexuality in-game is a difficult task; for Brazilian players, in a stark difference from Britons, gender is reflected in language. More importantly, masculine representation is central to how League is perceived by participants: its status as a computer program, its inherent competitiveness, its portrayed violence. League is perceived as a masculine game, and so are its spaces, thus producing otherness in what is performed as feminine.

As seen, the exploration of social arenas asserts gamer identity as co-constitutive with online gaming spaces. The next chapter expands on the process of identification and belonging by delving into the dynamics of antagonism and rapport and the formation of gendered spaces in League.

Chapter Six: Antagonism and Rapport – Territorially Disputed Identities

As discussed in the last chapter, League's spaces are shaped by emotional bonds which afford players multifaceted senses of identity and belonging. As shown, gendered identities inflect spatial representations and representations of space in their co-constitution with lived spaces of the game. Identity and belonging are enacted through material practices that go side-by-side with play, post, and stream: the formation of groups and teams, and the communication that may be interpreted as both distinctive of a community, and as negative and reproachable.

This chapter presents the discussion of mutually-constitutive practices of socio-spatial antagonism and rapport within League. It starts by attending to participants' views on the role of gender in League, and how these views affect their perceptions and experiences of online misbehaviour in its complex exclusionary and inclusionary aspects. The second part of this chapter discusses practices of homosociality and affective relationships that shape socio-spatial organisation in League, and how these practices create rapport often attached to antagonism in these arenas.

6.1. Online Misbehaviour

As discussed in Chapter One, the participation of gender and sexuality minorities in online gaming is marked by negative experiences of hostility and aggressiveness, initially considered, in this research, as a source of socio-spatial exclusion within League gaming spheres. A deeper understanding of hostile interaction and its consequences for the shaping of digital spaces was sought through data collection and analysis, where survey and interview participants revealed their experiences and perceptions of negative and vitriolic communication in the FoJs, SNSs, e-sports, and streaming.

Data discussed in section 5.2 shows that, in both samples, participant's views on the role of gender in League are ambivalent; although most respondents don't overtly see gender as relevant for a player's ability, 32.71 per cent of all participants acknowledge

gendered conflicts and negative interactions that may affect their personal experience in the game. To unpack this issue, survey respondents were asked to describe any negative experiences regarding gendered relations in-game. 31.06 per cent (n = 309) of Brazilian respondents and 50.6 per cent (n = 162) of British respondents deny any experience; of those, 5.17 per cent of Brazilians and 2.4 per cent of British added that, although not having experienced it themselves, they have witnessed negative interactions towards their friends or teammates. Important differences were found in the response pattern of both samples. Moreover, 69.57 per cent (n = 215) of Brazilian respondents reported previous negative interactions regarding gender and sexuality, and most of them described their experiences. Contrastingly, most UK participants that have reported negative experiences in gameplay (4.9 per cent of the sample) did not describe or expand on their answers but focused on their chosen reactions and strategies to deal with possible experiences. Due to the deep imbalance of responses between samples, it is not possible to draw a trustworthy comparison of the types of negative interactions experienced by participants; a compilation of responses can be found on Table 10.

	BR = 215		UK = 8	
	N	%	n	%
Flaming and rage	74	34.42	7	87.5
Double Standards	4	1.86	3	37.5
Harassment	7	3.26	6	75
Homophobia	18	8.37	5	62.5
Trolling	2	0.93	1	12.5
Cyberbullying	4	1.86	1	12.5

Table 10: Content analysis - Negative gendered experiences during gameplay (per country).

The fundamental difference is that UK players, regardless of age, gender, origin, or in-game level state that online abuse is rare or infrequent, whereas Brazilian respondents state that it is widespread. In the UK sample, no males or females have openly reported being excluded due to any kind of hostile interaction.

Nevertheless, League is deemed by participants as a harsh environment in which the vernacular is marked by malice and hostility. Aggressive communication, frequently referred to as *rage*, is a complex phenomenon whose deep description and understanding falls out of the scope of this work; however, it is commonly seen as a

reaction to feelings of anger and frustration. Although the term *rage* is widely used to describe aggressive in-game communication, hostile online communication is much wider and complex in shape and aim. Overall, toxicity is regarded as an outcome of common practices that focus on personal and slanderous attacks.

In this study, the term “online misbehaviour” (see 3.3.3) is favoured over others used widely in social sciences (e.g. deviant, nonnormative, antisocial) (Fichman and Sanfilippo, 2015); these terms do not make justice to the complexities of online interactions, contingent on their contexts. For instance, deviation presumes an existing norm that is challenged or surpassed; however, as exemplified by many participants in this research, online misbehaviour is often considered the norm (albeit unofficial and unspoken). The same is valid for ‘nonnormative’. Besides, as further discussed, practices of online misbehaviour are often seen as an identity marker for some groups and online communities, acting not only as a norm but as integrator, a reason why these behaviours cannot simply be classified as antisocial.

As seen in Chapter Three, negative word of mouth (NWM) uses profanities to express frustration, sense of disloyalty towards a brand or community (Hickman and Ward, 2007), with important negative consequences to the offended interlocutor. In the dataset, NWM occurred only regarding the researcher or the project:

(...) it's all rubbish theories. Stop projecting on games.

I think this is a poor project (...) Also the questions and quite silly

This is one of the stupidest things i have ever taken part in.(...)⁵⁵

This was the most prevalent online misbehaviour aimed at the researcher and clearly reflect participants’ dissatisfaction with the research topic and approach. Responses coded as NWM displayed irritation and discomfort towards the research itself, to the questions and the researcher.

In trolling, mischievous interactions are utilised to prompt reactions and amusement (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017), as exemplified by these candid accounts:

(...) I find it rather amusing when my friends are subject to abuse or trolling - not for the fact itself, but because of how they react to it XD – Simon (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

⁵⁵ UK sample, unknown demographics.

Look, I'll be honest, I don't take anything seriously and I irk with everything in this game, I'm there to have fun and not to get offended by any arseholes. If someone gets offended, I'm sorry but the pest is strong with this one. – Anonymous (Man – other unknown demographics, Brazil)

Trolls are often motivated by revenge and depend on perceived impunity. Online surveys displayed trolling behaviours aimed at disrupting data collection, most prevalently through attempted ballot stuffing in the Demographics section; when asked about their gender, these participants often checked all the options and added:

I identify as an attack helicopter

*I'm a big strong hairy man, and thats the way i like it :P*⁵⁶

Contrary to trolling, flaming (i.e. deeply offensive comments aimed at provocation – see 3.3.3) usually depends on anonymity (Alonzo and Aiken, 2004). As evidenced in the interviews, the practice is often a way to vent personal issues in online spaces, reason why flammers do not necessarily expect a reaction or response. The practice is widespread in the League community, and participants often see it as harmless, natural, or inherent to it. Flaming is often aimed at individuals, with the sole intention of inflaming individuals and fomenting an animus climate (Alonzo and Aiken, 2004; Jane, 2015). The following survey quotes illustrate a typical flaming behaviour:

(...) just suck it up...dont be a little bitch

*TRUMP WON GET OVER IT..... go back in the kitchen*⁵⁷

The idea of “setting the room on fire” is illustrated by these comments, which seem to have been made solely to irritate the researcher; nevertheless, it showed low prevalence amongst coded online misbehaviour occurrences in the survey.

Online gaming provides an ideal space for flaming practices to develop and escalate, as Viviane’s comment describes:

Yes rage is normal in anything and everything / in online games we're not in direct and real contact with anyone, there is the computer's mediation giving

⁵⁶ UK sample, unknown demographics

⁵⁷ UK sample, unknown demographics

us the sensation of being alone with the machine only / it makes us less sensitive, it makes us more propitious to let out any feelings of anger and frustration.. it's a game, innit, there's a lot of it (...) – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

Interviewees argue that most League *ragers* practice flaming, noticeable on the use of profanity and capitalisation on in-game text chats and SNS. However, the expressed motivations evidence a tangling of flaming and NWM, as players report using or witnessing rage motivated by frustration with their or their peers' gaming performance, for the player is expressing their discomfort with what they see as an inadequate gaming practice that disrupted their in-game experience:

(...) there are different categories of rage / there's blind rage where the person is just looking for someone to blame that isnt themselves / and then there's the frustration of the player that is trying their best but it just isnt enough because they or their team memebers are outmatched / (...) usually if they attempt to blame people for things they had nocontrol over you can get a good idea of the type of person they are / i have seen people play extremely poorly and still find ways to try and attack the best performing members of teams / in fact recently I had an extremely peculiar case / in which I invited my team mates to voicechat and one of them left the voicechat mid game to rage at another team mate who hadnt joined in text chat / while in the voice chat he was perfectly calm as well / (...) a good example of how people are able to use the anonymity of being behind a keyboard to display a different side of themselves – Mason (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)

Sebastian, who describes himself as a toxic player, expands on that idea by telling his story as a flamer:

I feel like its an emotional release from the stresses that come along with everyday life / I recently finished my degree this previous academic year / And it was a very stressful time for me / I also had a crumbling long term relationship that wasn't working and was making my studies more difficult / So I channelled that into overeating and abusing people online – Sebastian (Heterosexual Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)

The term *toxic* is one of the most common in all datasets of this research, widely used by both samples to describe their respective UK or Brazil communities. In the League

community, toxic behaviours often comprehend a mixture of trolling and flaming, rendering those who consistently engage in such behaviours as *toxic players*. Brazilian interviewee Camila⁵⁸ summarises the problem with in-game misbehaviour by saying that ‘*one’s behaviour influences, intoxicates the other’s*’. Although, as shown in Table 10, toxic behaviours seem more prevalent in the Brazilian survey sample, all interview participants acknowledged its extensiveness in their servers and communities. According to the interviewees, reasons, and motivations for engaging on in-game toxicity include idleness, peer pressure, a sense of increased fun and enjoyment, excessive competitiveness, personal frustrations or bad mood, an intention to irritate others, ignorance, and young age.

Practices of verbal intimidation and demoralisation are common in sports, where they are often named as *trash talk* (or *sledging*); in that context, trash talk is considered a psychological test of excellence under stress (exerted under certain moral conditions), to which the recipient is responsible for responding in deemed adequate manners (Johnson and Taylor, 2018). Verbal online misbehaviour may be understood as a form of trash talk in online gaming; it also carries a playful character (Fichman and Sanfilippo, 2015), often being a source of pleasure due to its virtually unpunishable transgression (Bareither, 2017), as illustrated by Simon’s perceived amusement before his friends being trolled (quote on p. 239). However, the playfulness of this practice is impaired when it entails offensive interactions, precluding players (either recipient or giver) from the pleasures of the game (Duncan, 2019). Duncan goes further by stating that ‘when a sledge is of a serious nature, insulting, hurtful or about a player’s family, the consequence and impact of the sledge transcends the play context to other parts of the player’s life’ (2019, p.195).

Luke and Flynn, both British interviewees, have also engaged in toxic behaviours, and both relate being driven by the same reasons. Their narratives reinforce online misbehaviour as the centre of negative and potentially exclusionary practices at play in League, one that is expected to happen as part of this, and of a wider online gaming culture. This professional analyst, specialised in e-sports, summarises the point when talking about vitriolic behaviours in the gaming community:

The content and type may differ, but mockery is a universal language and one to which the public is entitled. It’s more and expectation than a barrier. – Kelsey Moser (Woman, commentator, UK-USA)

⁵⁸ Bisexual Woman, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil

Interview participants are ambivalent as to whether toxic in-game behaviours can escalate to more serious interactions when prolonged after a match, especially when following a player to social media, which can be characterised as cyberbullying. Among online survey data, these repetitive and distressing behaviours were the most difficult to identify, as cyberbullying often aggregates typical flaming, trolling and NWM practices and motivations; however, cyberbullying is distinguished by repetition and persistence in overtly harmful practices. For instance, one respondent made consistently hostile comments throughout the survey, including ballot stuffing; this visibly angry comment summarises his participation and illustrates the practice:

*Fuck off with your shitty feminist research. You will take this research and present it to represent your personal opinions. You also posted it in a group where the gender mix is not representative of the League community because there are a higher % of female players in [group name] than there is who actually play League. ONLY feminists care about your twatting gender science in games. "Geography in Virtual Games" fuck off – **Anonymous**⁵⁹*

As discussed in section 3.3.3, cyberbullying is a serious issue, for it can escalate to the point of causing severe harm, even threatening the victims' lives.

Brazilian interviewee Viviane tells cyberbullying stories following her agency initiatives against exclusionary practices (see 5.1.b and 6.2): after creating a social media group to support other women and girls whose participation was hindered by online misbehaviour, she experienced extreme distress in seeing her page terminated after a series of repeated coordinated attacks. The situation escalated when she used League's official forum to discuss these issues:

*(...) I made a post about sexism and hate crime at the forum / I have a collection of rape, battery, and death threats because of that (...) – **Viviane**
(Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

Meanwhile, Sebastian's shocking account of cyberbullying contrasts with his apparent unconcern:

*I've had people send me death threats in the game / But it doesn't bother me / Because its all part of the banter / (...) They don't know who I actually am / They could never possibly execute that / So no, it doesn't bother me / Its like screaming into a void / You know nothing of the void / So how are you going to stab what you know nothing about / Or have anyway of being found / I don't take it to seriously – **Sebastian** (Heterosexual Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

⁵⁹ UK sample, unknown demographics.

This perception seems to be shared by most British participants, of which Simon is another example:

*(...) I remember one case vividly when I was playing ranked with a friend actually / He was beating his lane opponent quite badly and we were winning, and his lane opponent told him that he should kill himself, it'd do his family a favour / (...) My friend? Yea, we were both bawling with laughter. We really don't care about that kind of abuse. / We were throwing "XD"s and "LOL"s and "HAHAHA"s in the chat in response to the guy / (...) It doesn't affect me and my circles, I can't say the same for everyone else – **Simon** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)*

Although most British participants consider online misbehaviour unlikely to escalate and affect someone's life, the literature backs up practical examples which challenge that notion; one example, discussed in Chapter Three, is the doxing campaign of #Gamergate.

All types of online misbehaviour gain different nuances depending on the gaming sphere where they occur. In the Fields of Justice (FoJ), in-game practices such as intentionally letting one's champion die (i.e. intentional *feeding*), away from keyboard (i.e. AFK) and rage quitting are considered trolling for their disruptive characteristics. On social media, trolling can take the shape of disruptive or mischievous communication, such as practised by this participant (in this case, as an agency device – see 6.1.2):

*(...) I enjoy trolling the blokes / I've spent 4h talking to a lad who asked for nudes and reading it to my server to have a laugh – **Diana** (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)*

A similar practice happens in streaming platforms, where mischievous comments are aimed at the streamer, who chooses whether to engage with them.

Overall, UK and Brazil interviewees perceive a clear difference between the three FoJs – Summoner's Rift, Twisted Treeline and Howling Abyss – in terms of online misbehaviour prevalence, intensity, and frequency. According to participants, due to its precedence for ranked matches and consequently for professional and amateur tournaments, Summoner's Rift reportedly hosts the most intense and common flaming, trolling and NWM of all maps; Twisted Treeline also hosts ranked matches, but no interviewees mentioned previous experience with online misbehaviour in that map; finally, ARAM (Howling Abyss) is allegedly the most friendly of maps, and factors such as the randomly-chosen champions and the absence of ranked matches

are considered responsible for that difference. Regarding player level and position in the ranks, Brazilian participants state that toxicity levels increase with the ranking position, due to the equally increased competitiveness; British players, however, are ambivalent and it is not clear if there is a perceived correlation between player level and toxic behaviour.

In fact, the dataset does not offer definitive evidence of which demographic bands are responsible for most online misbehaviour. However, offensive communication seems to be targeted at or tailored to certain strands of the population. As evidenced by the prevalence of practices like online misbehaviour, social interaction in League is linked to practices such as sexism and LGBTQphobia, as well as racism and intergenerational conflicts.

When asked about the role of gender and sexuality in gameplay, this Brazilian survey respondent gives one example of a conflict between ability and community reception:

I don't think it influences in playability, but the prejudice one suffers from other players is evident. For example, there's a gay player that calls himself Rainha Matos [Queen Matos] who suffers a lot of prejudice, even though he's the best person in Brazil to play with teemo. – Anonymous (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Midwest Brazil)

This example exposes that identity and skill are not always seen as independent attributes, as they are often not enough to ensure one's reception in League's community, especially if coming together with deemed unwelcome gender and sexuality performances. In the whole dataset (but especially in Brazil), a conflict is revealed by participant's remarks about how, although most participants believe that gender does not affect individual skill, they acknowledge the existence of what they name as bigotry or discrimination; less often, they qualify these manifestations as sexism or LGBTQphobia.

Online misbehaviour has increasingly gained gendered tones over the years (Jane, 2015), regardless of how it is structured and whether their consequences are intentional or unintentional. Likewise, even though most participants in this research see online misbehaviour as an integral part of League's and the wider gaming culture, the broader dataset shows that in-game misbehaviour has a gender bias. Although only an average 7.6 per cent of the survey samples (see Table 9) used terms such as sexism and homophobia to describe negative, damaging in-game experiences,

expressions of gendered power in League appear to be much more nuanced and pervasive.

In fact, the identity '*gamer*', like any other, amalgamates social performances that include gender, as a result of persistent performativity (Butler, 2004). As evidenced by participants' accounts, *the gamer* is assumed male, and their performance is either appropriately masculine or masculinising; meanwhile, the use of terms such as *girl-gamer* indicate a need to accommodate outcasts, often seen as inappropriate or unexpected expressions of femininity. Again, this echoes Haraway's (1988) discussion of the construction of otherness through the assertion of men as the 'normal' gender, thus unmarked and disembodied, face the deviant, thus marked, female body. Ultimately, participants' accounts reveal League to be a gendered space where identities are positioned as appropriate or deviant.

Nuanced perceptions of gendered power in League are also exemplified by a somehow conflicting relationship between participants' narrated accounts and how they perceive the harmful/harmlessness of online misbehaviour, which varies across samples and with gender and sexual orientation. Notwithstanding the documented evidence on the consequences of online misbehaviour, participants do not fully agree on the impact or barriers imposed by these behaviours to people's participation in the gaming spheres. The existence and significance of sexist and LGBTQphobic online misbehaviour are also questioned by participants, although 10.6 per cent of all survey participants believe that may negatively change one's gaming experience (Table 9). Contrasts regarding the gendered perception of online misbehaviour are found across the dataset; for instance, interviewee Rosa⁶⁰ states that, in face of sexist online misbehaviour, '*some girls just give up and don't play anymore*'.

Rosa's example adds to the 69.57 per cent of Brazilian survey respondents that had encountered online misbehaviour, and her experience offers a hint on the exclusionary character of these practices. However, female, and heterosexual male British interviewees do not perceive online misbehaviour as exclusionary, only as a solvable nuisance. Imogen, a main support who plays a fairly high level on ranked matches, says that in-game rage is rarely a serious problem:

(...) it's easy to mute someone (...) it's very hard to get into the same game as a random person more than once unless you invite them so it's easy enough to

⁶⁰ Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil.

avoid. – **Imogen** (*Heterosexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK*)

Likewise, Sebastian, despite his history as a toxic player, does not think in-game rage means abuse, as seen in his previous quote (p. 214). He eases his views by saying that *'Its vile, I agree / But it seems to be a way I vent my anger instead of taking it out on my loved ones'*, reiterating that those who are troubled by the issue should be free to withdraw from playing. Contrastingly, Viviane echoes her Brazilian fellows' perceptions. When sharing her account on flaming, she expresses frontal disagreement with this behaviour's supposed harmlessness:

(...) the thing is, that's not natural / to go on yelling racist, sexist, homophobic stuff and whatnot is not natural / to think that's normal or even 'funny' is a serious problem (...) it's very easy to say it's a 'bunch of kids' and pretend there's not a throng of grown up men there / yelling that they'll rape Jane Doe, or that John Doe should go to stocks and pillories or whatever absurdity they say / those are harsh, real and tangible violences that are being trivialised to an extreme / it's not 'democratic', 'cause, ok, they rage at anyone / but when you choose gender, race, sexual orientation and class as offences, that person shows their bigoted and violent way of thinking (...) – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

The quote highlights this participant's ability to make an elaborate critique of the phenomenon. In being a feminist herself, Viviane noticed nuances that challenge the notion of online misbehaviour as a harmless practice.

The aggressive language and violent/coercive practices experienced by some Brazilian players touch their femininities and masculinities in different ways. As this quote by the participant Viviane shows, these experiences conflict with her expectations of a gaming session, detracting her from the pleasures of play. Viviane's accounts show a certain resentment towards League's community for diminishing her enjoyment:

(...) every match is a kerfuffle / I can't let it go, I can't pretend I'm a man, or not pick a fight / I end up enjoying the game much less / for noticing the structural flaws in the issue – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

In League, offline gender regimes define appropriate behaviours in the online sphere; there is no neutrality, as summarised by this survey respondent:

It does more in a cultural than in a natural way. Genders and everything related, like prejudice, affect us. (...) It is nothing more than a reflection of our environment, not something that's only apparent in the game. – Anonymous (Pansexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

The conflict between abhorrent and expected gender roles and behaviours is also present in League's fourth spatial sphere, streaming. Brazilian interviewee Rosa soon wishes to become a streamer. She sees streaming as a more accessible path to the industry, somewhere between the excruciating demands of elite e-sports and the near invisibility of amateur tournaments. Her views follow other interviewees' opinion that streamers enjoy a level of public attention directly proportionate to their game knowledge, skill, and social media management abilities (section 5.1.d). However, live streaming of League matches is perceived as a heavily gendered activity by most participants. With abundant examples of erotic and sensual performances on streaming platforms, this perception on women's participation in these spaces was more than once associated to prostitution and pornography, as illustrated by some terms used by participants when talking about the presence of women on Twitch:

Oh of course but most of them are camwhores and everyone knows that / for every legit streamer like pokimane / you have 20 STPeaches – Flynn (Non-Binary Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

In this quote, participant Flynn refers to STPeach, popular American streamer known for her paid, sexualised performances on streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube. According to Flynn, streamers like her set a certain standard for women engaging in the activity, attracting harmful (but, according to Flynn, understandable) reactions from the audience. Contrastingly, Pokimane represents what Flynn perceives as a positive example of a female streamer, who performs a certain appropriate femininity (or emphasised, in Connell's (1985) terms), alongside what is seen as a more professional approach to the game. Rosa, the streamer in the making, expresses frustration towards eroticised performances on Twitch:

(...) I think that's very harmful / because, you know, men say that women can't play since I started playing online, at 8 years of age. / if they [female streamers] use their bodies to market their work, it's because, in some way, their work is not good enough in itself. – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

Flynn expands on Rosa's views:

(...) id really like / people from certain groups (I think we know who they are) / to stop pretending / that women aren't holding other women back inside this online gaming space, because they definitely are / (...) do not perpetuate the problema / and then pretend you aren't part of it / which is what those twitch whores do ive seen their little speeches about how it isn't on them but theyre intentionally playing the system to make money (...) ppl make the myfreecams⁶¹ comparison so (...) – Flynn (Non-Binary Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

Notwithstanding the criticism sparked by some streamers' gendered performance within the community, some responses are likewise problematic. Harassment is defined as unwanted and repeated verbal disturbance aimed at offending and provoking one's retreat from a certain place, and participants in this research distinguish it from other practices of online misbehaviour by its most recurrent face, sexual harassment. Despite the imbalance shown on Table 10, this practice figured as relevant in interviewees accounts.

In the surveys, social media figured as a crucial site and means for sexual harassment against women. A common practice reported in surveys and interviews consists of some women, when demonstrating good gaming skills in a match, being followed to the post-match lounge where fellow players will request their social media details for further contact. In other cases, social media groups are marked by constant harassment. Since participants' personal details such as gender, real name and location are visible on social media, harassment is made easier; consequently, it may often hamper people's participation. Diana is an engaged social media participant and tells the difference between four League groups:

On Facebook I'm on [group 1] and [group 2] / [group 1] is for LGBT and women / and [group 2] is women only / (...) I've got into [group 3] but there was so much harassment / in these groups I feel safer / I'm also on [group 4] / but I don't post anything in any of those groups / I'm a passive participant, I just observe the posts (...) – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

This trend is, however, rare. Harassment in social media was mentioned by only nine Brazilians in the survey and one interviewee, whereas no UK participant cited the issue. The dataset reveals that, although sexual harassment is not deemed as a pervasive practice by the sample, online misbehaviour generates different emotional responses across the community, whose participants express their emotions (or not)

⁶¹ MyFreeCams is an adult website comprising amateur and professional erotic performances on mobile and webcams.

in different ways. Formation and participation in gendered social media groups are discussed in-depth in the next section.

As discussed in section 5.2, British participants highlighted their disagreement about the importance of gender in play and gaming. However, interviewees do not deny the existence of sexual harassment, especially in streaming platforms. In a reflection of what he sees as a discouragement of women in League, Simon says:

(...) a lot female Twitch streamers face abuse almost every time they stream League about how they play, or experience sexual harassment (although in some of those cases, they aren't helping the issue with their cleavage clearly on display) / (...) I think it's just a whole bunch of discouragement for female players in general – Simon (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

He resorts once more to the gendered performances of some streamers as possibly attractive to hostile interactions but confirms gendered abuse as an important factor discouraging women in the game.

When asked about the reasons for the lack of women in the field, this Brazilian interviewee answered:

I believe there are many reasons. For example, during the matches, you're attacked if you use a feminine name. I was once cursed for 40 minutes straight for saying 'thank you' (...) – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

As mentioned on section 5.2, the key to understand Rosa's account is language; Brazilian respondents say that virtually any text communication not purposefully controlled to avoid the use of gendered nouns and adjectives can be used to infer one's gender. In having her feminine identity disclosed by the use of a gendered adjective, Rosa attracted negative reactions from interlocutors. In fact, her gender was enough to create animus amongst other players (see Table 9), labelling her as unwelcome in that environment. Although planning to start a career in streaming, Rosa has delayed her debut in the field because of online misbehaviour, especially sexual harassment:

Yes, it is one of my fears. That's why I haven't started yet. / women are normally harassed, even if they don't give reasons for that. When they become public people, some of the public think that gives them the right to say whatever they want (...) I have seen rape threats. (...) – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

Sexual harassment is a markedly gendered territorial strategy for it creates social and psychological boundaries of fear which delineate safe and dangerous spaces (Pain, 2000). Fear is used, in a context of structural, everyday violence, as a device to exert political control which impacts and is mediated by intersectional gendered relations (Pain, 2014). In this sense, an experience centred in the emotional-embodied has patent consequences on the physical and the virtual by fragmenting social spaces and imprinting different meanings for different social groups. Sexual harassment, and fear thus becomes a cross-scale spatial practice in League due to its ability to spawn from the most intimate spaces (Pain and Staeheli, 2014) – the gamer in her bedroom – and become a pervasive issue inflecting the production of space in the other spheres. Rosa’s account illustrates how fear of violence had impacted her engagement with League even before she migrated from one sphere to another, in an act of self-censorship employed to protect her from expected gendered violence. Gendered violence is a ‘geographical frontier of encounter’ (Brickell and Maddrell, 2016) anchored in the private, but determinant of spatialities across and beyond the public. Moreover, as argued by Datta, gendered violence is central to the production of space and to processes of placemaking, for it creates ‘a lived space where such violence is itself normalised’ (2016, p.179).

Fear of online misbehaviour is widely reported in the Brazilian sample and highlights emotions, yet another force shaping space through the sense of place marked by detachment. As discussed in Chapter Three, fear of violence changes the gendered experience of place because it coerces certain people (especially women and LGBTQ) into avoiding certain spaces (Pain, 2000, 2009; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2015). In League, this is illustrated by Flora’s account of the effects of gendered online misbehaviour to participants’ emotions:

*(...) one plays to have fun, unwind / not to hear insults all the time / you end up insecure, afraid of trying other lanes / maybe a new champion / afraid of the cursing / of the team’s lack of support / and you end up giving up the game –
Flora (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)*

In provoking fear and insecurity, online misbehaviour marginalises people. Consequently, difference is expunged, conforming digital space to hegemonic gendered performances, and reinforcing fundamental imbalances – in excluding women, League (and, more broadly, online gaming) is authenticated as a men’s place. As confirmed by the widespread perception of the game as a toxic space, League is perceived as an unsafe, hostile place, hence changing personal and collective

experiences of gaming as a practice and of League as a place. Online misbehaviour is then an exclusionary practice of gendered relations, creating a cycle which produces unequal spaces within digital social arenas. This particular sense of place engenders movements of escape from online misbehaviour, as discussed later in this chapter.

In sum, both examined cohorts differ significantly regarding their perception of online misbehaviour as an exclusionary practice. Half the Britons state they have not experienced any negative encounters, stressing that online abuse is rare or infrequent, whereas most Brazilians have had negative experiences, and those who did not have, at least, witnessed it. In fact, as further analysis shows, both cohorts' understanding of online misbehaviour is nuanced: for Britons, it is not inherently negative, but an endemic sledge practice to get accustomed to, should one wants to engage with the community; for Brazilians, it is widespread, hurtful and reproachable. As discussed, fear of violence is an important device for spatial domination; considering the context of gendered violence faced by women and LGBTQI+ people in Brazil (see section 2.1.3), much more accentuated than in Britain, it is possible that this cohort shares a heightened sense of fear and threat face to online misbehaviour, changing their perceptions of the practice. Moreover, this finding points to intersectional unfolding of online misbehaviour, discussed next.

6.1.1. Intersectional Online Misbehaviour

Communities' perception of online misbehaviour changes across contexts, and this is where gender and sexual orientation intersect. Some participants often understand online misbehaviour as more than a nuisance. This anonymous British survey respondent plays with two groups, one mainly composed by LGBTI+ people, and he notices that

(...) the homosexual group takes incidents of homophobic language more seriously and is more likely to give detailed reports of it, although the other group has also started to do so after I started playing with them. – Anonymous (Gay Man, 18-25 years old, White or White British – Scotland)

In fact, gay men in both cohorts follow Brazilian women in their perception of online misbehaviour as an important phenomenon in need of attention (and reaction) due to its possible negative consequences to gameplay and to players' safety in that environment. In both samples, gay men perceive online misbehaviour as an important

factor for excluding people (especially women) from the game. This British interviewee says:

(...) I think its more that girls aren't as open with their gender / and they get more harassment n abuse sadly / (...) if I ever make a comment about say, liking a male champion a lot people will assume im a girl rather than gay / ive met people who end up being really creepy about it as well people who are straight up mean for no reason other than they think im a girl / and ive seen the same happen to my girl friends as well / I think it definitely stops them from being open with it / if someone assumes they're a guy they don't correct them – Alex (Gay Non-Binary/Agender, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., North West England, UK)

As shown on Table 9, a small number of participants (average 5.6 per cent) in both survey samples overtly state that there are sexism and LGBTQphobia in the community; some of them expand by saying that these manifestations may intimidate, discourage, exclude, demean and negatively affect women and LGBTI+ players' in-game performance. Forty Brazilian survey respondents reported being victims or witnessed homo and transphobia occurrences during gameplay. A significant difference between samples is also found regarding the community's attitude when women or LGBTI+ players are identified in casual matches. Around 15 per cent of Brazilian respondents say that the presence of women/LGBTI+ players affects other players' in-game attitude, usually in a negative way – twice the number of Britons with the same perception (see Table 9). However, community's views and responses towards homophobic slurs are conflicting.

When giving examples of how players' gender and sexuality may be identified in-game (see section 5.2), Viviane⁶² mentions that 'people lose their minds' before anyone using LGBTQI+ slangs in the chat. In being a symbolic identifier to bodies whose gendering is not visible, language also signals the adequateness and acceptability of those bodies. In tagging a body as male/female or heteronormative/non-normative, the gamer makes a choice of whether that body is acceptable or not in that environment, often hierarchically (Barker, 2016). Concurrently, the practice and sites of online gaming are marked by a certain sense of loyalty, and by heteronormativity. When these perceptions collide with deviant bodies, the immediate response is aggressive.

⁶² Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil.

Although the questionnaires did not mention race or ethnicity (aside from the demographics section), a small number of Brazilian participants (n = 8) reported racism as a recurrent topic in negative behaviour and an important source of distress. Interviewees, however, spontaneously cited racism as a recurrent theme on in-game flaming. When intersected with other axes, racist slurs seem to pose severe offences to participants⁶³. Interviewee Rosa mentioned that her religious affiliation is occasionally a source of biased interactions; as a Candomblé⁶⁴ initiate, she chose to use her ruling deity's name as in-game name, attracting manifestations of sympathy or intolerance from those who know her IGN's meaning and origin. Several of these remarks are racist in nature: she's often told to 'go back to the stocks and pillories' when the African origin of her IGN is identified. In not being Black herself, she did not find this personally offensive, but her story finds an echo in other participants' accounts of in-game racist flaming and structural bias; for instance, Flynn believes that racism is a bigger problem in the EUW server than sexism, and adds:

(...) so I got into EU and I swear / eastern and northern Europeans / 'nigger' is just like saying bitch to them (...) I'm there in a team with a bunch of white boys / and they're calling each other nigger like / 'you're such a disgusting nigger' lmao / so casually (...) / I realized that that's just their culture at that point / (...) In SoloQ / you can see / whos gonna be bullied more over the next few weeks/months / like last year / being a 'fucking gross turk kebab eater' etc etc / was the most popular one – Flynn (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

In his interview, Sebastian revealed his actions as a toxic player, highlighting the trends brought about in the dataset:

Honestly I said some really inappropriate things in a game with some friends because at the time it was funny / but I got banned for it / (...) I called someone on the other team a "cotton picking nigger" / (...) I am toxic / With my friends we say some pretty horrid stuff to people – Sebastian (Heterosexual Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)

Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter Five, race and ethnicity are deemed as the most unobtrusive or obscure identity markers in League, for the sheer anonymity and inaccessibility to bodies make the identification of race nearly impossible, more so than gender and sexual orientation. Interview and survey accounts thus reinforce the

⁶³ Based on second-hand accounts, since no participant has reported previous experience with racism.

⁶⁴ Polytheist afro-Brazilian religion in whose pantheon is formed by *orishas*.

idea of online misbehaviour as part of League's vernacular, where racial slurs are diffuse, untargeted offences integrate a wider habit of flaming:

But the Internet the Internet and they're always gonna say what they think will hurt the most / (...) it's an easy go to thing that everyone normally understands across language barriers due to media and everyday life – Alex (Homosexual Non-Binary/Agender, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., North West England, UK)

A clear difference is noticed between both samples: Brazilian women, alongside British and Brazilian LGBTQI+ people, felt permanently or temporarily excluded from the game when harassment practices were at stake; contrastingly, Brazilian men, alongside British men and women rarely perceived these as exclusionary practices, but as natural gaming behaviours or friendly banter. Overall, there is perceived exclusion, but that differs from objective, intentional exclusion; when happening, exclusion was more commonly understood as an outcome than as a goal. However, with its mischievous and disruptive loyalty in all shapes and sources, online misbehaviour appears as a manifestation of power relations.

In the context of online gaming, online misbehaviour is framed by discursive norms, the overt and covert rules for human behaviour, in which 'one's behaviour is influenced by the misperceptions or incorrectly perceived attitudes and behaviours in an environment of peers and other members in their communities' (Berkowitz, 2005). According to participants, online misbehaviour is tolerated in League's environment, often seen as the norm or the expected behaviour in the game's arenas. League is coded by normative constructions and discourses of gender and sexuality expressed in all spheres (see section 5.1) – in the FoJs, it is expressed in the shape of champions and their splash art and voice over, and in gendered stereotypes of gaming preferences and behaviours; in social media where gender regimes are reproduced and reinforced; in e-sports where these regimes are materialised in teams and tournaments; and in streaming platforms, where gender regimes are reinforced and questioned. Notwithstanding the reported unintentionality, online misbehaviour is characterised by an expression of power exercised symbolically and discursively because, in mirroring society, online gaming reflects and amplifies the extensive and enduring patterns of gendered relations which constitute the social structure and tissue wherein gaming is performed. Consequently, gendered, and sexualised hostile communication imposes power both through discursively expressed symbols such as those of expected gendered roles and performances and through actual and symbolic possession and

ownership, expressed by gamers' often fierce loyalty to the game. Online misbehaviour is thus a deeply gendered representation of space (Harvey, 1989; Lefèbvre, 1991), for it translates offline gendered relations into signs and jargon, transposing it to the online where it is amplified.

If space and power are mutually constitutive, territoriality is also expressed and achieved by means of online misbehaviour. The sense of belonging and protection behind certain online misbehaviour such as NWM and flaming creates a place that carries a strong meaning to online gamers: a place of hostility where you can belong if you don't provoke it and can cope with it, and likewise a place where certain types of gendered performance are unwelcome. For that reason, although socio-spatial exclusion may not be conscious and intentional in online misbehaviour, it can come as a result of the mutually constitutive domination, segregation and marginalisation resulting from its dialectics. As argued by Sundberg, 'if mundane social practices are so integral to producing and sustaining geopolitical distinctions, this also makes the intimate a significant domain of contestation' (2008, p.887)

Online misbehaviour appears, most importantly, as a device through which spatial practices of domination and control are enacted in League. This practice can be used to vent personal frustrations, but it ultimately expresses presence and ownership; simultaneously, it controls the space by defining social and spatial boundaries that state, locationally, and socially, the directives for belonging (McDowell, 2013). Now, if the power relations underlying online misbehaviour are gendered in nature, all spatial practices resulting of this device are also gendered, and so are gendered the multiple, changing, overlapping, and intersecting places (Maddrell, 2016) generated by socio-spatial relations marked by online misbehaviour.

Participants relate diverse emotional responses to online misbehaviour, and the dataset shows a variable response according to gender and sexual orientation, depending on the cultural context. When these emotions are negative, domination and control ensue online misbehaviour, producing repulsion, generating a perceived denial, often culminating in fear. League then shows an internal division where symbolic boundaries are laid – a forbidden (or, at least, uncomfortable) place for those whose gendered performances are undesirable. Since spatial practices are themselves mutually constitutive, domination and control end up creating spatial appropriation: online misbehaviour has become one of League's trademarks, and so has hegemonic

masculinity – gaming is a boy’s activity, League is a boy’s place, both characteristics perceived by participants in this research.

Mason expands on the idea, also widely expressed by Brazilian respondents, and reveals his views on the effects of online misbehaviour to players’ emotional landscapes. Here, he positions online misbehaviour as harmful not only to adversaries but to teammates, too:

*the best way to deal with someone on your team typing negative things in chat is to never, ever respond to them / mute them / doubly so if more than one of them are taking part / maintaining your own mental integrity is one of the most important things when trying to win – **Mason** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

Indeed, online misbehaviour has negative consequences to players’ mental health in similar ways to sportive trash talk do, by altering a player’s perception of the self and state of mind, reducing one’s ability to perform and detracting from the freedom to play (Duncan, 2019). Hostile communication in social media often has a significantly negative impact on people’s mental health, especially among adolescents and those predisposed to mental disorders (Pantic, 2014). The embodied-psychological spaces of online misbehaviour refer to virtual practices but have solid expressions in the gamer’s body and in the spaces they cease to occupy due to the need to withdraw from playing.

When driven by activism or ideology, online misbehaviour carries an inherently political discourse and can be practised in the shape of politically-charged NWM and flaming, as well as purposeful trolling and cybercrime. Interestingly, gamers tend to perceive what they call ‘ideological’ interactions (i.e. bearing overtly political discourses) as more disruptive and inappropriate than those based on ignorance or provocation (Fichman and Sanfilippo, 2015). In that context, a troll practising AFK or feeding would more easily get away with their behaviour than would someone who is flaming with an underlying political speech. Associated with a wider gendered aspect of online misbehaviour, and the rampant backlash against online feminism, that tendency would help explain the discomfort experienced by marginalised people who overtly participate, and question perceived harmful interactions in the gaming arenas.

Significant contrasts are found across intersectional axes. For British women (regardless of sexual orientation), and heterosexual men in both cohorts, online misbehaviour is not exclusionary; for Brazilian women (regardless of sexual

orientation), and homosexual men in both cohorts, it is. In the UK, this trend hints to a process of solidarity between gay men, who tend to perceive online misbehaviour as exclusionary; in Brazil, women and gay men share the same experience and form a wider solidarity net. The solidarity between Brazilian women and gay men stresses the co-constitution of gender and sexuality in terms of their relative position in the hierarchy of gender roles, as do the solidarity between gay men in the UK, positioned within non-hegemonic performances of masculinity. Moreover, the contrasts between British and Brazilian experiences seem to follow the context of their respective trajectories for gender rights (see Chapter Two); in Brazil, LGBTQI+ and women's rights walk at similar paces, significantly behind the UK; concurrently, British women have advanced and secured rights earlier than LGBTQI+ people, which may give them a stronger perceived sense of comfort and safety than that of gay men in the same country. Nevertheless, political activism never ceases to exist in these arenas, either as a form of oppression or as a form of resistance, as discussed in the next subsection.

6.1.2. Online Misbehaviour and Agency

Regardless of having experienced negative interactions, participants presented their preferred practices to deal with online misbehaviour, and strategies to increase a sense of security and reduce anxieties derived from negative encounters. As shown in Table 11, content analysis revealed a set of strategies to deal with negative in-game experiences in both samples and, overall, the dataset allowed the identification of three patterns of agency related to online misbehaviour. Passive resistance refers to elusive practices where individuals resort to devices such as concealment, quitting and withdrawing, as well as in-game devices such as muting or blocking to avoid further communication. Exercised negotiation refers to practices undertaken by participants, individually or as a group, to mediate and mitigate socio-spatial outcomes of online misbehaviour; these practices include personal initiatives to avoid the occurrence of online misbehaviour, as well as strategies to communicate and reinforce positive behaviour. On the other side of the spectrum, reaction and active resistance result from both evasive practices achieved through devices such as resettling, and from confrontation, whose main identified devices are taunting and counter-flaming, scolding, banning, reporting and confrontational blocking. As follows, agency practices and devices are spread across a spectrum for they are not mutually exclusive, and players often combine them to achieve a perceived sense of success.

	BR = 125		UK = 87	
	n	%	n/a	%
Accept and accustom to it	13	10.4	n/a	n/a
Block offender	4	3.2	2	2.30
Conceal gender (IRL name, IGN, pronouns)	11	8.8	7	8.05
Expose offender on social media	2	1.6	n/a	n/a
Improve skills	7	5.6	n/a	n/a
Ignore	49	39.2	31	35.63
Mute text chat, or restrict all communication	75	60.0	32	36.78
Offer support; cheer team up	6	4.8	4	4.60
Play with friends only	7	5.6	n/a	n/a
Respond/confront/argue	11	8.8	9	10.34
Report to Riot	69	55.2	15	17.24
Ridicule/have a laugh	3	2.4	4	4.60
Seek peer support	8	6.4	1	1.15
Temporarily cease to play, or play in restricted modes	6	4.8	3	3.45

Table 11: Content Analysis - strategies and devices to deal with negative gendered experiences in League (per country)

Indeed, interventions against online misbehaviour were classified by Suler and Phillips (1998) as *preventative* and *remedial*. Preventative measures are based on the creation and exhibition of public codes of conduct encompassing the standard behaviour and practices expected in that community. In League, prevention is materialised in Riot Games' official Summoner Code and Terms of Use, valid in the FoJs and the official forum. In streaming, social media and forums, preventative measures start from the website's official terms of use and culminate in each specific page or group's rules and codes of conduct. In e-sports, prevention entails official corporate rules, as well as local sports laws and the more specific rules for each team, tournament, and championship.

Manifold remedial measures can be found in each arena, coming from interpersonal interactions (one-to-one and group discussions), technological interventions (e.g. banning, disconnecting), automated responses to the use of certain languages (as the infamous strategy employed in Habbo Hotel). Remedial measures culminate in corporate governance, in which the managing company takes responsibility to evaluate, sentence and punish deviant users.

In the survey, 10.4 per cent of Brazilians argued that online misbehaviour is something to be accepted – and accustomed to – as part of the game (theme not present in the UK sample). Similarly, 35.63 per cent of British and 39.2 per cent of

Brazilian respondents believe that the best strategy against online misbehaviour is to ignore it when it happens. On the first sight, passive acceptance of hostile interactions may appear as lack of agency. British interviewees, especially women, refuse to be placed as victims of online misbehaviour in League and deny its entanglements with gender; however, in choosing to actively ignore or accept online misbehaviour as part of that place, these participants do not simply conform to it, but shift the practice's power by questioning or diminishing it.

Passive resistance, as discussed by Ehrkamp, is an alternative practice of defiance based on the idea that 'it is thus not necessary for acts of resistance to be open confrontation in the place where power is exerted' (2013, p.24). Practices of passive resistance are common among those League players who seek to avoid online misbehaviour.

As discussed, Riot Games bars the exhibition of any personal details in-game; although it is expected that players suppress their real names, it is also common that personal characteristics can be inferred through one's IGN. Active concealment of one's gender, by suppressing real names or using neutral IGNs, plus actively avoiding the use of gendered language, is thus a strategy to avoid gendered online misbehaviour, mentioned by 8.8 per cent of Brazilians and 8.05 per cent of Britons. Although seemingly widespread, the nature of this practice is perceived differently by British and Brazilian participants. When sharing how she navigates the game, Lucy says that

though, I usually treat myself as a guy, for instance, if they say bro, I won't correct them. / (...) I don't think my gender matters most of the time. / so I don't really see it as concealing – Lucy (Bisexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East of England, UK)

Alex and Luke do not see it as concealing, either, but as the expected behaviour (of which, if not employed, online misbehaviour is an expected consequence):

(...) but your username shouldn't be like / JaneSmith12313 – Luke (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

I mean unless you're running around telling everyone you're a girl/guy/LGBT everyones gonna treat you the same – Alex (Homosexual Non-Binary/Agender, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., North West England, UK)

Brazilian players, especially women, often watch out for language use to avoid being identified and attract online misbehaviour. Leticia⁶⁵, another Brazilian interviewee, replaced plain Brazilian Portuguese for acronyms and English expressions which, in her view, *'besides being more practical, keep unwanted chat at bay'*. Alternatively, changing previously revealing IGNs can be a strategy for mitigating online misbehaviour occurrences. Viviane, the Brazilian player who collects several stories of cyberbullying, says that

I had to temporarily change my nick / because of guys who would add me just to harass me and wind me up – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

As a result, she chose an ambiguous nickname, but makes a statement:

My nick is considered 'neutral', it has a little feminine aspect / since it refers to a cute animal, it leads to doubt / I don't talk much in the chat, but I won't be changing my pronouns just because someone can be a damn sexist, either, innit – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

As discussed in Chapter Five, language use and the negotiation of nicknames is attached to issues of identification within and across the gaming arenas. Albeit in variable degrees, language use is heavily gendered in both samples, often being the only window to the gendering of people who are out of reach both visually and audibly; as discussed in 6.1.1, this process of identification can have negative consequences for some people, such as exclusionary processes of perceived marginalisation:

(...) some think I'm a guy cos they played on a team with me or just assume that (...) / (...) ill hide what i am / til i cant hide it anymore / its going to be a nightmare most likely especially with the way i am in teams / and how hardcore i am about the game / like smh / it might ruin me actually but / cant give up before you try / (...) gonna pray they go easy on me or something – Flynn (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

For this reason, the dataset reveals that concealment (passive or active) is mostly employed by women and LGBTQI+ people, although acknowledged by most participants in both cohorts. The avoidance of certain loaded language is, in this sense, a practice of agency employed to ensure the permanence of otherwise marginalised people in these spaces. Likewise, the use of neutral nicknames is expected to preserve

⁶⁵ Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

one's identity marks from public scrutiny, and its careful crafting reveals its importance to avoid distress and exclusion due to online misbehaviour.

The most popular non-confrontational method to avoid or mitigate in-game online misbehaviour in both cohorts is the act of muting text chat or restricting all communication (60 per cent in Brazil and 36.7 per cent in the UK). League provides the tool to mute one or all players or hide the game chat window altogether. When muting abusers in the game, participants report a perceived decrease in distress, since they cannot see any textual communication:

I think toxic players get very easily fixed if people use the resources available right / I'd say the majority of toxic players are flammers, right? / (...) occasionally you might see someone intentionally feeding or griefing / but the majority of "toxic" behaviour / can literally be fixed by using the mute button / (...) you remove the source of stress/ toxicity, you reset / recentre your thoughts / and you play your game / (...) you can easily remove this negativity with a button press – Luke (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

Luke's account on dealing with toxic players reflect the views of 5 of the 6 male interviewees in the UK cohort. For this demographic, silencing abusive players is an ideal response that helps players stay in the game regardless of how they feel about rage; with this, participants also state that reaction to online misbehaviour is a matter of different degrees of sensitivity:

Most players choose to handle it differently / Some, like us, just laugh at the person / Others will just mute the abuser and carry on / And most will give as good as they get and start firing back – Simon (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

I might say there's a sensitivity issue but / use the mute button lmao / wow that was hard now this person literally cannot contact you / (...) There's a real culture of / "I don't like this, it shouldn't be allowed to happen" with toxicity / but the mute button literally does all the work – Luke (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

Reflecting on the matter of sensitivity, interviewee Simon attempts a gendered read of the use of the mute button:

My guess is that females will try to mute and ignore the person / I don't know how thick-skinned most male players are so I'm even less likely to know about the female players XD – Simon (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

Simon's guess is confirmed by female and LGBTQ interviewees in both cohorts, but with a significant difference. Brazilian and British women disagree as to whether online misbehaviour is a serious issue: British respondents see muting as a total annulment of any risks inherent to dealing with online misbehaviour, whereas Brazilian respondents, albeit employing it, see muting as a necessary evil – not ideal, since it only shrouds a bigger problem while impairing essential in-game communication, but necessary to avoid the distress that would exclude them from the game. Equally, while women and LGBTQI+ interviewees confirm the use of muting as an agency strategy, its efficiency is questioned by gay men as well:

Muting is not the solution. / But it is an acceptable escape in case you can't deal with it. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

Table 11 shows temporary withdrawal or retreating to restricted game modes as the preferred strategies for 4.8 per cent of Brazilian and 3.45 per cent of British survey respondents. When choosing to suspend their gaming activities, players seek to distance themselves from the distress that diminishes their enjoyment. Likewise, when retreating to restricted game modes (e.g. ARAM only or with friends only), players are voluntarily segregating themselves, again, because of the distress caused by online misbehaviour. Hence, this strategy is a facet of the creation of fractured spaces in League – one space marked by discomfort and marginalisation, another space marked by strategic segregation, and a space of absence and healing. Withdrawal, albeit seemingly voluntary and temporary, confirms online misbehaviour's exclusionary outcomes within and from the community.

Sebastian explains his self-assessment and choice to withdraw to stop his tendency of being toxic:

*Because I get emotional and irrational / And take everything personally / (...)
Then I take a break away from it / By playing my guitar / Or doing some
photography / Hanging out with my family / Anything to change my mood –
Sebastian (Heterosexual Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

His account reveals a twofold characteristic of this exclusionary outcome: toxic players can be excluded from League, either voluntarily as an act of agency for themselves, or as a consequence of other players' protective agency, as further discussed in this section.

Alternatively, 3.2 per cent of Brazilians and 2.3 per cent of Britons prefer to block the offender; between interviewees, this is also a rare occurrence, being mentioned by only one man in each cohort. The act of blocking another player results in ceasing all possibility of communication with that person, excluding them from contact lists and barring any attempts of in-game communication in the event of a shared game match. Blocking is especially effective if the abusive player attempts to continue engaging with peers in the after-match, which can lead to other forms of online misbehaviour (e.g. cyberbullying).

Nevertheless, avoiding confrontation is not always perceived as positive or effective; one participant describes his sheer insecurity on what to do when facing online misbehaviour:

Avoiding them doesn't improve them. / When a child does something wrong, pretending not to see it and getting away does not make them change. / (...) It is very rare that I mute someone. / I've taken the posture to let them talk and talk. / And, in the end, I ask them: "Are you done? Do you feel better? Now, focus on the game." / I's been working quite positively. / (...) Arguing only gives them more stamina. / Getting passionate only gives them more stamina. / So it's really complicated to know exactly what's the best way to act. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

As seen, gay men in both cohorts share Brazilian women's perception of online misbehaviour as harmful and exclusionary. As a response, players like this Anonymous and his friends choose to confront or evade antisocial interactions by employing several devices for reaction and active resistance. The most commonly used and recommended strategy is to use the built-in report tool, which comprises an entry text window (available at the end of the match) in which one may enter details of any negative behaviour displayed by another player. The submitted form is sent out to Riot Games, who analyses the contents and decides whether the reported behaviour goes against the Code of Conduct. The reporting tool offers a range of options:

- Negative Attitude
- Verbal Abuse
- Leaving the Game/AFK
- Intentional Feeding

- Hate Speech
- Cheating
- Offensive or Inappropriate nickname

Mechanisms such as reporting and ticketing (i.e. taking screenshots of negative textual communication and sending for analysis) are chosen by 55.2 per cent of Brazilian players, and 17.24 per cent of British players. Interviewees in both cohorts state that grieving (i.e. intentionally ruining the match by trolling, giving up or abandoning it) and verbal abuse are the main reasons for reporting. However, Brazilian respondents mentioned sexist, heterosexist, and racist abuse much more frequently than the British, adding that discrimination and bigotry are always reasons for reporting. The only British respondent who raised the issue says, however:

If they're really toxic or make racist remarks.. I report them / never due to my gender however, just things that if I would scold in real life, they get reported – Imogen (Heterosexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

Again, British respondents do not perceive gender and sexuality issues as central to severe online misbehaviour, and none of the interviewees has experienced it to the point of reporting.

Although straightforward, and recommended to every player, reporting in-game online misbehaviour is not always perceived as effective. Players in both cohorts believe that Riot Games fails to respond to reports, which has consequences for the community:

it's a shame that a lot of people say like "oh, riot doesn't do anything to change the community" / "reporting is no use" / i've actually seen ragers themselves saying "go on, report it, riot never does anything" – Fernando (Heterosexual Man, White, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

The only frustrating thing is reporting them, it's very rare to get that message come up saying that someone you have reported has been punished – Imogen (Heterosexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

Riot Games is often perceived as being lenient towards toxic behaviours which, for this participant, explains the company's negligence:

[report doesn't work] at all (...) / it is completely arbitrary and a lot of rioters think it's all 'whining' / Y'know... riot doesn't make their own casters obey the summoner code / in my page there are twitter screenshots of casters say that

women belong in the kitchen / that women are whiners and can't play decently
– **Viviane** (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

This state of conflict and frustration leads some players to verbally confront toxic peers: active confrontation via text chat, scolding or arguing are the chosen strategy for 8.8 per cent of Brazilians and 10.3 per cent of Britons. Among interviewees, only Brazilian women choose to reproach hostile players in-game, and both do it because of gendered offences:

sometimes I say "don't you have sisters, a girlfriend? can they have fun, or should they only stay in and do the dishes?" – **Diana** (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

In some cases, a grieved participant chooses to employ online misbehaviour as a tactic of agency. A small percentage of participants scoffs or ridicules their offenders – a total of 2.4 per cent of Brazilians and 4.6 per cent of British respondents. This practice is often named as taunting the opponent as a reaction to online misbehaviour:

If they're like that on the other team I tend to intentionally wind them up. Probably not the nicest thing I could do but it makes the enemy team play worse (usually) and some of the /all chats can be pretty funny. – **Alex** (Homosexual Non-Binary/Agender, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., North West England, UK)

Once more, taunting is not always perceived as effective against online misbehaviour, as exemplified by this Brazilian interviewee:

(...) in practice, you waste your time to see if the enemy wastes theirs / and most of the time it's a shoot in the foot / the guy mutes you, doesn't say anything, and you're there, standing in the lane, typing in the chat / your team stops doing what they have to do and keep reading the chat / they get in the middle / and dunno, it turns into a mayhem – **Leticia** (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

Another example of online misbehaviour as an agency device is what Diana does when she is sexually harassed in the game: she trolls a man who asks for nude pictures of her by exposing him to her friends to have a laugh (see p. 244). She uses a Discord server to communicate with her teammates (see 1.3) and engages with social media to keep in touch with other peers. Like her, 1.6 per cent of Brazilians chooses to denounce the offender by exposing them on social media. When choosing to take agency to another sphere, players highlight their dissatisfaction with the built-in tools for community management, while building communities around the frustration of

having to deal with toxic behaviours in-game. Likewise, some participants prefer to avoid having to play with strangers; avoiding Solo Queue and forming groups with friends and acquaintances is an evasive strategy employed by 5.6 per cent of Brazilian respondents (no mentions in the UK sample).

As a middle ground between passive and active resistance, some players prefer to negotiate their presence in League through some practices in face of online misbehaviour. When choosing to engage in exercised negotiation, players who are bothered by toxic peers assume a proactive posture, often taking responsibility for avoiding the behaviour from others, and for mitigating any consequences should online misbehaviour happen.

As shown in the previous section, participants believe online misbehaviour to be a device through which players vent their frustrations towards their and other players' insufficient gaming skills. This trend is confirmed by 5.6 per cent of Brazilian players who believe that the best way to avoid online misbehaviour is by improving their skills and excelling in the game.

*when I'm targeted, I always try to stay calm / focus on the game / and come out on top, cause if I'm getting rage, I'm probably being bad in the match / resilience is a virtue, and it should always be practised/ even when it's 'just a game' – **Fernando** (Heterosexual Man, White, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)*

Although no British survey respondents mentioned this, interviewee Flynn confirms:

*(...) if were being real / to get the highest possible % of not being harassed or abused / you have to not mess up – **Flynn** (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)*

Whenever online misbehaviour comes with bigoted undertones, some participants believe that awareness-raising is the best strategy in-game and beyond:

*there's awareness being raised in the Brazilian League of Legends community where we try and teach the players, doesn't matter the age, that it is important, that the respect you have outside the game you should have it in the game, because you're not dealing with bots, you're dealing with people – **Raphaela 'Queen B' Laet** (Heterosexual Trans Woman, 18-25 y.o, streamer, Brazil)*

im more than happy to talk about it too, if someone doesnt entirely understand something i wanna like, educate them / (...) i think its also like, ive met a lot of

other gay people by just being open about it too – Alistair (Gay Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., South West England, UK)

Although Alistair believes that, he is the only one in the British cohort to engage in this agency strategy.

A small number of participants seek peer support in case of online misbehaviour, a total of 6.4 per cent of Brazilians and 1.15 per cent of Britons. In response, 4.8 per cent of Brazilian and 4.6 per cent of British respondents support and reassure their teammates (and sometimes opponents) in face of online misbehaviour. This cooperative strategy is usually based on verbal communication aimed at appeasing the victim or perpetrator and encourage them to persist in the match. Although the numbers are similar in the survey, only one British interviewee claimed to employ this strategy, whereas several Brazilian interviewees had similar stories:

I recently had a great experience. / The match was terrible. / My adc was a massive rager. / My midlaner was playing very poorly. / But, at the end of the match, in the after-game screen. / I stayed and chatted with the adc. About why he was acting that way. / I read his story, talked to him and he cooled down. / It was interesting. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

Nevertheless, awareness-raising, and cooperative communication are too perceived as faulty:

I uses to try and make the darlings rethink their attitude / I managed once / I made a 12 year old boy apologize / he added me and we played peacefully other times / but I gave up, there are adults raging, right... / it's easier to avoid listening than to endure it and try to help those who don't want to be helped – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

The intricate social relations that gravitate around online misbehaviour are of fundamental importance to understand the nature of power relations in online gaming. In these spaces, identity is produced and negotiated through mechanisms of belonging and otherness (see 5.2), of which online misbehaviour is one of the most salient. Although reportedly spawning from an experience of frustration or irritation, hostile interactions in League are not neutral - they are loaded with meaning which inflects the production of digital spaces by altering their social tissue. Moreover, the nature of hostile communication reported by participants is revealing of complex politics of identification within League, where gameplay style and skill are related to expected identities and vice-versa. Gender and sexuality are poignant axes in this

process: although participants do not believe those identities impact on one's abilities, they all acknowledge that online misbehaviour changes in nature when crossed with them. Consequently, online misbehaviour is a gendered spatial practice in League, for it shapes the game as a place where it is a central (even normalised) practice while delineating socio-spatial boundaries based on the power axes where each player is located.

Although the British and Brazilian cohorts disagree as to the meaning and impact of online misbehaviour, they agree on some agency strategies against it. For both samples, ignoring, muting, or blocking the abuser are valid tactics, as well as concealing one's identity and supporting teammates in distress. Due to their more negative perception of online misbehaviour, Brazilian players tend to report it more often, besides seeking peer support, and exposing the perpetrator on social media; these coping strategies illustrate an approach of denouncement, varying significantly from the more confrontational approach taken by Britons who tend to taunt and scold their abusers.

Other important contextual differences between Brazil and the UK are illuminated by the contrast. In the UK, women (regardless of sexual orientation) and heterosexual men perceive online misbehaviour as part of the community that should not be addressed as a problem. For these demographics, it is a matter of individual sensitivity and a choice as to whether one can endure misbehaviour as part of the fun. In this sense, online misbehaviour can also be an inclusionary device, either because it unites people who take pleasure by engaging with it, or because enduring it is an axis from which a regarded true gamer can be identified. Differently, Brazilian men and women are followed by British gay men and trans* people who perceive online misbehaviour as a significant issue, with consequences for the community's wellbeing in the game. This phenomenon shows a pattern of solidarity derived from the perceived risks of being exposed to toxic behaviours. What results is the construction of social places in these digital environments: a place of inclusion by online misbehaviour, a place of exclusion due to online misbehaviour, a place of inclusion despite online misbehaviour. The friable borders between these spaces of meaning are permanently (re)drawn by the evident conflict between those who engage and benefit from online misbehaviour, and those who feel attacked by it. The fact that British respondents mostly defend muting ragers while Brazilians choose to report them is supportive of this contrast.

As a territorial practice, online misbehaviour is faced with resistance. The identification process derived from online misbehaviour is further complicated when players attempt to oppose it by mobilising acts of agency, ultimately revealing the essence of power relations within the game's social arenas. In revealing what players see as problematic in their gaming arenas, practices of reaction and active resistance also highlight how these arenas become places of conflict. A most obvious clash is between ragers and their counterparts and occurs when the formers promote a climate of animus in the game maps and beyond; this climate may produce exclusion or marginalisation. When verbal confrontation is the chosen agency strategy, another level of conflict unfolds – while it may ensure that a victim stays in the game, taunting, scolding, and arguing may worsen the climate in these environments. The third level of conflict lies where participants perceive negligence from the company, who fails to provide feedback regarding the success of its behaviour management tools. Finally, publicly denouncing toxic behaviours may be a dangerous endeavour: while it promotes awareness of what is perceived as a problem in the community, the denouncer is vulnerable to serious retaliation. Nevertheless, encountering online misbehaviour is rarely perceived as a pleasurable experience: stories like Viviane's experience with reactive cyberbullying provide examples of reduced enjoyment and increased risk associated to active resistance (see 6.1.).

When British players choose to avoid conflict - mostly due to not seeing the need to face it - they reveal that, in this cohort, online misbehaviour is rarely an exclusionary practice. Likewise, British players rarely reset or quit from a Field of Justice (or the game altogether) due to online misbehaviour, albeit relying on cooperative practices in the event of hostile interactions during a match. In fact, the spaces of agency within the British cohort are more ephemeral, lasting for a match only, the only rare exception being found in the formation of groups and servers between LGBTQI+ people. In this dataset, Brazilian players are more likely to reset, avoiding certain game modes (e.g. Summoner's Rift, or the Solo Queue), forming exclusive teams, groups, and servers, while heavily relying on corporate tools they hope will reduce the occurrence of hostile interactions in the game. The next section expands on how these social arenas are formed in League, their meaning and how they produce space in the digital and beyond.

6.2. Homosociality: of friendship and agency

The dataset evidences that interpersonal relationships are the thread connecting the four identified spheres in League. When asked to describe their (lived or ideal) positive gender-related experiences in-game, Brazilian and British respondents mentioned practices of solidarity, identification, and association with other people, as described in Table 12. Likewise, interviews confirmed that all people in both samples engage with the game, and most keep playing (developing a sense of loyalty) because of friends and relatives.

	BR = 161		UK = 63	
	n	%	n	%
Perceived solidarity from others	49	30.43	9	14.29
Identification/association with others	72	44.72	8	12.70
LGBTI+	22	13.66	1	1.59
Women	8	4.97	1	1.59

Table 12: Content Analysis - positive gendered experiences (per country)

Homosociality refers to social bonds between persons of the same sex, a concept that relates to power structures and dynamics of desire that change over time and across places. Gender is a collective performance through which masculinity and femininity are mobilised (see section 3.2); homosociality is thus enacted through rituals designed to reinforce dominant myths and expectations of gendered behaviour through performance aid. Social bonds such as friendship are devices for the application of these rituals within and across gender binaries, ending in the reinforcement of divides, inequalities and exclusions (Grazian, 2007). The drive towards the formation of homosocial ties is, however, related to desire as much as it is to power; desire can be both attractive and repulsive, in a continuum disrupted by the same power relations which underly and are destroyed by desire (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). Homosocial ties employ practices of resistance, inclusion, and exclusion to establish

patterns of accepted gendered behaviour, of which heteronormativity is the most prevalent system (see 3.1.1). When strengthened by emotional bonds and sustained over time through shared activities, homosocial relationships may develop into friendships.

Friend and kinship are attached to the shaping of places. These voluntary emotional investments between two or more people (kin or not), often related to material tasks of care, are attached to power relations, constantly producing lived spatialities (Bowlby, 2011; Bunnell *et al.*, 2012). Friendships start and end in space through emotion mutually constituted with socio-cultural categorisations (i.e. axes of identity) and social networks. The fluidity of these relationships, Bunnell and colleagues explain, render it a complex form of intimacy whose spatial dimensions are produced differently over time and within and across different social groups. Moreover, friendship tends to be formed in the intersection of salient social characteristics – notably gender, but including sexuality, class, race/ethnicity, religious and political affiliation – pushing for homophilous bonds that reveal underlying power differentials (Bowlby, 2011; Dunbar, 2018). In fulfilling people’s fundamental needs for social interaction, these relationships strengthen individual and collective ties to broader communities and reinforce identities.

As seen, friendship is gendered due to wider structural issues such as socialisation; however, other axes of difference, markedly sexual orientation, affect people’s experiences of friendship, with fundamental consequences for placemaking and the formation of other social ties. Valentine’s (1993) seminal study of lesbian friendships demonstrate the relationship between lesbian identity and these women’s experience, perception and attachment to places. Social alienation and the lack of dedicated places of leisure and socialisation for LGBTQI+ people narrow lesbian women’s social pool; concurrently, the fear of LGBTQphobic violence affects the possibility of making and maintaining new friendships. As such, friendships are fundamental for identity production and reinforcement, either through the positive aspects of affective bonds or through social pressure to conform to social orderings (Bunnell *et al.*, 2012). When looked at through the prism of gender, friendships produce spaces for (re)production and contestation of gendered and sexualised identities. The fine nuances between identities are used, deliberately or not, to delimitate socio-spatial limits within and outside groups of friends, and identities are articulated and performed within and through these relationships (Bunnell *et al.*, 2012).

Regardless of the medium – be they letters, telephone, social network sites (SNSs) or simply the human body – communication technologies are technologies of/for friendship. There is no evidence of significant changes to friendship patterns due to Internet access (Dunbar, 2018); the number of meaningful relationships and the size of individual networks seem to follow those in offline relationships. However, SNSs have indeed expanded the possibilities for human interaction through instant messaging and video calls that emulate the feeling of face-to-face conversations, creating a sense of copresence that is invaluable for the formation and strengthening of emotional bonds. Moreover, the tools offered by SNSs often foment the creation of intimacy through ‘focused, directed interactions (...) determining relationship quality’ (Dunbar, 2018, pp.46, 47). Friendships are, in sum, not contingent on physical encounters, and although benefiting from digital technology, their patterns are practically unchanged when intersected with it. SNSs seem to provide support to friendships and enhance social capital, especially when supplementing physically-bound interactions (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Niland et al., 2015); however, it is unclear whether SNSs interactions are enough for sustaining friendships over a long period of time, especially without face-to-face interactions (Vallor, 2012).

As discussed, the literature on friendship provides evidence of a mutual constitution between gender relations and friend relationships; this dynamic directly affects the production and experience of space and place, being replicated (and often augmented) through digital technologies and in digital spaces. Although friendship is insufficiently explored in the social sciences (and often subsumed into other categories such as social networks and communities), they offer a brilliant opportunity for geographical inquiry. Different socio-cultural contexts offer different meanings to friendship, one of the several social ties constituting geographical entities such as the community and the household; moreover, friendships are often unbounded, changing one’s focus from the limits and dimensions of social relations to the characteristics of associations between people. Moreover, affective, and emotional aspects of friendship are geographically important because they establish and employ spatial practices across all the relationship’s lifecycle. Trust, rapport, allegiance, gift-giving are all practices enacted through symbolic interactions which sustain dyadic and more-than dyadic affective relationships between friends. These practices are emotional labour fuelled by affect with the goal of affecting, being required in all stages of a relation of friendship. Encounters between friends materialise emotions through their bodies; these gendered, sexed, classed bodies perform friendship and create space through the

performance (Bowlby, 2011; Bunnell *et al.*, 2012). The following section discusses friendship, this remarkably spatial(ising) gendered relationship, as a practice shaping spaces of online gaming.

6.2.1. Gaming Spaces of Friendship

As discussed (sections 1.3 and 5.1), players may choose to start gaming on their own or with pre-set teams, formed beforehand. As found on the surveys (and discussed in Chapter Five), the formation of teams is contingent on a wider demographic gender imbalance underlined by foundations of gender socialisation, roles, and regimes. Most people playing in groups form mixed-gender teams, and most people in single-gender teams are men.

Responses about the formation of mixed-gender teams were ambivalent; the occurrence of intentionally formed mixed groups could not be verified in either sample, as no respondent overtly state that it was a choice. In the British sample, 98 people engage in group/team play within a mixed-gender team, of which sixteen (16.3 per cent) were reportedly mostly composed by men (the respondent being the only woman in the group). The Brazilian sample includes 212 participants in mixed-gender teams, of which twenty-one (9.9 per cent) are mostly composed of men (with no more than one or two women). Table 13 expands on the motivations leading participants to engage with mixed-gender teams, albeit unintentionally.

	BR = 212		UK = 98	
	n	%	n	%
Pre-existing social circle configuration	116	54.72	45	45.92
Availability	1	0.47	8	8.16
By chance/no particular reason	13	6.13	8	8.16
Gender is not an issue	16	7.55	5	5.10
Overtly unintentional	38	17.92	13	13.27
No answer	37	17.45	23	23.47

Table 13: Content analysis - Motivations behind unintentional mixed-gender teams (per country)

All interviewees refer to interpersonal relationships as the driving force for their initial interest and later loyalty to the game. Word-of-mouth, invitations, and arrangements for social gatherings are often the first contact these people have with the game.

Likewise, it is used as a space for continuing and strengthening bonds, either due to a sense of copresence or to the fear of being left out:

*When I was 18 I was in college and a new friend of mine played / and it was kind of like I was being tutored in how to play the game but / also becoming better friends with them in the process / I never feel like through talking in text or even real life sometimes that I can hold a conversation / gaming gives you something to talk about / if you do stuff with people / you get to know them better – **Luke** (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)*

*(...) I'm dating this guy for years now and I'd always follow my boyfriend on the games he played / when he started with lol he wouldn't answer for the whole day, so I downloaded the game and we started to talk on the little chat / with time, I grew more and more curious, then I started to play (...) never stopped since then – **Letícia** (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

As illustrated by these quotes, there is a clear emotional-affective relationship attracting players to League, and these ties, which often persist and are reinforced through gameplay, are co-responsible to participants' persistence and sense of loyalty to League and its community. In fact, although League is not advertised as a social game, participants perceive community as one of its defining characters, and relationship to friends as capable of influencing their experience – it can either increase a sense of belonging and inclusion or make players feel excluded and distressed:

*Probably the only time [I wanted to quit for good] was when my friends stopped playing. SoloQ can get pretty lonely and hardwork especially for ranked / (...) Yep it's a lot better with friends :) – **Imogen** (Heterosexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)*

*its kind of interesting because i don't need friends to enjoy this game its not what i love about it / soon after i got invited to play the first time i just / hit 30 with friends then quit playing with them / and became the best / they messed around too much / i couldn't concentrate / i just wanted to be better – **Flynn** (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)*

Flynn's quote cues at the complex interplay between social ties and participation in League. As discussed in section 1.3, each of the various game modes request a different level of engagement from the player, which is often influenced by their social circles (or lack thereof). Friendship ties can either attract players from casual to ranked (and

thus to professional gameplay) or detract them from their climbing goals. As Flynn continues:

(...) i never play normal / hate them, hate playing the game casually / i might play a handful a year / if i'm not working hard to get better its not worth my time, ill play something else – Flynn (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

These participants illustrate the opposite case:

I sometimes play [ranked] when friends call me, but it's not a mode I normally choose – Camila (Bisexual Woman, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

Well my relationship with league is directly correlated with my relationship with friends. I'm an extremely casual player. – Lucy (Bisexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East of England, UK)

As seen, friendship ties can change more than a player's experience; they are related to one's choices, preferences, and roles, inflecting a player's identity within the wider gaming community. One example is the formation of duos instead of teams: a player who excels as a controller joins one who excels as a marksman, forming a pair that plays the bottom lane on ad-hoc matches (see section 1.3). Imogen's account illustrates the sense of connection enhanced by friendship when playing in a duo:

Some of my friends taught me how to play but I really got into it when I started playing with my now fiancé. I used to only play normals in a premade 3-5 but have begun playing ranked again towards the end of this season. Currently in Silver I. I main Support, my fiancé plays ADC as it's the duo lane it's good to have that synergy – Imogen (Heterosexual Woman, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)

Friendships often suffer from physical distance, which tends to relax the bonds, and digital technologies facilitate the maintenance of friendly relationships (Magrath and Scoats, 2017; Dunbar, 2018). In being online, League can be used as means to join friends who are physically separated by long distances; players often set a time to meet in the game lobby and join the game on a custom match, where they enjoy the sense of copresence fostered by the game and its possibilities for interaction. Participants' accounts on the use of the game for the maintenance of pre-existing friendship bonds follow Magrath and Scoats' (2017) findings on the importance of SNSs for men who are physically separated from their friends.

*I used to play DotA a lot with my friends. Then they quit. After a while some friends started playing LoL. I didn't want to be alone on DotA so I started on League. (...) especially 'cause some friends lived abroad and games were the only way we could keep in touch – **Augusto** (Man, 31-40 y.o., Midwest Brazil)*

Ultimately, League often provides space for the development of new social bonds and friendships, that may be transported to and from the offline, or simply stay in the digital:

*When I was 18 I was in college and a new friend of mine played / and it was kind of like I was being tutored in how to play the game but / also becoming better friends with them in the process / I never feel like through talking in text or even real life sometimes that I can hold a conversation / gaming gives you something to talk about / if you do stuff with people / you get to know them better – **Luke** (Bisexual/Heteroflexible Man, White or White British, 18-25 y.o., East Midlands, UK)*

*(...) I do have goodfriends I've met through the game and talked to, but never actually seen physically – **Mason** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

The dynamics of affective bonding in the arenas of League are inflected by the gendered relations in play. The next sections explore how the discussed gendered relations are materialised in the social bonds between players, and in the social spaces they establish across the four gaming spheres.

6.2.2. Masculinity, Homosocial Domination and Control in Digital Spaces

As discussed, team formation is reportedly tied to pre-existing social bonds, mostly those of friendship. In the UK, single-gender groups correspond to 38.4 per cent of that cohort's ad-hoc teams; 100 per cent all single-gender teams in the UK are men-only groups (n=70)⁶⁶. In Brazil, male-only teams correspond to 96.2 per cent of that country's single-gender teams. Brazilian teams are mostly mixed (72.1 per cent), against 53.8 per cent of the teams in the UK. When expanding on the issue, male participants deny any intentionality in the formation of their teams, referring to pre-existing social ties or other issues out of their control as the reasons for their team

⁶⁶ In this cohort, 27.1 per cent of respondents preferred not to state their gender.

configuration, as seen on Figure 68. The strong role of friendship in contouring social arenas in League is introduced by survey respondents and confirmed in interviews.

Participants' accounts clarify the underlying power differentials present in their game-related friendships. As illustrated in Figure 48, most players in both samples are men. In both samples, especially during interviews, participants relate the previous gender imbalance, a demographic characteristic, to the formation of teams, groups in SNSs and all related social spaces of League. For most of them, men-only spaces are a result of unequal gender rates. This clear gender imbalance generates representation issues, pushing for the accommodation of players in men-only teams.

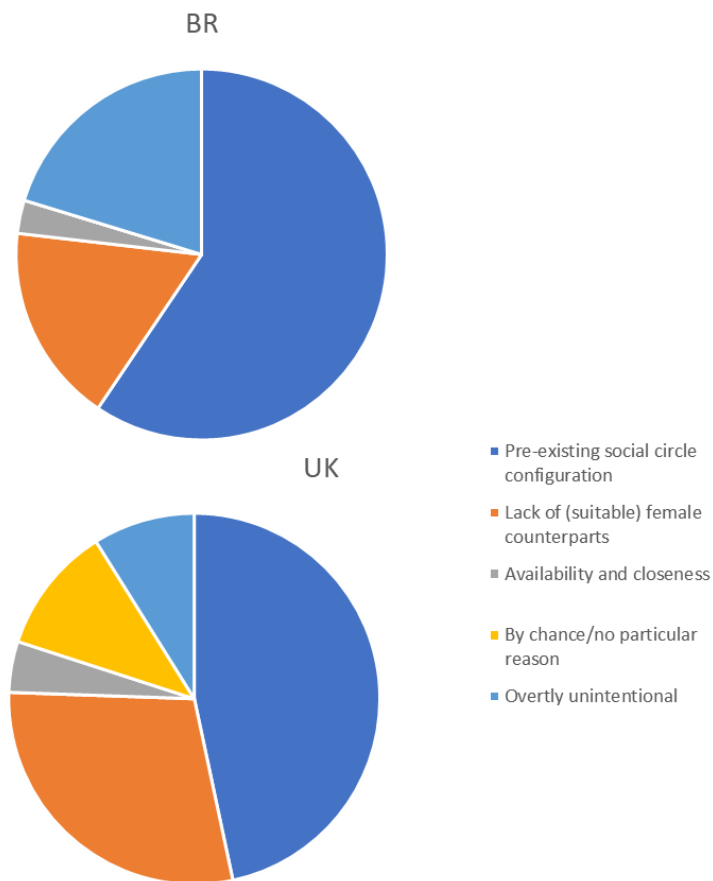


Figure 68: Motivations for the formation of men only teams (per country)

Male friendship is consistently inflected by current standards of masculinity, which includes displays of maleness and assertion of heterosexuality. As summarised by Magrath and Scoats, 'male heterosexuality has been largely demonstrated through violence, aggression, hyper-heterosexuality, emotional stoicism and the stigmatizing

of anything vaguely related to femininity' (2017, p. 46). Hence, traditional patterns of male friendship are reflective of these standards, being a prime social space for the reproduction and reinforcement of gender orders that are basic to hegemonic masculinity. Educated, middle-class, White men's friendships shifted significantly in the past two decades, moving from the traditional heterosexual standards of interaction, constrained by homophobia, towards more fluid, softer and affecting relationships (Magrath and Scoats, 2017). This shift is evidenced by a wider display of affection between male friends, which includes emotional and physical intimacy associated, in the past, with women's friendships (see section 3.1.2).

As seen, the gendered socialisation described by participants acts in a twofold manner: in fomenting the perception of men as the expected identity in the gaming community, it produces male homosocial spaces which, in turn, work as a substrate for reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. In League, male homosocial spaces reproduce traditional hegemonic male positions, transposing exclusionary practices and places from the material to the digital. Even though men's relationships and practices should not be seen as stable and monolithic (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014), the primary, shifting structures of power underlying hegemonic masculinity continue to act across time and space, markedly changing how people engage – or not – with technology.

Participant's accounts of the role of friendship in their engagement with League confirm Bowlby's (2011) statement that intersectional socio-cultural cleavages play a significant role in the development and strengthening of emotional ties, whereas inter-subjective relationships are foundations of the production of space. As discussed in Chapter Three, 'masculine identities are diverse, not singular, and produced through relations with imaginaries of both femininities and masculinities, and everyday encounters with both women and men (as gendered subjects)' (Gorman-Murray, 2013, p.215). Furthermore, the production of both gender and space is iterative, where the inter-subjective inflects the spatial, changing its meaning. The seemingly spontaneous formation of male teams in League points to the relational phenomenon of masculinity inflecting the production of digital spaces, while these spaces inflect the concept and expectations of masculinity performed within their realms. For instance, what starts as an impromptu gathering of people with similar interests becomes a social space where a certain gender profile of adequate characteristics and behaviours is foundational.

Gendered relations, seen by participants as simply inescapable gendered socialisation, generate and are generated by power differentials which establish informal rules and

boundaries for the inclusion and exclusion of people based on their gender. Ultimately, men who play will end up playing with their male peers not simply because males are more numerous. In fact, male gamers are acquainted because there are structures and discourses supporting gaming as a male activity. When crossed with the tendency of friendship to form in the intersection of socio-cultural categorisations (Bowlby, 2011), these discourses and structures are reinforced, strengthening social ties (including friendships) through the same defining power differentials. This is illustrated – and enhanced – by the perceptions of male players who claim not to know suitable female counterparts (15 and 26 per cent of players in Brazil and UK – see Figure 68): the perception that men perform better in an activity framed as male. In League, gendered friendship ties are understood as consequence and catalyser of the socio-cultural context and discourses wherein they are embedded and developed.

Friendships between men play an important role in both shaping masculine identities and their spatial dimensions. As evidenced by Dunbar (2018), mainly male social circles usually rely on joint activities (e.g. sports, playing games, drinking) for the growth and maintenance of the relationship's quality. That clues into a different spatiality when compared to women's friendships, which heavily depend on shared conversations to be maintained (as expanded on next section). Socio-cultural factors behind the phenomenon of people gathering in single-gender groups are summarised in the concept of homosociality (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014; Webster and Caretta, 2016).

Friendships between men in League can shape identities, reproducing, in the digital, the same patterns of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities existing in the material. For instance, when insisting on stressing the preceding, almost seminal nature of friendship to the formation of homosocial spaces, male participants naturalise these bonds. This process of naturalisation obscures the issues of power and desire, which generate social cohesion and sense of belonging, as well as equally powerful meanders that disrupt underlying power structures.

In being a relational concept, homosociality implies differentiation, and often hierarchisation; for this reason, male homosociality is primarily associated with hegemonic masculinity, the gender practice employed to legitimise patriarchal structures through the subordination of 'non-men' (see 3.1.2). For instance, relations within men-only groups are frequently shaped by and consequently shape men's sexual attitudes towards women. In measuring their masculinity with their sexual

experiences and fantasies, groups of men turn women into a currency from which masculinity – and related participation (or not) in certain social circles – is defined. From this point of view, male homosociality is responsible for the establishment and reinforcement of a somewhat pernicious and hostile masculinity (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). For instance, in positioning online misbehaviour as the expected practice, League-related groups and teams position a model of masculine behaviour as part of their identity (see section 6.1). As discussed by Gorman-Murray, ‘changing relations between men – and the spatial performativity of their relationships (...) – are critical for recalibrating masculine hierarchies.’ (2013, p.216).

As explored by geographers of childhood and youth, antisocial behaviour is often practised because of or through friendship; in establishing the roles of bullies and targets, spaces of fear for the latter and loyalty for the former are shaped (Bunnell *et al.*, 2012), and the emotional landscapes derived from this relationship are responsible for the formation, maintenance or dissolution of friendship ties and related social spaces. Friendship-driven online misbehaviour thus generates or strengthens patterns of masculinity which are valid at least in the time-space of a match. That dynamic establishes League as a place for a certain kind of friendship, that is agreed upon in the FoJs, but oozes to other spheres of action on and offline.

As discussed in section 6.1, online misbehaviour is an important device not only due to its almost defining character in relation to Internet communication but also because it is a spatial practice of inclusion, exclusion, and agency. Furthermore, Hammarén and Johansson (2014) translate LGBTQphobic and misogynistic language as arising from the need to emphasise heterosexuality as a standard, a practice foundational to hegemonic masculinity. The homosexual panic, so defining of hegemonic masculinity, clashes with homosocial desire and intimacy, and male homosocial relationships, a prime form of bonding between men, come to be in this conflicting cleft. For this reason, online misbehaviour in online games insists on employing masculinist language, inflicting heteronormativity as a meaning, and consequently producing spaces of masculine dominance. Online misbehaviour is, between gamers, ‘a manifestation of men’s homosociality and thus of power relations’ (Webster and Caretta, 2016, p.1089). Moreover, in this case, male homosocial spaces seem to enact gendered domination and control of space within League (especially through the practice of forming amateur and professional teams), where the relationships of care between people and the digital places where they occur are marked by gendered power differentials.

As discussed in Chapter Three, hegemony juggles on top of permanent struggle, which opens space for transformations and recreations; for this reason, homosocial spaces can be sites for changing as much as strengthening hegemonic gender orders, and male homosocial spaces can be marked by healthy, nurturing masculinities as opposed to its toxic, dominant version. Masculine subjectivities are often subcategorised into hegemonic and non-hegemonic, thus complicating the seeming homogenous identity of men. Heteronormativity, as explored by feminist and Queer scholars across the social sciences, positions individuals within a spectrum of agreeable and abhorrent identities and performances. In the next section, the relationships between gendered minorities in League are explored in relation to spaces of the masculine and spaces of otherness.

6.2.3. Appropriation and Use in Spaces of (Shared) Otherness

The literature exploring the participation of women in online activities is marked by the effects of psychological and symbolic violence and oppression (ELSPA, 2004; Graser, 2013; Blodgett and Salter, 2014; UN Women and Working Group on Broadband and Gender, 2015; Cote, 2017). Consequently, this research started with the expectation of finding women congregating as players to avoid pernicious interactions. The dataset reveals that practices of agency amongst women and other marginalised groups are articulated in two main forms: via homosocial team formation and connection through SNSs.

Women-only teams are very rare in the samples, with less than 1 per cent of Brazilian women playing in single-gender teams, and no British women doing the same. Those survey respondents who play in women-only teams justify their choice on the need to avoid online misbehaviour. Although the concept of homosociality has traditionally been applied to straight male relationships only, recent discussions have placed intersectional relationships between women as homosocial (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014); the same is true for gay/straight, non-sexual relationships between men. Regardless, female, and male homosocialities are often deemed asymmetrical; while the latter is often associated with competition and emotional distancing, the former is stereotypically posed as collaborative and affectionate. As found in surveys and confirmed in interviews, the main difference between men and women-only teams in League is that, while the first are rooted in the pre-existing homosociality contingent to the strengthening of hegemonic masculinity, the latter are created

through agency against the pernicious consequences of the former. This respondent illustrates the matter:

*I feel more comfortable with other women and I know they feel the same, so I don't have to pretend I'm a man to play in peace – **Anonymous** (Bi/pansexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)*

Practices of agency do not always rely on reaction and active resistance but can be very effective through appeasing compliance and apparent passivity and complicity, especially when one's safety is at risk (Ehrkamp, 2013). The participant above talks about the common practice of concealing one's gender in the game, either by avoiding any revealing communication or by impersonating a different gender to avoid pernicious interactions. As seen on section 6.1.2, concealment is reportedly effective as a form of passive resistance but, for some women, it can be tiresome and mutilating of their identity. For these women, the maintenance of their identity outweighs their inclination to the game, leading to desistance; for others, it is a call for new strategies, such as forming homosocial teams. Women-only League teams are, then, outcomes of exercised negotiation, spaces where safety and assuagement are fomented in contrast to the perceived violence and intimidation which persists outside these arrangements. As discussed by Webster and Caretta (2016), negotiations do not always yield substantial changes in gendered power dynamics, but rather accumulate several, small changes as a result of political dialogue. Although homosocial groups act as substrate for the reproduction and reinforcement of gender contracts, '[g]roup dynamics can create a safe place for practising negotiations and even testing new forms of engaging in gender power relations before applying to the broader social structures' (Webster and Caretta, 2016, p.1084). However, notwithstanding the efforts to mitigate or avoid online misbehaviour in their matches, these women's agency is driven by masculine power inflicted through the exercise of those exclusionary behaviours (Webster and Caretta, 2016).

Patterns in friendship interactions demonstrate gendered differences in the formation of networks. As demonstrated by Dunbar (2018) women tend to befriend more people and to maintain closer ties to one person (namely a best friend, usually of the same gender), and women's friendships are maintained through the permanent effort of sharing through talking. In depending on heavy investments of time and emotions, women's friendships are also more vulnerable to mishaps (Felmlee and Peoples, 2016). Moreover, practices in homosocial groups shape identities: whereas male homosocial groups are often delineated by shared activities, their female counterparts

are shaped by shared experiences and emotions. In League, this is evidenced by the nature of the preponderant men-only teams that are based on pre-existing friendships gathered around a shared interest, but also by women-only teams that, albeit rarer, are mostly contingent on the need to ameliorate the distress experienced in mixed-gender teams. For women-only teams, friendship is often a corollary, not a condition.

Participants' views on the topic become indecisive when women-only spaces are discussed in the context of professional gameplay, illustrating that female homosocial teams are not always seen as beneficial arrangements for women. In the surveys, only a few people claimed to play professionally (12 in the UK and 10 in Brazil, see Table 7), and almost everybody was a man (90 per cent in Brazil, 41 per cent in the UK⁶⁷). Even so, the formation of women-only professional teams and tournaments is often presented as an agency strategy towards wider visibility for professional female players, a response to the masculine domination of this field. Once more, the lack of women in League's professional gameplay appears as an erasure, a consequence of pre-existing gender imbalances in League (and in online gaming, more broadly). Nevertheless, interviewees in both samples see women-only teams and tournaments ambivalently – either as necessary and beneficial or as a useless and harmful practice.

Some participants view female-only teams and tournaments as platforms to create visibility and amplify opportunities for high-profile women in the field:

I think Riot could, for example, create a female league (more or less like the worlds championship there is today). For the female players to follow the example of the game's professionals. – Augusto (Man, 31-40 y.o., Midwest Brazil)

With the inclusion of all-female tournaments and teams, many women who are players have received a lot more exposure than they would have were they men of similar skill level in an e-sports title. (...) / The Chinese League of Legends servers have had transient female players between Challenger and Master (...) – Kelsey Moser (Woman, commentator, UK-USA)

For people sharing this perception, higher visibility is supposed to create momentum and space for bargaining on other pressing matters such as sexist attacks on the field. Representativity is thus key for challenging existing structures and, as seen in Webster and Caretta (2016), these spaces act as testing fields where new dynamics are tested and negotiated before spreading to the wider scene.

⁶⁷ Half the respondents claiming to play professionally in the UK preferred not to state their gender.

Alternatively, those who see female-only teams as necessary often believe that mixed teams can be a source of problems or distress, for pre-existing gender roles (see sections 3.1 and 5.2) create tensions in the social space of gender-mixed teams. The maintenance of a segregated structure is thus seen as necessary until the wider social norms change. These participants express their concerns:

*well mixed teams does have the potential to effect performance of the team if either gender is not used to interacting with each other / not that i think it should be banned / but there are hurdles that organizations come to when dealing with that situation – **Mason** (Heterosexual Man, Black or Black British, 18-25 y.o., West Midlands, UK)*

*(..) I wouldn't feel good in a gamehouse with 5, 10 lads sleeping together / I don't trust it – **Letícia** (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

To these participants, structural issues regarding gendered relations in League and other games overpower any strength or willingness to change the scenario. Nevertheless, these quotes illustrate two contrasting viewpoints in favour of the same thing: Mason's position leans towards potential hurdles for corporate structures, with loss for teams' productivity, whereas Letícia's claim highlights issues of fear of gendered violence. Although for different reasons, these participants echo Webster and Caretta's assertion that, in some cases, '[w]omen, in fact, are not only in a subordinated position, but they participate in the group not to challenge their unjust condition, but rather to avoid further conflict while creating shifts to these conditions in a long-term perspective.' (2016, p.1085).

Nonetheless, participation in homosocial groups is often conditioned to the maintenance of the gendered regimes and contracts, instead of their challenging. Any women-only team anyhow exists within a dominant structure, being shaped through practices of hegemonic masculinity in the game and beyond. Female homosociality, in this context, is deemed secondary, a consolation prize, in comparison with the dominant, male teams and tournaments. As summarised by Webster and Caretta, 'group membership does not necessarily equate to gaining bargaining power more broadly in society, quite the contrary it equates with maintaining the current standing of gender relations' (2016, p.1085). This issue is present in the ambivalence expressed by participants:

*(...) specially because [female tournaments] don't have the same visibility as the 'officials' / but it's still ambivalent / because, many times, [female players] are refused in big tournaments, but they can still participate in the other – **Letícia** (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)*

I'm dubious that heavy pushes to increase awareness of women in e-sports have significantly influenced this considering that, in some cases, all-female tournaments, particularly in China, have descended to pageant-like displays where women are judged for their appearances or simply mocked and ridiculed by their audience. – Kelsey Moser (Woman, commentator, UK-USA)

The latter quote highlights the dilemma of the existence of female-only teams raising questions as to whether the public display of emphasised femininity is beneficial to the issue of female inclusivity, for it can imply the female body as decorative and the male gaze as appreciative, unmaking some of the progress towards more egalitarian gender relations (Webster and Caretta, 2016). Likewise, this British participant expands even further, finding an echo in several of the Brazilians' perceptions:

female tournaments are a joke and shouldn't exist unless they're literally for fun only / they hold back women without a doubt / they're a joke and everyone knows it, including the girls that play in it / all the teams are used as poster girls which is why you'll find female players who / don't even main top lane for example / (...) but they'll play top in this 'professional female team' / it's awful / a totally sad waste and ofc / most of the guys just sit back and laugh / in trying to create some 'protected' environment in which women can play without fear of bullying or something idk / they've separated themselves and made the idea of a female pro into a joke – Flynn (Trans, Mixed heritage, 18-25 y.o., Greater London, UK)

More importantly, these quotes evidence that male homosociality defines norms and standards within the wider League community. Women's performances are measured against those of men in the community and, in evading these expectations, they get once more marginalised. To this participant, segregation and marginalisation of women walk hand by hand:

(...) organising female leagues / it's / yikes / I am super against it / it's not a physical strength sport for it to make a difference / (...) that's basically saying that women's basic motor and mental abilities / are different from men's / and let's agree that, in patriarchy, different means worse / it is just a PC game / your sex does not change anything in your ability to play / I think that it only takes out the opportunity for women to be on the spotlight / because the main league will always be the male one – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

Ultimately, participants like Flynn and Viviane view women-only teams and tournaments as reinforcing harmful gender roles and standards, frontally disagreeing with those who defend the idea. The case for mixed teams, in this context, relates to the perception of segregated teams as inherently marginalising, as exemplified below:

It's time for teams to be mixed. / I can't see a reason not to. / (...) They're basically saying: men and women cannot live together and focus on work. / (...) and from the moment when championship participation becomes a job, you cannot restrict it due to gender or sexuality. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

(...) it only reproduces the idea that women will never be capable / it bothers me a lot because there's a lot of great gals / but they stay in this dilemma of mixed teams or female world championship / I think it should be mixed because, unlike traditional sports, the physique does not make any difference – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)

Overall, female-only teams are also perceived to be consequences of gendered socialisation, norms and contracts which create tensions across the community. However, because women-only teams are often created as strategies for coping or changing the scenario, they carry intentionality and purposefulness that changes their nature (and players' perceptions), in contrast with men-only teams. Nevertheless, homosocial teams are prime sites for the negotiation of identities and norms, and the homosocial practice of team formation carries gendered practices from the physical to the digital, reproducing and reinforcing while questioning and refusing. These struggles render political the digital spaces of League: although masculine power is carried from the offline to the online, marginalising and excluding the Others, otherness carries agency in the shape of compliance or resistance, nonetheless challenging.

Digital technologies play an important role in the establishment and maintenance of friendship ties for, as explained by Dunbar (2018), communication channels can often improve the sense of copresence, increase the speed of interaction or, when video is available, offer visual cues to the interlocutor's body language. SNSs come as another field produced by gendered strategies for and within social groups, due to their high pervasiveness and attractiveness, and their dedicated tools for bridging people and keeping them together. Further investigation revealed that, although team formation is a relevant inclusionary strategy amongst women in League, SNSs figures as the most important sphere for homosocial spaces formed through reactive agency amongst the

Brazilian sample (especially Facebook, the most popular site of its kind in that country). In this research, British participants did not report the same experiences with social media and focused on using it for sharing information about the game.

Facebook groups are created by one member with the aim at enabling collective discussions, media sharing and event organisation; three main privacy settings allow managers to create and maintain groups as open (i.e. comments and members can be viewed by anyone on Facebook), closed (i.e. only the member list can be seen, and one must ask permission to join), and secret (i.e. groups that are not visible to the public and participants only get to visit when invited by a member or manager) (Facebook, 2019). Pages are rather open to any viewers and are often used to display products or ideas and engage with the wider public (Facebook, 2019). Communication is usually asynchronous in groups and pages, and both can provide means for organising and sharing activity between members, hence its widespread use by local communities and grassroots organisations (Vallor, 2012). Viviane illustrates the twofold strategy and the motivations behind the creation of groups and pages on Facebook:

the group existed to shelter people, to unburden, to play together / (...) on the other hand, the page was created with the idea that, if the rioters are not listening to us / if the crew does not believe us / we will publicly denounce it / now everybody is going to see it for sure / (...) if they don't protect us, we protect ourselves / we unite and we expose the enemy's face / (...) I wanted the page to be that, a place for us to feel that the report got somewhere / support / and, wow, I got some DMs / I cried reading some of the stories / some gals would come just to chat, completely worn-out by the game, the community / we made friends, we helped the crew to get things off their chest, and sometimes we would develop self-defence methods against those attitudes / we had an in game group to play together / it was real amazing / I felt like it gave the crew a confidence boost / most of the audience was women and gays / but we had a lot of support from everywhere – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

The importance of Facebook groups for Brazilian participants in this research is patent in their accounts. Players create pages for the denouncement of pernicious occurrences or practices, and for advertising services, events, and other relevant topics; whereas groups are created with aims to assuagement and cooperation, often enhancing perceived safety and security against online misbehaviour.

According to five of the twelve Brazilian interviewees, social media groups are spaces for collaboration mediated by the exchange of amusement and information, where

participants feel encouraged to disclose their thoughts and feelings about the game and their experiences with it. Alongside participants' accounts, observations display that group administrators and moderators invest significant time and effort shaping the group's character and maintaining its standards through the enforcement of agreed rules. This is further illustrated by the researcher's experience during recruitment: in most of these groups, gatekeepers were adamant in browsing the researcher's personal profile for background check, and most would not admit her for recruitment before verifying whether the online survey was safe, free of spam and malware, and appropriate for their audience. In a few cases, the researcher had to agree to have the surveys publicised without her in the group since her ingress was denied by the manager (see section 4.4.1).

The fact that these groups are spaces of fun and enjoyment evokes the sense of amiability that is paramount for the solidification of friendly relationships; in providing openness, these groups foment emotional care and solidarity, also fundamental for the creation and maintenance of friendships (Niland *et al.*, 2015). In supporting the creation of a network of soothing hospitality, Facebook can represent a place of emotional support where participants help each other overcome any distress experienced due to misbehaviour in their matches. Likewise, in denouncing either people's online misbehaviour or Riot Game's perceived insufficient policies against it, groups and pages offer practical support. Later, interviewee Leticia⁶⁸ stresses that toxic behaviours are frowned upon (instead of seen as inherent – see section 6.1), and '*taken very seriously*' in her favourite group, hinting that what distinguishes the groups created through and by agency is the focus on an increased sense of safety. It is thus clear that these groups have the potential to produce new friendships between members, and that the perceived friendliness of the spaces is cherished by participants.

Although SNSs are more effective for the maintenance of pre-existing friendships, they are evidenced to be significant for bridging and bonding as well (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Johnston *et al.*, 2013). More specifically, Facebook associates high-profile technological capabilities (e.g. media integration, synchronicity, device convergence, algorithm-based content tailoring) with a widespread heavy usage across the globe. Ellison and colleagues' (2007) seminal study on Facebook friends has shown that intensive use of that SNS helps in the maintenance of social bonds for

⁶⁸ Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil.

people moving across physical communities, often yielding positive results for their personal and professional lives, and strengthening their connections to physical places.

It was observed on SNSs, and further confirmed by interviewees that women are often the creators and users of League-related assuagement groups; these women are however accompanied by gay men and trans people, with whom they frequently share these spaces. Likewise, LGBTQI+ people also create and join Facebook groups with the same intentions, and their groups do not tend to be exclusive and often accommodate women, regardless of sexual orientation and cis/trans identity. Interestingly, female participants never mentioned their sexual orientation when discussing their practices in SNSs; it seems that their gender identity was more salient to their motivations to engage with these groups than their sexualities, as opposed to the gay-identified men with whom they collaborate.

The collaboration between women and gay men in these spaces reflect participants' accounts on LGBTQphobia as a serious and prevalent issue by participants who talked about online misbehaviour. Diego, a gay man, says that his favourite group is not aimed at tackling toxic encounters, but it naturally came to that:

I use it more to look for game updates, and to help in some cases. / Like of toxicity and emotional trauma. / (...) it is not the aim. / But when someone tells a story. / People would go there and try to help. / Sometimes even about their personal lives. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

Young gay and bisexual men tend to form bonds outside their intersecting gender and sexual orientation, and cross-gender friendship is overall more frequent among non-heterosexual people; nonetheless, LGBTQI+ people tend to equally befriend people of the same or different gender (Gillespie *et al.*, 2015). Alternatively, gay men tend to create networks and communities where identity is built together with a sense of belonging and, usually, reinforce notions of maleness and male superiority in relation to women (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). Hammarén and Johansson (2014) see homosociality as a more nuanced concept where intersectional crossings and demarcations are highlighted. In fact, after Bowlby (2011), Bunnell and colleagues (2012) agree that friendship has the ability to cross (and often erase) socio-cultural boundaries if the mutual emotional investments are strong enough. These patterns, however, change in time and space, with cultural shifts, for friendships are often used

as protection and soothing against LGBTQphobic attacks. In that sense, it seems sensible that gay men befriend women in the context of online misbehaviour – both groups share the experience of being targeted by the phenomena.

Friendships and collaborations between heterosexual women and gay men are reportedly open to an affectionate exchange of emotional care, and intimacy, forming deep and satisfying bonds which often fill gaps encountered on female homosocial or gay-only groups (Grigoriou, 2004). However, although having the potential to challenge heterosexist norms, the association of gay men and heterosexual women is accepted within the heteronormative norm, and cannot be interpreted as gender-neutral on the basis of a devised asexuality (Rumens, 2012). Notwithstanding their internal practices and discourses often reproduce heterosexist values, these cross-sex relationships may shape alliances that simultaneously foster an increased acceptance of LGBTQI+ people and strengthen women in struggle for equality (Shepperd, Coyle and Hegarty, 2010).

In being a digital space moulded to be a place of care, SNSs offer space for cultivation and strengthening of women and LGBTQ friendship within the digital and, as illustrated by participants' accounts, it also becomes the interstitial space for friendships that traverse to the offline. These spaces may not be homosocial, but they are shaped by shared experiences of marginalisation due to hegemonic masculinity. Ultimately, as explained by Bowlby (2011, p.608), these non-heteronormative friendships, 'while not successfully challenging patriarchal relationships, offer opportunities for resistance to them'. Moreover, regarding non-hegemonic relationships, intimacy and affinity play a further role: 'queer networks of friendship are not just about fun and pleasure; they are also essential to physical and mental well-being and long-term survival' (Bunnell et al., 2012, p.499). As seen in participants' accounts, the formation of women- and LGBTQ-centred groups on SNSs configure spatial appropriation of perceived and imagined spaces through active resistance. These groups have the potential to generate new spaces of friendship as a corollary, contributing to individual and collective comfort and ease, in contrast with the lived and perceived risks and distress associated to alienation in potentially antagonistic spaces. Ultimately, SNSs epitomise a certain sense of community wrought between people who share experiences of inclusion and exclusion from gaming arenas, united with the aim at supporting each other (Maddrell, 2012, 2016).

SNSs often provide space for people to form teams that will then act in the FoJs; the formation of women and LGBT-centred teams is not directly due to online misbehaviour, but as a consequence of social gathering in homosocial spaces in SNSs. Befriending women and LGBTQ players, either in the game lobby or on SNSs, and offering support and assistance in-game often leaked to their offline lives. However, these relationships shouldn't be seen as neutral or unproblematic, for they are based on, and carry on sustaining differentiations and contradictions generative of the gendered segregation and marginalisation born by otherness (Shepperd, Coyle and Hegarty, 2010; Webster and Caretta, 2016).

Likewise, SNSs can be sites of distress, especially when the user's motivations interact with connection times. For instance, those who use Facebook for a longer period of time with the motivation of making new friends (instead of maintaining pre-existing relationships) tend to have their psychological wellbeing reduced (Rae and Lonborg, 2015). Likewise, the formation of female/queer-centred or homosocial spaces in SNSs bears its contradictions. For instance, SNSs groups are perceived as porous spaces due to their high permeability and difficult control. Consequently, women-centred groups are often infiltrated by men such as the participant Vladimir, who is heterosexual and does not explain what leads him to participate in such groups. Likewise, participant Diana says that, although she stays a member of some groups where she feels safe, she has abandoned Facebook groups in the past due to sexual harassment and stays mostly inactive or lurking nowadays because of perceived sexism and transphobia in some other groups (quote on p. 249). Moreover, the very existence of women-only groups is often a reason for backlash: amongst other instances of reactive online misbehaviour, Viviane's Facebook group was suppressed from that network by the action of trolls who resented the group's feminist stance.

The binational comparison revealed interesting contours to the spaces of friendship within and across Brazil and UK. As discussed, team formation is mostly guided by the existence of friendship ties, which are also responsible for many player's loyalty to the game. Likewise, masculine homosociality in League is mostly expressed in the formation of men-only teams; Brazilian and British male players assert that this is guided by a pre-existing homosociality. Confirming Webster and Caretta (2016), regardless of motivation, the existence of single gender teams reinforces hegemonic masculinity, pushing for further spatial segregation and fracturing. Since British women tend to integrate in mixed-gender teams, the most significant fractures are found when intersectional identities are placed in context. Women-only, and LGBTQ-

aimed teams only occur in the Brazilian sample, and all due to a perceived need to tackle online misbehaviour; this cohort is also the only one to participate in women- and LGBTQ-aimed SNS groups created for assuagement of online misbehaviour. This case illustrates a process of spatial segregation where solidarity based on shared marginalisation is employed to produce inclusive spaces. Albeit not participating in the same teams and groups as their Brazilian counterparts, British gay men share the same perceptions and are united in solidarity against a perceived marginalisation due to harmful interactions in the community.

6.3. Chapter Summary

This final chapter attended to how Brazilian and British League players' perceptions of the role of gender in the game arenas weave into practices of antagonism and rapport. More specifically, it has discussed how these intricate practices collectively produce spaces of inclusion and exclusion, while also being employed as agency devices.

Online misbehaviour encompasses verbal and non-verbal interactions that expressively disrupt a game match or social media communication; these practices vary significantly in severity and perceived harmfulness, depending on their context in digital places. Regardless of motivation and modality, online misbehaviour is pervasive in League, being often considered as an integral part of the game's and the community's character. This study confirmed it as one of the most important practices of space production, acting through the negotiation of identities and the drawing of symbolic boundaries between people across the four gaming spheres.

Although participants do not see gender as important to in-game skills and abilities, this identity marker is central to the issue of hostile communication, since perceptions of, and reactions to online misbehaviour change with gender and context. This research confirms Fichman and Sanfilippo's (2015) findings on gendered differences in regards to deviant and antisocial behaviour in online environments, highlighting the importance of context (in this case, also geographical) to these differences.

Indeed, the negotiation of appropriate and deviant gendered performances in the game reveals the gendered nature of its arenas. Practices of online misbehaviour are central in their articulation of appropriate performances and create spaces of inclusion and exclusion depending on how one engages them. Again, context is fundamental to understand the differences between British and Brazilian cohorts: in general, the latter perceives online misbehaviour as an issue that needs tackling, whereas the former sees

it as friendly banter, and positions the responsibility on the receiver. In British League communities, online misbehaviour is only exclusionary should the receiver be unable to cope with what is an expected character of the game. In Brazil, online misbehaviour is a nuisance that impacts upon the community by patently excluding some people.

This contrast is even more nuanced when sexuality intersects gender. In Britain, gay men tend to follow Brazilian women and gay men in their perception of online misbehaviour as exclusionary; in fact, gay men in both cohorts manifest solidarity to what they perceive as sexism against women in League's arenas. Indeed, sexist and heterosexist attacks often take the shape of sexual harassment, a heavily gendered spatial practice central to processes of placemaking in physical and digital spaces, based on emotional constraining and shaping of what is lived, perceived, and represented as dangerous for some people. What gendered online misbehaviour reveals is a deeply exclusionary process often aimed at women, and less often at LGBTQI+ people, being a manifestation of power, shaping the physical, the virtual and the embodied-psychological spaces of gaming. As with physical places, gendered violence is defining of spatialities and placemaking in the digital arenas, and this is expressed in participants' feelings of fear, inadequacy, and insecurity prior to engaging with the game. However, this dynamic is also deeply contextual: in the UK, gendered exclusion due to online misbehaviour is not perceived or experienced equally, in intensity or frequency, as it is in Brazil. However, as confirmed by British participants, that does not mean that gendered online misbehaviour does not occur in that context; rather, it points to how British participants perceive and react to it. Notwithstanding the contrast, online misbehaviour distinguishes a sense of place in League.

When online misbehaviour is an exclusionary device, participants employ several other devices to avoid it or tackle its negative consequences. Players' response can range from passive to active resistance or be a complex mix of exercised negotiation. Regardless, the struggle between online misbehaviour and agency reveals some of the most important power relations acting within the gaming arenas. In being pervasive, it inflects the production of space in all gaming spheres; in being a conflict, it reveals an inequality-based struggle. In being based on identity, online misbehaviour settles rules for the definition of socio-spatial boundaries, infusing the spaces with meaning. The employment (or not) of agency devices against online misbehaviour is once more contingent to certain demographic strands and varies significantly from one country to the other.

This difference becomes clearer when this chapter attends to how practices of homosociality and affective relationships inflect socio-spatial organisation in League. Deeply related to this articulation of antagonism and rapport revealed by online misbehaviour, the formation of teams and social media groups shed light on how participant's social articulations mould the inner boundaries of the digital. Moreover, these social articulations often refer to how participants engage (or not) with online misbehaviour. Central to this is the phenomenon of friendship, revealed as motor or outcome of practically all socio-spatial articulations within League, once more highlighting the importance of the embodied-psychological to the other spaces in this assemblage. Friendships are the main motivation for participants to join or stay loyal to League and can be reinforced due to the sense of copresence entailed by the ICTs.

Friendships are important because they enhance one's gaming experience by increasing their sense of belonging and inclusion. However, it can also be a source of distress, should it create an environment of peer pressure and distraction, which can reduce the feeling of immersivity. In being a mutual relationship, friendship involves intersectional identity dynamics; while the limits between socio-cultural categories can be crossed or erased, friendships are often used to establish or reinforce social norms, creating and reinforcing socio-spatial distinction and exclusion.

In seizing the FoJs in the first place, male homosocial groups enact domination and control of the game's prime site of play. Since identity is relationally defined, this domination necessarily entails otherness and marginalisation. Although very rare in this dataset, women-only teams are formed as an opposition to marginalisation, in an exercise of strategic segregation that works as an inclusionary practice.

Accounts of the existence of female homosocial spaces in e-sports reveal other nuances. Respondents see the formation of women-only professional teams and tournaments with ambivalence: those who see it as beneficial to amplify women's opportunities in the field, and those who see it as marginalising. Spaces for professional gameplay in League are marked by homosociality, either because of the underlying gendered relations which frame them, or as a problematic response to perceived discomfort towards these relations.

On social media, a different experience is delineated. Groups organised on Facebook are centred on shared experiences and emotions, and act as devices for identity resistance and assuagement, often in opposition to negative encounters with online misbehaviour in the other spheres. These spaces of solidarity and emotional support

are mostly occupied by Brazilian women, gay men, and trans* people, and their accounts point to a space dynamic opposed to that of heterosexual men, often related to identity conformity.

The data also provides evidence that, although primarily used as means to strengthen pre-existing friendships, SNSs can be used to forge new ones, especially when people reach for those sites with a shared interest and goal. Due to SNSs' capacities, new friendships fostered in their groups and pages can overflow them to other digital places, often oozing to the physical; this movement is a result of SNSs' remarkable ability to mark and inflect the embodied-psychological.

The next chapter summarises how the themes discussed in Chapters Four and Five communicate to the conceptual framework and respond to the research questions proposed in the Introduction. The conclusion ends by pointing to this thesis' original contributions to scholarship, and to ways forward through recommended future research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

The purpose of this comparative instrumental case study, employing an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, was to explore the gendered spatial practices of inclusion, exclusion, and agency at play in shaping League's digital spaces in Brazil and the UK. Engaging a conceptual framework assembled through the articulation of the concepts of gendered relations and spatial practices in the realm of digital geographies, this investigation has developed and employed a multifaceted disciplinary approach to feminist digital geographies. Through the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, collected in two distinct research phases, this study has answered the questions proposed in Chapter One:

1. Are League spaces gendered? If so, in what ways?
2. Are there any gendered homosocial spaces inside League? Why were they created and how are they organised?
3. What is the nature of gendered relations and gendered agency in the digital spaces of League?
4. Comparing players' experiences and attitudes in Brazil and the UK, are there any differences in gendered relations within national/regional spaces of League?

This chapter casts off this thesis by presenting a summary of the research findings in the context of each research question, before discussing the contributions to the existing field of knowledge in gender geographies and digital geographies, first-person reflections, and possibilities for future research.

7.1. Summary and Findings

A mixed methods approach comprising online surveys and semi-structured online interviews, informed by supportive participant observation, has provided rich quantitative and qualitative data. Abductive analysis comprised descriptive statistics, content, and thematic analysis. After initial explorations from a gamer perspective, the digital sites of League were identified in their form, location, and use. Data collection instruments were designed with this knowledge; online surveys provided a controlled dive into the main themes at play within the gaming community, whereas interviews amplified players' voices and refined the themes. While descriptive statistics and content analysis provided the lie of the land, thematic analysis enhanced these findings by framing them within the conceptual framework articulating gendered relations, spatial practices and digital spatialities.

First, this investigation sought to answer whether League's spaces are gendered, and in what ways. To answer that question, it was necessary to understand what constitutes League as a space. Observations and data collection ascertained the articulation of League's spaces within the Lefebvrian (1991) trialectic co-constitution of the lived, the perceived and the imagined, while positioning the game as belonging to virtual space in interactive co-production with the physical and the embodied-psychological, as presented by Maddrell (2016). League is thus a gendered digital space made through the assembly of four intersecting, overlapping spheres, whose boundaries are permeable and mobile, defined by social relations of power which enact and rule the inclusion and exclusion of people depending on the site.

The first sphere, where gameplay takes place, are the game maps, known as Fields of Justice. Here, players become summoners who navigate the digital space of a battle arena while located in a room, somewhere in the world. Their embodied identities exude to their virtual selves, who take shape in the champions – the characters they control during a match – and inflect every interaction in the space-time of a match, and beyond. Social network sites are the second sphere, spaces where in-game experiences are extended through the formation of micro-cultures and solidarity chains. Social media groups are created around collective emotional ties, interpersonal or in relation to the game, and can be spaces of antagonism or rapport depending on the sets of practices employed there, and to how certain populations relate to these practices. E-sports represent all physical, virtual, and embodied-psychological spaces involved in professional gameplay. In this sphere, power struggles become deeper

since the boundaries between work and play are blurred; for this reason, the same gendered relations at play in the other spheres are emphasised. On streaming platforms, bodily and embodied performances are central to those producing or consuming content. This all-encompassing sphere communicates with all the others by associating amateur and professionals, gameplay, and social media, and by generating a space bound and inflected by the social relations within them.

Games, as cultural artefacts and materialities, are sites of relationality – they evoke presence and absence. League's four intersecting spheres provide good examples of how reality is mediated through the co-constitution of intersecting technologies, spaces and social relations, as proposed by Leszczynski (2015), rendering these as sites of co-constituted spatiality. Ultimately, League exists, as a space, through the continuous assemblage of these spheres, which represent specific space-times of gaming, changing shape with the social dynamics which give meaning to each of their physical, embodied-psychological, and virtual manifestations.

Based on the feminist standpoint of looking into everyday practices and giving voice to people's subjectivities, the exploration of processes of identification and belonging shed light on the gendering of physical, digital, and embodied-psychological spaces of League. Identity performances are spatial practices co-constitutive of power relations, and deeply alter personal and collective experience, perception, and imagination of space. Central to this study, *gamerness* is negotiated around material practices of play, and gains complex contours when, while navigating the four game spheres, it is challenged or reinforced by the encounters which position a videogame player as a League player. In this sense, research data provided evidence that gendered relations act on personal and collective identification processes, expressed on the overall unequal gender ratio, in practices of team formation, social network use, engagement with streaming platforms and professional gameplay. Moreover, collective processes of identification are deeply enmeshed in people's emotional landscapes, being translated into feelings of belonging or alienation.

The over-representation of men in both cohorts is deemed, by participants, as a concrete reflection of how gendered socialisation impacts on access to and engagement with games like League. Consequently, League is perceived as a masculine space, of which performances of masculinity (e.g. online misbehaviour) are an integral part. Although participants are ambivalent as to whether one's gender matters in the game, implicit rules of behaviour position the expected League player as a man, or at

least as someone who acts 'like one'. In all spheres, identity is negotiated through language and in-game practices (e.g. role and champion choice). Participants' accounts in surveys and interviews express how one's gender is recognised through markers of language use (such as a nickname or certain expressions in the text chat), and how this acknowledgement may shift one's position in the space-time of that match. Likewise, expected gendered performances in game are responsible for changing how one is seen in that community, depending on how socio-cultural difference is challenged or naturalised in that social arena. Consequently, manifold gendered socialisation is reproduced in League's spheres, generating perceived belonging or alienation, drawing emotional boundaries around people who feel welcome or unwelcome to be there.

In this context, gendered relations shape intimate power struggles, a relationship expressed through the process of identification with similarity or difference, which positions a player as an insider or an outsider depending on their gender, among other axes of difference. In its core, identification carries belonging, enacted through strong practices of claiming and protection of spaces delineated by power struggles. In being a dynamic process, belonging presumes alienation, in an interchangeable movement of inclusion and exclusion. Gendered identification is thus tied to identification as a League player, but more clearly to otherness or concordance within those spaces.

The analysis also showed that League players create and organise homosocial spaces in all the four spheres, and each of these spaces have different meanings. The online surveys provided an initial dive into the prevalence of homosocial teams for gameplay. In the Fields of Justice, homosocial spaces usually exist in the shape of men-only teams, and seldom as women-only teams. Differences between Brazil and the UK in this matter are contrasting. In both countries, mixed gender teams are the most common practice, and men-only teams are the majority amongst homosocial teams. A few Brazilian women organise homosocial teams as a strategy to avoid online misbehaviour. Likewise, men-only teams are preponderant in e-sports, and while women-only teams and tournaments do exist, their existence is constantly challenged as to whether it is necessary, prudent, or ill-advised. Female homosocial spaces in professional gameplay are, once more, proposed as strategies for tackling poor visibility and misrepresentation, although participants are ambivalent as to whether these work as intended or simply worsen the perceived marginalisation. While the occurrence of women-only teams is a clear act of agency, the prevalence of masculine homosocial teams highlights the power differentials in action in processes of

identification and provides material example of the underlying gendered power relations that act in the production of spaces in League.

People in both interview cohorts utilise Facebook to create groups aimed at information-sharing, united around the shared *League player* identity; however, engagement with social network groups was more prevalent and detailed in the Brazilian dataset. The use of Facebook as a site for creating homosocial spaces was observed among interviewees and survey respondents; although social network use is common among Brazilian respondents, women, gay men and trans* people are more engaged with groups where there are practices of assuagement in face of in-game hostile interactions. These groups may not be strictly homosocial, but they are created from a shared identity of marginalisation in society and in the game, and once more highlight the strength of identification processes in the production of online gaming spaces.

With its focus on the importance of context to geographical dynamics, the binational comparison magnified gendered socialisation and other identification structures that are commonly shared by both countries in the production of space, in contrast to processes that are more salient in Brazil or the UK. Men-only spaces are reportedly unintentional, and that is precisely why they are a result of primary gendering of League as a game and as a digital space. Contrastingly, the conscious adoption of strategic segregation by Brazilian women and LGBTQI+ people⁶⁹ is an agency device that reveals both the nature of these gendered relations in Brazil, and the processes of creating spaces of resistance and contrast against perceived injustices. The fundamental spatial practices of identification and belonging set unspoken rules and draw immaterial, but very concrete borders between the dominant (men) and the ancillary ('non-men').

Gender is historical and, like all social processes, it is open-ended; likewise, the concept of gender bears fractures originating internal crises and clashes with external dynamics. This investigation has provided evidence of how gendered relations and gendered agency in League are grounded in identity and belonging and articulate with processes of antagonism and rapport. Identification, as a spatial practice, is co-constitutive of the gendered relations of inclusion, exclusion and agency identified in this research. Conforming to or questioning the expected identity performances are thus agency devices employed by participants in both samples, who act moved by a

⁶⁹ Not mutually-exclusive categories.

sense of belonging (or lack thereof), aiming at maintaining or achieving inclusion – even if this entails some form of exclusion.

In this context, identity unfolds into relationships of rapport and antagonism articulated through individual expressions and group practices. For instance, identifying as a League player is an initial step for belonging to that community and to be included in the social spaces it entails, but that process can be hampered by tacit rules, expressed in behaviours and group configurations. In this example, rapport and antagonism are almost-already clashing, and this research has brought evidence that gender is a central axis in the constitution of these power struggles. The most important practice articulating the negotiation between identity and antagonism or rapport is online misbehaviour.

There are interesting contrasts between Brazil and the UK. In both cohorts, online misbehaviour is considered an identity marker of the League player, and an inherent and expected practice in the game's arenas. However, British participants generally perceive online misbehaviour as innocuous, a solvable nuisance, whereas Brazilian participants tend to perceive it as harmful and disruptive. These contrasts are even more salient when other identity axes are at play; for instance, the (albeit rare) occurrence of women-only teams in the Brazilian cohort shows how hostile interactions are perceived by women in that country, and illuminates team formation as an agency strategy aimed at creating spaces of inclusion in the game.

The gendered relations identified in this research are complex entanglements of identification and belonging, articulated, and disputed through practices of socialisation, markedly through intentional homosociality inflected by relationships of friendship, or unintentional homosociality inflected by underlying gendered socialisation. Symbolic exclusion and violence enacted mostly through language encompass some of the most important spatial practices identified and gain stronger contours when confronted with the equally gendered emotional responses expressed through agency. The masculine character of these digital social arenas, carved by an ongoing socialisation enacted through practices of domination and control, is challenged by the outsiders' resistance to subsuming, expressed on their fight for identification and belonging. In League, political minorities – especially women, who are also demographic minorities – experience marginalisation by gendered socialisation and gendered symbolic violence in the shape of targeted online misbehaviour. Nevertheless, these women employ tactics of agency which start with

individual approaches to protect from or react to online misbehaviour, often culminating in strategic segregation as a counterpoint to masculine homosocial spaces, sometimes associating with homosexual men in their efforts to foment a community which can, finally, afford them a sense of belonging.

Finally, this research sheds light on the otherwise ‘hidden presence’ of friendship in human geography (Bunnell et al., 2012, p.492). In looking at friendship as a foundation and corollary of relationships in and through League, this research has attended to Bowlby’s (2011) call to explore the role of digital media in friendships, particularly regarding gendered relations. The analysis of people’s associations and loyalties in the game has evidenced the gendered character of these relationships, while showing that in-game behaviours can both strengthen or hamper identity performances, while facilitating the maintenance of friendships, on one hand, and/or the dissolution or replacement of emotional ties on the other. Moreover, this research has answered to Bunnell and colleagues’ (2012) call for attention to how friendship causes socio-spatial boundaries to shift and blur, generating inclusion, while simultaneously reinforcing geographies of exclusion and differentiation; accordingly, the theoretical understanding of the affective social worlds within and through the digital was enhanced through the outlining of friendships entangled in its foundations. Ultimately, this research has provided empirical evidence of the significance of the many arrangements of friendship to the production of space, thus offering a geographical stance against the general view, in social sciences, of friendship as a subsumable, ‘free-floating’, informal social network (Bunnell et al., 2012).

7.2. Reflections and Diffractions: ways forward

The importance of identification for spatial practices is reflected not only in the literature, but also in my own experience as a researcher. Interviewees and peers would frequently inquire about my identity: “are you a gamer?”. I would never find it easy to respond to that (and still do not do). I found my unease to be grounded in relational issues, as I don’t think I would be perceived as one by other gamers, especially if seen in person, because of my gaming practices and preferences, and because of my visible cultural markers – I am not, aesthetically, a gamer. In a sense, I would fear this would influence my participants’ responses or the wider community’s views on the legitimacy of my research. It was an impossible reconciliation between

my identity as a person who plays games and happens to be a researcher, and vice versa. Nevertheless, my experience with online misbehaviour during this research, although stressful, has provided me with important lessons which helped me better understand my participants' experiences. More importantly, it has equipped me with a stronger sense of my philosophical standpoint, both as a researcher and as a feminist, leading me to pursue a better grasp of feminist ethics of care, with focus on their employment in online research.

The ground-breaking transportation of the concept of spatial practices to the digital realm has provided a novel exploration of online spaces and their constitutive processes. Through the underlining critical standpoint provided by its feminist position, this study amplified the use of the concept by extending it towards digital practices, spaces, and places. In critically analysing the iterations between material and digital places, and the role of this iteration in the production of space, this study has explored the new elastic frontiers of power relations across the realms of the virtual, the physical and the embodied-psychological proposed by Maddrell (2016).

By employing a sophisticated combination of descriptive quantitative data to support meaningful, qualitative data, this study has contributed to the debate regarding the use of digital methodologies in geographical exploration. More specifically, it has enhanced the discussion around the ethics of digital research by providing a feminist stance on the ethics of care in online environments. From the experience of doing this research, that geographical academia has the potential (and the duty) to contribute to the development of stronger and flexible frameworks for ethical digital research, especially when communicating with feminist ethics of care.

This research supports Fichman and Sanfilippo's (2015) debates about contextual gendered differences on the perceptions and reactions to online misbehaviour. Attention to issues of online misbehaviour in this research has answered Brickell and Maddrell's (2016) call to uncover experiences of gendered violence and illuminate practices of agency and resistance. Moreover, by attending to the negotiation of identities in an online game, this study has extended the understanding of 'how social difference, oppression and resistance are re-iterated in and through digital life' (Elwood and Leszczynski, 2018). In practice, by highlighting these issues, the study reveals forms of domination that are still to be addressed, thus being useful to inform future policies for technological justice, with patent consequences to socio-spatial justice. The rich dataset collected and analysed in this study ultimately contributes to

the enhancement of a critical mass of the feminist critique to technology and of contemporary forms of sexism and heterosexism. Additionally, this study strengthens the dialogue between geography and game theory and studies, especially in its feminist and other critical strands.

With its focus on a Latin-American and a Northern-European countries, this research has extended the scope of studies on massive online battle arenas (MOBAs), thus filling one of the gaps indicated by Mora-Cantalops and Sicilia (2018). In this sense, the study has also contributed to the wider field of feminist game studies by geographically addressing issues of gendered power in a popular online game.

It is important to stress that this research has limitations. For one, although Internet samples allow for the recruitment of a more diverse cohort in terms of gender, age and location, it also tends to encompass many higher-educated and higher-income people; this limitation was enhanced by the use of some recruitment sites focused on university students (mostly in the UK). The sample was not probability-based nor representative, but recruitment sites were carefully chosen to allow for purposive sampling. Nevertheless, self-selected samples are known to hamper wider and equitable distribution of recruitment; in this research, most UK participants were based in England, which limits the generalisability of the findings to the whole United Kingdom. A similar issue was encountered in the Brazilian sample which, although somewhat larger than the British, also concentrated most responses on some areas; in Brazil, however, the self-selected areas correspond to those with better digital inclusion rates, which may explain the concentration.

Additionally, social media voluntary recruitment may induce selection bias, since the study may have attracted participants who are interested in the topic due to previous experiences with online misbehaviour, or due to feelings of antagonism towards feminist research and practice. It is understood that the nature of the case study bears its biases, for online games require certain financial conditions to afford Internet connection and access to computing equipment, as well as a minimum level of computing and gaming literacy. Data collection could have thus benefited from questions regarding participants' preferred site for playing (i.e. home, gamehouse, LAN house, university), and ELO/level, categories that would have provided interesting insights about participants' class, level of engagement, and possible correlations with perceptions and experiences.

During the research, some topics were identified beyond the scope of the study and are recommended as future endeavours. Considering the limitations of this study, future studies on the digital geographies of online gaming may benefit from recruitment from physical sites, and from the use of control studies featuring participants who engage with one but not all the four gaming spheres. This way, studies may also explore gamers' practices and perceptions of the physical spaces of gaming, to understand class cleavages, issues of ICT access and how these factors inflect the production of material spaces of gaming and play. A focus on non-users would have been of further use to capture outside perspectives, both as a form of control sample, and to challenge the game's parameters and ideologies.

Notwithstanding the ethical difficulties and grey areas of this kind of research, document analysis and structured observation of Facebook groups and Reddit forums may be of use for a deeper understanding of the role of social media in the production of gaming spaces. Likewise, online focus groups using Discord servers can uncover team formation and the use of non-native voice communication in League gameplay.

Although streaming has proven to be an important practice and space for League players, it was the less developed gaming sphere in this research. In the future, a deeper analysis of gendered roles and performances on Twitch.tv should provide better insights on the very complex practice and spaces of streaming, especially if focusing on the e-girl phenomenon and how it is perceived as intimately located at the edge of gaming and adult entertainment. Future studies on streaming spaces may seek to understand how they subvert the gendered intimacy of bedrooms and the body, and how they twist sexual and gendered relations in these spaces, especially related to gaming. These studies would contribute immensely by interrogating gendered gaming performances on streaming to understand how they create space for the reproduction and disruption of gendered norms.

A deeper analysis of spatial practices of toxic culture in different spheres of online interaction (especially on social media) can also be useful to expose pressing matters of the political formation of social arenas in digital spaces, especially if engaged with emotional responses and practices of exclusion, inclusion, and agency. Considering participants' views on the role of race and racism, and sexuality and heterosexism within these arenas, future studies about the production of online spaces are recommended to focus on the role of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer people and beyond (LGBTQI+).

Considering participants' overall negative perceptions of the company regarding managing harmful interaction in League's social arenas, a document analysis of the defunct Riot Games' Tribunal is recommended as a study to uncover corporate practices of managing online misbehaviour in League.

Through its commitment to a geographical analysis, this project has successfully transported the concept of spatial practices to the digital realm, an original enterprise done by articulating the works of many geographers, social scientists, and game theorists. As a product of a multi-disciplinary approach, this study enriches geographical knowledge by deepening the understanding of new, elastic frontiers of power relations. Positioned within the field of digital geographies, this work provides further evidence of the prime role of gendered relations in the iterative co-production of physical and digital spaces, whose on-going construction significantly alters social life.

Likewise, this study's contributions to the geographies of gender are manifold. It illuminates practices of agency and resistance by unpacking conflicting gendered relations in the digital realm and, in doing so, it reveals the simultaneously exclusionary and inclusionary role of social antagonism and rapport in the production of online space. At the crossroads of feminist and digital geographies, this work has enhanced understanding of some of how identity negotiation produces a sense of belonging – albeit in permanent struggle – in online spaces. Here, the intersecting frontiers between Geography and Game Studies (especially regarding more critical dialogues) are expanded. Ultimately, by looking closely into socio-spatial gendered dynamics in online spaces, this study joins contemporary voices in feminist debates about technology and technological justice, contributing to all forms of activism in our long walk towards gender equality.

This project, which has engaged with deemed *unserious* cultural products, communities, and topics, offers a ludic path to seriousness. In dealing with controversy, it opens the doors for contrast; in dealing with conflict (and, often, pain), it underscores agency, and togetherness. By using a game as a case study, this project plays with assemblages, and illuminates the opaqueness (Santos, 2002) of peoples, activities and places to which Geography has just recently turned. As an endeavour, the gendered geographies of online gaming are, I hope, a heuristic device: capable of arousing debate, stimulating creativity, and kindling change.

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ⁱ (Brasil, 1934; British Nationality Act, 1981; Civil Partnership Act, 2004; Código Criminal do Império, 1830; Constituição do Estado de Mato Grosso, 1989; Constituição do Estado de Sergipe, 1989; Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act, 1980; Criminal Justice Act, 2003; Lei 7.716, 1989; Lei 9.263, 1996; Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, 2013; Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act, 2019; Pedro, 2003; Representation of the People Act, 1918; Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, 1928; Sexual Offences Act, 1967; Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2000; STF, 2013; The Equality Act, 2010; The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations, 1999)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – League of Legends Code of Conduct (in Terms of Use - EN-GB and PT-BR)

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS®

TERMS OF USE (EUW)¹

Last Modified: June 15, 2018

5. CODE OF CONDUCT

5.1. Can I troll, flame, threaten or harass people while using the Riot Services?(No. If you do, you might get banned.)

While using the Riot Services, you must comply with all laws, rules and regulations in the jurisdiction in which you reside. You must also comply with certain additional rules that govern your use of the Riot Services (the “Code of Conduct”). The Code of Conduct is not meant to be exhaustive, and we reserve the right to modify it at any time, as well as take appropriate disciplinary measures including account termination and deletion to protect the integrity and spirit of the Riot Services, regardless of whether a specific behavior is listed in the policy as inappropriate. In addition to the Code of Conduct, please review the Summoner’s Code <http://gameinfo.na.leagueoflegends.com/en/game-info/get-started/summoners-code/> for additional guidance on exemplary gameplay behavior.

The following are examples of behavior that warrant disciplinary measures:

- i. Impersonating any person, business or entity, including an employee of Riot Games, or communicating in any way that makes it appear that the communication originates from Riot Games;
- ii. Posting identifying information about yourself or other players to the Website or within the Game;
- iii. Harassing, stalking or threatening other players while using the the Riot Services;
- iv. Removing, altering or concealing any copyright, trademark, patent or other proprietary rights notice of Riot Games contained in the Website, the Game and/or the Software. You also may not transmit content that violates or infringes the rights of others, including patent, trademark, trade secret, copyright, publicity, personal rights or other rights;
- v. Transmitting or communicating any content which is deemed offensive, including language that is unlawful, harmful, threatening, abusive, harassing, defamatory, vulgar, obscene, sexually explicit, or racially, ethnically, or otherwise objectionable;

¹ Source: <https://euw.leagueoflegends.com/en/legal/termsofuse#section5>

- vi. Transmitting or facilitating the transmission of any content that contains a virus, corrupted data, trojan horse, bot keystroke logger, worm, time bomb, cancelbot or other computer programming routines that are intended to and/or actually damage, detrimentally interfere with, surreptitiously intercept or mine, scrape or expropriate any system, data or personal information;
- vii. Spamming chat, whether for personal or commercial purposes, by disrupting the flow of conversation with repeated postings;
- viii. Participating in any action which defrauds any other user of the Game, including by scamming or social engineering;
- ix. Using any unauthorized third party programs, including mods, hacks, cheats, scripts, bots, trainers and automation programs that interact with the Software in any way, for any purpose, including any unauthorized third party programs that intercept, emulate, or redirect any communication between the Software and Riot Games and any unauthorized third party programs that collect information about the Game by reading areas of memory used by the Software to store information;
- x. Accessing or attempting to access areas of the Game or Game servers that have not been made available to the public;
- xi. Selecting a Summoner name that is falsely indicative of an association with Riot Games, contains personally identifying information, or that is offensive, defamatory, vulgar, obscene, sexually explicit, racially, ethnically, or otherwise objectionable. You may not use a misspelling or an alternative spelling to circumvent this restriction on Summoner name choices. Riot Games may modify any name which violates this provision, without notification to you, and may take further disciplinary measures, including account termination for repeated violations;
- xii. Logging out or exiting the Game during live game-play. Riot Games' automated Leaverbuster® system tracks this data over time and issues a temporary ban when a user is determine to have left mid-game too many times. The length of the temporary ban will increase over time if a particular account continues to leave live game play; or
- xiii. Playing on another person's account to "boost" that account's status or rank.
- xiv. Inducing or encouraging others to violate this Code of Conduct or the terms of this Agreement

TERMOS DE USO (BR)

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS[®]²

Última Modificação: 13 de Julho de 2012

V. CÓDIGO DE CONDUTA

Enquanto você estiver usando as Propriedades, você concorda em cumprir todas as leis, regras e regulamentos aplicáveis. Você também concorda em cumprir com determinadas regras adicionais que regem o uso das Propriedades (o "Código de Conduta"). O Código de Conduta não é exaustivo, e a Riot Games se reserva o direito de modificar este Código de Conduta a qualquer momento, bem como de tomar quaisquer medidas disciplinares adequadas, incluindo o cancelamento e a exclusão da Conta para proteger a integridade e o espírito das Propriedades, independentemente se um comportamento específico foi ou não listado aqui como proibido. Além deste Código de Conduta, por favor, consulte o Código do Invocador para orientação adicional sobre o comportamento exemplar dentro do Jogo. A seguir encontram-se exemplos de comportamentos que justificam medidas disciplinares:

- A. Fingir ser qualquer pessoa, empresa ou entidade, incluindo um funcionário da Riot Games, ou se comunicar de qualquer forma que faça parecer que a comunicação se origina da Riot Games;
- B. Postar informações de identificação pessoal sobre si mesmo, ou qualquer outro usuário, no Site ou no Jogo;
- C. Assediar, perseguir ou ameaçar qualquer outro usuário no Jogo;
- D. Remover, alterar ou esconder quaisquer avisos sobre direito autoral, marca, patente ou outros direitos de propriedade da Riot Games contidos no Site, Jogo e/ou Software. Você também não está autorizado a transmitir conteúdos que violem ou infrinjam os direitos de terceiros, incluindo, sem limitação, patente, marca registrada, segredo comercial, direitos autorais, publicidade, direitos pessoais ou outros direitos de propriedade ou não;
- E. Transmitir ou comunicar qualquer conteúdo que, a critério único e exclusivo da Riot Games, seja considerado ofensivo, incluindo, mas não limitado a, linguagem ilegal, prejudicial,

² Source: <https://br.leagueoflegends.com/pt/legal/termsfuse>

ameaçador, abusivo, assediante, difamatório, vulgar, obsceno, sexualmente explícito, ou racial, étnico, ou de qualquer forma censurável;

- F. Transmitir ou facilitar a transmissão de qualquer conteúdo que contenha vírus, dados corrompidos, cavalo de Tróia, bot keystroke logger, keylogger, worm, bomba-relógio (time bomb), bomba-lógica (logic bomb), cancelbot ou outras rotinas de programação de computador que sejam destinadas a danificar, interferir de forma prejudicial, interceptar ou minar subrepticiamente, arranhar ou expropriar qualquer sistema, dados ou informações pessoais;
- G. Enviar spams em chats, seja para propósitos pessoais ou comerciais, interrompendo o fluxo da conversa com postagens repetidas de natureza semelhante;
- H. Participar em qualquer ação que, no julgamento único e exclusivo da Riot Games, "explore" um aspecto não documentado do Jogo para garantir uma vantagem injusta ou desleal sobre outros usuários;
- I. Participar de qualquer ação que, no julgamento único e exclusivo da Riot Games, engane qualquer outro usuário do Jogo, incluindo, mas não limitado a, uso de golpes ou esquemas fraudulentos ou de engenharia social;
- J. Utilizar quaisquer programas de terceiros não autorizados, incluindo, mas não limitado a, "mods", "hacks", "cheats", "scripts", "bots", "trainers" e programas de automação que interajam com o Software de qualquer forma, para qualquer fim, incluindo, mas não se limitando a, quaisquer programas de terceiros não autorizados que interceptem, emulem ou redirecionem qualquer comunicação entre o Software e a Riot Games e quaisquer programas de terceiros não autorizados que colem informações sobre o Jogo lendo áreas de memória usadas pelo Software para armazenar informações;
- K. Acessar ou tentar acessar áreas do Jogo ou servidores do Jogo que não foram disponibilizados ao público;
- L. Selecionar um nome de Invocador que seja falsamente indicativo de uma associação com a Riot Games, que contenha informações de identificação pessoal, ou infrinja os direitos de propriedade ou não de terceiros, ou que seja ofensivo, difamatório, vulgar, obsceno, sexualmente explícito, racial, étnico, ou de qualquer outra forma censurável. Você não pode usar um erro de ortografia ou uma ortografia alternativa para contornar essa restrição nas escolhas de nome de Invocador. A Riot Games pode modificar qualquer nome que, no julgamento único e exclusivo da Riot Games, viole essa condição sem qualquer notificação a

você, podendo tomar medidas disciplinares adicionais, incluindo o encerramento da Conta, no caso de repetidas violações; ou

- M. Terminar sessão ou sair do Jogo durante uma partida ativa. O sistema "Leaverbuster" automatizado da Riot Games rastreia esses dados ao longo do tempo e emite um banimento temporário quando um usuário abandona partidas ativas frequentemente. A duração do banimento temporário irá aumentar ao longo do tempo se uma determinada Conta continuar a abandonar partidas ativas.

Appendix 2 – Interview Guiding Questions (EN-GB)

Hi, good morning and thank you very much for your time. First, I'd like to highlight that this interview is voluntary and should be a good experience to you, you don't have to answer everything, and if want or need to quit at any time, please talk to me. As I said, this is not a test or anything like that, I want to know your opinions. Your responses will be totally anonymous, so feel free to give your honest views about everything.

Experience

- Would you like to start by telling me something about your relationship with League? how long you play for, your ELO, habits, main lane/role
- Why the mid lane?
- As a competitive player, I assume you play mainly at SR. Have you played in the other maps?
- What is your favourite map? Why?
- Have you played in other maps? Are there any differences in how people behave in each map?
- What has attracted you to the game?
- Do you feel immersed in the game? How does it feel?
- Can you tell me more about how important is League in your life?
- Have you ever been through anything that made you feel like quitting League for good?
- Do you always play with the same group?
- What's the composition of your group? mainly boys or girls?

eSports

- Do you follow esports at all?
- I reckon you're a pro. How would you describe the pro scene in the UK?

- In the ESL website your profile is related to Ardent Esports, is that still on? How is the team configured
- there are no female players in this year's world championship... any thoughts on that?
- What do you think of organisations that ban mixed teams from competitions, or LGBT players from their professional teams?
- Is there any reason to ban or forbid people from playing?

Gender and sexuality

- It seems like there are more male than female players in League. In your opinion, what's the reason for that?
- Is it possible to identify a player's gender in game?
- Is the community and environment any different for men and women?
- Have you ever felt self-conscious of your gender or sexuality in game? (Do you keep thinking like: oh what if they realise I'm a woman, or gay, or trans?)

Community & behaviour

- I'm assuming you play on the EUW server. How would you describe League's community?*
- Why do you think there's rage in League? When does rage become abuse or harassment?
- What's the best way to deal with these situations, you think?
- Some people would tell me that online abuse hurts because, after all, there's a person behind that screen...

Forum, Social Media and Engagement

- Do you participate in any groups or forums about League (online or offline)? Which group?
- Why this group? What does this community mean to you?

Streaming

- Do you follow any streamers?

Summoner's Code (game rules and mechanics)

- what about the reporting tools? do you ever use them?
- What are the best reasons for reporting?

Representation

- What's your main champion? Why?
- How do you choose it?
- Do you like the way the champions are portrayed?
- If I may show you some pictures comparing male and female champions, would you give me some thoughts about them?
- Do you think that the champions' looks influence players at all?

To forum managers

- Why did you create the group?
- Did you have a specific participant profile in mind when creating it?

If professional player

- Can you briefly describe your routine as a professional? Training, team work, tournaments?

Appendix 3 – Original PT-BR Interview and Survey Quotes, per page

p. 201	acho o 5x5 bem mais competitivo / parece que os outros mapas o pessoal leva menos a sério, mais na brincadeira / o que deveria ser em qualquer mapa né / jogar pra se divertir – Flora (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 202	gosto muito de jogar ARAM, é meu modo preferido pra jogar solo. / Posso testar campeões que não usaria normalmente sem levar rage e dificilmente tem algum imbecil machista. Acho que eles só jogam normal pra pegar campeão que tem maestria e ser retardado. / pq tem mta diferença no rage de aram pro de sr – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 202	Passei muito tempo internado no ARAM porque a competitividade e pressão do SR não me agradavam. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 204	(...) Twisted Treelane é uma lane maravilhosa. / (...) O ruim é que tem pouca gente. / Aí, demora muito e não dá vontade de esperar tanto,. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 207	(...) acredito que as escolhas de campeões, skins e em alguns casos, até mesmos de itens são utilizados por conta de uma construção social historicamente dividida por gêneros e seus respectivos papéis sociais. Contudo, não acredito que orientação sexual interfira nem um pouco em como a pessoa joga LoL. – Anonymous (Gay Man, Mixed background, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 214	é mais besteiro, na verdade. / tem gente chamando pra jogar, gente desabafando, gente querendo brigar (hehe) / é legal pq você acaba sabendo tudo que sai de novo de league, sem precisar correr atrás / e tem pessoas ali que gostam de explicar as coisas, então sempre que tenho uma dúvida voltada aos temas de gênero e sexualidade, aparece alguém com paciência e me explica / troca de experiencias – Letícia (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 214	(...)o pessoal perguntava “vc é gay? vc é gay? vc é gay?” e eu sempre desviava da pergunta, eu não gostava de desviar da pergunta, queria ter liberdade de responder. (...) assim, quando eu fiz o post, porque o porquê de eu queria fazer o post é porque eu sei que eu tenho muita visibilidade, eu era pessoa pública, ainda sou, mas pra tipo tentar diminuir um pouco esse negócio de preconceito porque de fato na internet o povo fala qualquer coisa porque não tem problema, certo, você tá atrás do monitor, teclado, mouse, etc, você posta o que você quiser na internet, então tem muita gente má na internet, muita gente que dissemina ódio, preconceito, esse tipo de coisa, então eu tentei também usar o fato de eu ser pessoa pública pra diminuir isso, pra botar na cabeça das pessoas que o proplayer que vcs gostam é gay, não muda nada na vida deles, não muda nada na vida de vocês, é perfeitamente normal, sabe. Então teve esse lado também. (...) – Gabriel 'Kami' Bohm (Gay Man, 18-25 y.o, pro-player and streamer, Brazil)
p. 214	(...) e a recepção foi super positiva do pessoal, acho que... você consegue ver os dados da página do Facebook, e no dia que eu postei eu perdi 800 likes, eu acho, mas eu ganhei 2.500... eu não digo nem pelo número, tipo... whatever eu ter ganhado 2.500 likes, mas 800 pessoas que deram dislike na página conta disso... vai embora, sabe, não faz falta (...) – Gabriel 'Kami' Bohm (Gay Man, 18-25 y.o, pro-player and streamer, Brazil)
p. 215	participava, hoje em dia só vejo as coisas pelo Twitter / (...) virou algo só de memes, ataques pessoais e coisas do tipo. hoje em dia só curto a página oficial do lol / (...)

	sim, mas tem grupos que são mais agressivos. existem grupos que chamam mulher de merdalher, depósito de porra e absurdos do gênero. / (...) em grupos fechados – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 216	Vejo a reprodução de parte da sociedade no jogo. Mesmos problemas externos que temos, temos no jogo. / (...) O cara que faz um comentário rage no grupo do facebook com certeza ele vai fazer no jogo. Pq é a forma como ele reage a alguma coisa. Algumas pessoas por estarem no computador podem fazer mais do que fora como conheço casos. – Vladimir (Heterosexual Man, Pardo, 31-40 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 216	Provavelmente eu vá sofrer com o machismo. Acho que aconteceria assim: 1) Vão pedir direto meu Facebook ou alguma rede social. 2) Claro que eu vou negar, não conheço nenhum deles. 3) Vão começar a me xingar pq eu não dei meu Facebook. Vai ser coisas do tipo "deve ser gorda, deve ser feia" como se isso fosse motivo pra não dar Facebook ou como se fosse algum xingamento. – Anonymous (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 217	(...) o grupo era pra acolher, pra gente desabafar, jogar juntas / virou propaganda de rioter / (...) já a página foi na ideia de que se os rioters não estão nos ouvindo / (...) vamos denunciar publicamente / (...) o grupo no caso morreu pra mim pq uma rioter tomou conta e virou propaganda da empresa / mas a página ficou na minha mão e com ajuda de amigas a gente se manteve o quanto deu – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 223	(...) Obviamente existem menos mulheres jogando LoL, mas ainda assim, seria uma incrível e mágica coincidência de que entre tantas oportunidades em tantos lugares diferentes do mundo e em times de níveis diferentes, com 7 possíveis funções diferentes dentro deles pra cumprir, nenhuma única vez uma mulher tenha sido mais capacitada para elas do que todos os homens pro-players atuais, em nenhuma região do mundo. É mais fácil acreditar em Papai Noel. – Anonymous (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 224	mulher já é criada pra não almejar o topo / ã quer ser a melhor ou ser competitiva / pq é "rude e masculino" / homem é criado pra ser o melhor em tudo / e os jogos ainda são deles teoricamente né / com incentivo, no seu próprio meio e sem assédio ou boicote é mais fácil ser pro – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 224	(...) outros dizem que não há jogadoras de elite suficientes pra um campeonato profissional / Deve existir muitas com potencial, mas não tem um mísero incentivo. / É o mesmo que você falar que não existem brasileiros bons o bastante para ter um nobel. Sendo que nossa base educacional e incentivo/estrutura de pesquisa não são grande coisa. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 226	Eu acho que num primeiro momento, como ainda falta muita representatividade feminina, talvez o mais fácil seja criar ligas femininas e dar força pra essas ligas / Pq se deixar o jeito que está, mesmo que tenham times mistos mais pra frente, as mulheres vão estar sempre em desvantagem por não ter tido esse apoio inicial – Augusto (Man, 31-40 y.o., Midwest Brazil)
p. 226	eu acho bobagem porque são esportes eletrônicos, a mente do homem e da mulher são iguais, a gente não tá usando força física, a gente não tá usando é, é nenhum aspecto físico então não tem nenhuma diferença ali entre homem e mulher, e eu acho bobagem, é... tanto é que as vezes times femininos de LOL ou de algum outro jogo me procuram pra coaching, pra dar palestra, alguma coisa, eu me recuso porque que eu acho bobagem, eu acho que o nosso caminho é treinar meninas e

	capacitar meninas pra inseri-las em times mistos, times normais. O caminho não é separar, o caminho é juntar. – Raphaela 'Queen B' Laet (Heterosexual Trans Woman, 18-25 y.o, streamer, Brazil)
p. 231	hoje em dia, acho que tá chegando num nível de igualdade / começaram a surgir jogadoras profissionais, tem streamers famosas, inclusive uma transgênero, que eu acho importante ter visibilidade (...) – Camila (Bisexual Woman, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 231	(...) hj a comunidade e muito receptiva ! / não sei se vc acompanha foruns ! ou se vc conhece o twitch tv / la vc pode ver que as pessoas de boa indole aceitam q tratam as mulheres da mesma forma / e muitas vezes dependendo da situação ate defendem / e bem legal isso / isso claro nos locais aonde a comunidade e mais unida (...) – Rodrigo (Man, 26-30 y.o., Midwest Brazil)
p. 232	Eu entrei numa plataforma de stream (...) Pq vi no face uma streammer bonita falando q ia dar live e até curti. Vi uns 10 min nesse dia e nunca mais. (...) confesso q entrei pelo fato de ser bonita a stremmer,essa faz video jogando, mas pela falta de hábito de ver e acompanhar não a sigo e nem vejo nada. (...) – Vladimir (Heterosexual Man, Pardo, 31-40 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 233	É bom as pessoas te verem com como diva e como musa, mas é bom as pessoas reconhecerem o teu potencial também né. Se eu tivesse fazendo isso só por atenção eu não estaria virando noite ali no jogo, eu não taria me dedicando... eu só taria só streamando ali com meus peitão e não fazendo nada! [Risos] – Raphaela 'Queen B' Laet (Heterosexual Trans Woman, 18-25 y.o, streamer, Brazil)
p. 233	(...) eu acho isso muito nocivo / porque assim, os homens já falam que mulheres não sabem jogar desde que eu comecei nos jogos online, com 8 anos. / se elas usam o corpo pra divulgar o trabalho, é porque de alguma forma o trabalho não é bom o suficiente pra ser mantido só com ele. – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 234	eu também faço streams (de jogos indie no caso) e raramente faço lives de LoL e posso dizer com certeza/ se eu sou assediado, sou xingada ou zoada por ser mulher é SEMPRE quando eu to jogando lol, mais nada atrai esse tipo de comportamento (..) e o assédio é normal, mas varia demais de comunidade pra comunidade / a de LoL é a mais detestável / eu por exemplo hoje me dia me nego a fazer stream de lol – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 235	e é onde começa os tilts e rages / assim / tem youtubers que dizem algumas coisas sempre e quem assiste eles fica escrevendo no jogo / (...) e tiltam os outros assim / ali eu vejo um problema (...) – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 239	(...) acho que por motivos "culturais" homens héteros acabam jogando mais, o que por sua vez, acaba acarretando em homens jogando melhor. Coloco culturais entre aspas porque acho que essa palavra pode assumir várias justificativas, que vão de imposição de que jogos não são para meninas ou até ao abuso sofrida por mulheres em jogos online. – Anonymous (Heterosexual Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 241	quando eu era menor eu era uma das poucas meninas que conhecia que jogava / não pq mulher não gostava / mas a gente era proibida de jogar / minha mãe mesma dizia "vai ficar violenta, masculina, não pode" / é "coisa de menino" / ensinam a gente a gostar de outras coisas ,ter outros interesses – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)

p. 242	mas é muito mais complexo que isso, pra mim isso começa lá no início da vida / pais incentivam filhos a jogar videogame, mas se for menina o incentivo não é o mesmo. / mulher não deve "perder tempo". tem que estudar, aprender a cozinhar, limpar a casa. / enquanto os garotos estão na frente do computador ganhando o prato do almoço feito pela mãe pra ele não precisar sair do computador] – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 243	se você solta um "ahazou viado"/ a galera fica meio surtadinha – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 245	(...) muitas pessoas do sexo feminino acabam vertendo para o lado "Suporte" pois é assim que são introduzidas ao jogo (quando o são por outras pessoas, comumente main ADCs e/ou homens) – Anonymous (Bisexual Man, White, 18-25 y.o. Southeast Brazil)
p. 245	Quando eu comecei a jogar eu adorava mid e top, depois que tive mais gente pra jogar (ainda mais namorado e amigos homens) acabei sendo, como sempre, tacada como suporte, o que eu sempre odiei. Jogo bem de suporte? como uma deusa, mas não gosto – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 245	Depois que parei de ligar mudei e agora sou main mid e adc – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 247	o que mais me incomoda é ser only sup e ser mulher / eu sinto que só reforço o estereótipo apesar de saber o porque ele existe / mulheres não foram criadas para matar e sim pra cuidar, nossa criação foi pra isso. Eu comecei a jogar com 14 anos e nunca me senti capaz e sempre usei suporte. Eu jogava muito de suporte e mantinha o meu clã vivo como uma mãe cuida de um bebê. Eu gostaria muito de vencer essa criação e matar muito sabe. / Eu gostaria de poder me sentir capaz e foda e pegar uma champ pra carregar – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 253	Olha soh vou ser sincero eu levo tudo na zueira e zoo tudo nesse jogo to ali pra me diverti e não pra ficar ofendido com babaca. Se alguém ficar ofendido, sinto muito mais a zueira eh mais forte do que eu. – Anonymous (Man – other unknown demographics)
p. 254	sim rage é normal em qualquer coisa / em jogos online a gente não ta com contato direto e real com alguém, tem o intermédio do computador que nos da a sensação de estar sozinho com a maquina apenas / isso deixa a gente menos sensível, deixa a gente mais propicio a soltar qualquer sentimento e raiva e frustração.. né, é um jogo, tem bastante (...) – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 256	(...) (...) por exemplo quando fiz um post sobre sexismo e crimes de ódio no fórum / tenho uma coleção de ameaça de estupro, espancamento e morte por conta disso (...) – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 257	eu gosto de trollar os guris / já fiquei 4h conversando com um que queria nudes e lendo pro meu server pra gente rir – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 258	Não acho que influencia na jogabilidade, mas o preconceito que se sofre por outros jogadores é evidente. Por exemplo, existe um jogador gay que se intitula Rainha Matos que sofre muito preconceito, mesmo sendo a melhor pessoa no Brasil a jogar de teemo. – Anonymous (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Midwest Brazil)
p. 259	algumas meninas desistem e não jogam mais (...) – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 269	o negócio é, isso não é natural / sair gritando coisa racista, sexista, homofóbica ou o caramba a quatro não é natural / achar que isso é normal e até "engraçado" é um problema grave / (...) é muito fácil falar "bando de criança" ou "é só birra" e fingir

	que não tem uma cambada de homem adulto ali / gritando que vai estuprar fulana, que é pra fulano ir pra senzala ou sei la que absurdo / são violências pesadas, reais e tangíveis que tão sendo banalizadas a um ponto absurdo / não é nada "democrático", afinal ok, eles dão rage em qualquer um / mas ao escolher gênero, raça, orientação sexual e classe como ofensa, a pessoa mostra o pensamento preconceituoso e violento dela (...) – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 260	(...) é treta todo jogo / não consigo fingir que sou homem ou não caçar briga / acabo aproveitando bem menos o jogo / por perceber a falha estrutural do negócio - Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 261	Mais de maneira cultural do que natural. Os gêneros e tudo relacionado a eles, como o preconceito, mexem conosco. (...) É nada mais que um reflexo do nosso ambiente, não é algo só aparente no jogo. - Anonymous (Pansexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 261	(...) eu acho isso muito nocivo / porque assim, os homens já falam que mulheres não sabem jogar desde que eu comecei nos jogos online, com 8 anos. / se elas usam o corpo ara divulgar o trabalho, é porque de alguma forma o trabalho não é bom o suficiente pra ser mantido só com ele. – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 263	creio que tenha muitos motivos. Por exemplo, durante os jogos se você usa nome feminino você é atacada. Eu já fui xingada durante 40min por falar simplesmente 'obrigada – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 263	sim, é um dos meus medos. por isso não comecei ainda. / mulheres já são assediadas normalmente, sem dar abertura. quando se tornam pessoas públicas algumas pessoas acabam achando que isso dá direito a falarem o que bem entendem. (...) eu já vi ameaças de estupro. (...) – Rosa (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 264	(...) vc joga pra se divertir, descontrair / não pra ouvir ofensas o tempo todo / vc acaba ficando inseguro, com mesmo de tentar outras lanes / ou quem sabe um novo campeão / com medo dos xingamentos / da falta de apoio do time / e acaba deixando de jogar – Flora (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 274	(...) já tive que trocar temporariamente de nick / por cara q ficava me adicionando só pra assediar e encher o raio do saco – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 274	Meu nick é tido como "neutro", tem um pequeno aspecto feminino / como remete a um animal fofo, leva à duvida / eu falo pouco no chat, mas também n vou ficar mudando pronome pq alguém pode ser machistão e chato né – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 276	Mutar não é a solução. / Mas, é uma fuga aceitável em caso de incapacidade de lidar com ele. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 277	Evita-los não os melhora. / Quando uma criança faz algo errado, fingir que não vê e se afastar não faz ela mudar. / (...) É muito raro, da minha parte, mutar alguém. / Adotei a postura de deixar a pessoa falar e falar. / E perguntar no fim: "Terminou? Sente-se melhor? Agora, foco no jogo." / E vem funcionando de forma bastante positiva. (...) / Discutir só dá gás a eles. / Ficar passional só dá gás a eles. / Então, é bem complicado tomar atitude mais acertada. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 278	pena que muitos têm isso de "ah, a riot não faz nada para mudar a comunidade" / "reportar não adianta nada" / inclusive, já vi os próprios ragers falando "reporta aí, riot não faz nada mesmo" – Fernando (Heterosexual Man, White, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

p. 278	[report não funciona] nem um pouco (...) / é completamente arbitrário e muitos rioters acham que é tudo "mimimi" / sbe... a riot não faz nem caster obedecer ao código / na página mesmo tem print de twitter de caster falando que lugar de mulher é na cozinha / que mulher é mimizenta e não joga direito – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
279	às vezes eu digo "vcs n tem irmã, amigas, namorada? elas devem só lavar louça ou podem se divertir tbm?" – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
279	(...) na prática, você perde seu tempo pra ver se o inimigo perde o dele / e mtas vezes é um tiro no pé / o cara te muta, n fala nada, e você tá lá, parado na lane, digitando no chat / seu time começa a parar de fazer as coisas pra ler chat / e podem entrar no meio / e sei lá, vira zona – Letícia (Heterossexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 280	(...) quando sou alvo, busco sempre manter a calma / focar no jogo / e dar a volta por cima, pois para estar levando rage, provavelmente estou indo mal na partida / resiliência é uma virtude, e deve ser praticada / mesmo que seja em um "joguinho" – Fernando (Heterossexual Man, White, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 280	está tendo uma conscientização na comunidade de League of Legends brasileira onde a gente tenta ensinar os jogadores, não importando a faixa etária que é importante você, o respeito que você tem fora de jogo também no jogo, porque você não está lidando com bots né, você tá lidando com pessoas. – Raphaela 'Queen B' Laet (Heterossexual Trans Woman, 18-25 y.o., streamer, Brazil)
p. 281	Recentemente tive uma experiência ótima. / O jogo foi terrível. / Meu adc foi super rager. / Meu midlaner jogava muito mal. / Mas, no final do game, na tela pós-game. / Fiquei conversando com o adc. Do porque ele estar agindo daquela forma. / Li o relato dele, conversei e ele ficou mais calmo. / Foi interessante. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 281	antes eu ficava tentando fazer os queridos repensarem suas atitudes / consegui uma vez / fiz um menino de 12 pedir desculpas / ele me adicionou e jogamos tranquilamente outras vezes / mas desisti, tem adulto dando rage então né... / mais fácil não ouvir do que aguentar e tentar ajudar quem n quer ser ajudado – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 288	namoro há anos e sempre acompanhei meu namorado nos jogos que ele jogava / quando ele começou com lol, não me respondia a tarde inteira, então baixei o jogo e conversava com ele pelo chatzinho / com o passar dos dias, cresceu a curiosidade em mim e, assim, comecei a jogar / (...) / nunca mais parei – Letícia (Heterossexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 289	de vez em quando jogo [ranked] quando amigos chamam, mas não é um modo que eu procure normalmente – Camila (Bisexual Woman, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 290	Eu jogava muito DotA com meus amigos. Ai eles pararam de jogar. Depois de um tempo alguns começaram a jogar LoL. Pra não ficar sozinho no DotA eu comecei a jogar o League. (...) principalmete pq alguns dos amigos moravam longe e o único contato era através dos jogo – Augusto (Man, 31-40 y.o., Midwest Brazil)
p. 296	me sinto mais a vontade om outras mulheres e sei que elas também se sentem assim, então não preciso fingir que sou homem pra poder jogar em paz – Anonymous (Bi/pansexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 297	Acho que a Riot poderia, por exemplo, fazer uma liga feminina (mais ou menos nos moldes do mundial que se tem hoje). Pra que as jogadoras tivessem em quem se espelhar como profissionais do jogo. – Augusto (Man, 31-40 y.o., Midwest Brazil)

p. 298	(...) eu não em sentiria bem numa gamehouse com 5, 10 marmanjos dormindo junto / não confio – Letícia (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 298	(...)ainda mais por não terem tanta visibilidade quanto os "oficiais" / mas é ambivalente / pq mtas vezes, [jogadoras] são recusadas dos grandes torneios, mas ainda assim podem participar de outro – Letícia (Heterosexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 299	fazer liga feminina / é / ew / eu sou super contra / não é esporte de força física pra fazer diferença / (...) é basicamente falar que capacidade motora básica e mental de mulher / é diferente de homem / e convenhamos, diferente no patriarcado é pior / é só um jogo em um pc / teu sexo não muda nada na capacidade de jogar / eu acho que só tira a oportunidade das mulheres de ter destaque / pq a liga principal sempre será a masculina – Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 300	E já está na hora das equipes serem mistas. / Não vejo motivo para não permitirem isso. / (...) Basicamente estão dizendo: Homens e mulheres não podem conviver juntos e se concentrarem no trabalho. / (...) E a partir do momento que a participação em campeonatos se torna um trabalho, você não poderia restringir por gênero ou sexualidade. – Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)
p. 300	só reproduz que mulher nunca vai ser capaz / me incomoda bastante pq tem muita guria boa / mas fica nesse dilema de time misto ou mundial feminino / acho que devia ser misto pq, ao contrario de esporte, em jogo não faz diferença o físico – Diana (Bisexual Woman, White, 18-25 y.o., South Brazil)
p. 301	o grupo era pra acolher, pra gente desabafar, jogar juntas /(...) já a página foi na ideia de que se os rioters não estão nos ouvindo / se a galera duvida que acontece / vamos denunciar publicamente / agora todo mundo vai ver sim / (...) se eles não nos protegem, a gente se protege / a gente se une e coloca a cara do inimigo a mostra / (...) eu queria que a page fosse isso, um lugar pra gente sentir que a denuncia chegou em alguém / apoio / e nossa, cada inbox que eu recebia / eu chorava lendo algumas histórias / tinha mina que vinha só conversar as vezes, farta do jogo , farta da comunidade / fizemos amizades, ajudamos a galera a desabafar e as vezes até em desenvolver métodos de defesa pra esse tipo de atitude / tínhamos um grupo ingame pra jogar juntas / foi incrível na real / senti que deu um boost de confiança pra galera / a maioria do publico eram mulheres e gays / mas a gente teve muito apoio de tudo quanto é lado– Viviane (Woman, 18-25 y.o., Southeast Brazil)
p. 303	Uso mais para olhar novidades do jogo, e ajudar em alguns casos. / De toxicidade ou abalo emocional. / (...) Não é o objetivo. / Mas, quando alguém faz um relato. / As pessoas vão lá e tentam ajudar. / Até sobre a vida pessoal, as vezes. - Diego (Gay Man, Pardo, 18-25 y.o., Northeast Brazil)

Appendix 4 – Participant Observation Field Note

Participant Observation – Session n^o

Vevila Dornelles

Date & Time	Map	Mode	Level	Champion	Role & Lane
01/02/2018 16:14:00	Howling Abyss (ARAM)	Player	7	Ziggs	N/A

Champion action & interaction

Attention to movements and gestures and in-game behaviour.

How champion choices impact upon interactions? Is there such thing as a newbie Avatar or incompetent Avatar? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each player level and avatar constitution

The assigned champion is not particularly fast or strong. My participation in the game was a little slow and hindered.

Communication (text)

How do they tell other people's genders? Are these interactions violent, aggressive, aggregating, receptive?

There was no chat communication between team mates.

My feelings and impressions

ARAM is a tricky mode since every player uses a random champion that may or may not be completely new to them. I've never played with Ziggs before, so I struggled to understand his gameplay and role in the match. Overall, my teammates were much better than I, but none of them have been negative towards me or others. A friendly and victorious match.

General observations

Appendix 5 – Online Survey Instruments

Introduction



Gendered Geographies of the MOBA League of Legends

My name is Vevila Dornelles, and I'm studying gender relations in online gaming spaces. This survey is part of my Ph.D. research in Human Geography, and will help me understand how people interact, and how these relations manifest in the virtual world of League of Legends (LoL). The study is taking place at the University of the West of England (UWE), and it is funded by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (CAPES).

This survey takes no more than 10 minutes to be answered. Your participation is very important for me to hear gamers' voices and understand how you think and use space.

You can participate if:

- You live in the United Kingdom; and
- You are 18 or older; and
- You currently play League of Legends.

There is no right or wrong in this survey. I want to know *your* feelings and perspectives.

All data collected in this survey is completely anonymous and will be securely stored in confidential and encrypted files at the university's network. Combined anonymous data will be used in my Ph.D. thesis, conference presentations, and publications.

This survey was designed to be quick, safe and not make you any harm. However, you are free to interrupt it at any time and without having to give a reason. To do it, just close your browser.

Please note that, because this is an anonymous survey, you will not be able to withdraw after submitting the responses.

Like other internet pages, Qualtrics can collect cookies from your browser.

If you have any questions or want to say something else about this study, please contact Vevila Dornelles (Vevila.Dornelles@uwe.ac.uk) or her supervisor, Dr. MariCarmen Gil-Ortega (Maricarmen.Gil@uwe.ac.uk).

Our address is: Department of Geography and Environmental Management (GEM), University of The West of England - Frenchay Campus - Coldharbour Ln, Frenchay, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS16 1QY

Do you understand what this survey is about and how your answers will be used?

- Yes
- No

How does Geography apply to online places? What is the relationship between online and offline spaces? To understand these complex questions, I am exploring an online game by looking at the many differences between gamers living in two territories - the United Kingdom and Brazil - to compare and understand how gender dynamics of exclusion, inclusion and agency manifest within online gaming spaces.

In this research, I will talk to adult players of all genders and backgrounds to explore the virtual world of League of Legends, as well as its social arenas, to discover how gendered spatial practices and power relations (and eventual conflicts) arise through the design and practice of online gaming.

If you have any questions, or want to participate via e-mail or in person, please drop me an email at Vevila.Dornelles@uwe.ac.uk. Please note

that this could potentially be a non-anonymous participation.

- I understand what the survey is about and want to proceed.
- I don't want to proceed.

Do you agree to take part in this research?

- Yes
- No

Default Question Block

How often do you play Lol?

- Daily
- 4-6 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- Never

What is your favourite Field of Justice (map)?

- Summoner's Rift
- Twisted Treeline
- Howling Abyss

Do you play Solo or Group?

- Solo
- Group
- Both

What is your team configuration?

- Only one gender
- Mixed

I don't know

Which gender? Why did you choose that?

Why did you chose a mixed team?

Do you think that gender and/or sexual orientation influence on the way a person plays LoL? Why?

Are you a professional player (e-sport athlete)?

Yes

No

What criteria should one use to choose their champions and roles in LoL?

Please, select your favourite roles in League:

- Assassin
- Fighter
- Mage
- Support
- Tank
- Marksman

Regarding gender and/or sexual orientation: have you ever had NEGATIVE experiences with fellow gamers during gameplay? How did you overcome that?

Regarding gender and/or sexual orientation: Have you ever had POSITIVE experiences with fellow gamers during gameplay? Please describe.

Think about this situation:

You're playing in a random group.

The match starts. You talk through your microphone and other players make assumptions about your gender based on your voice.

What happens next?

Demographics

We're almost done. Let us know a bit more about you.

My age is...

- 18-25
- 26-30
- 31-40
- 41 - 50
- 51 or older

I live in...

▼

My gender is... (choose as many options as you need)

- Woman
- Man
- Non-Binary
- Gender-neutral/Neutrois
- Androgyne
- Gender Fluid
- Bigender
- Agender/None

Other:

Prefer not to say

My sexual orientation is... (choose as many options as you need)

Heterosexual

Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual

Asexual

Bisexual

Pansexual

Other:

Prefer not to say

I identify myself as...

Asian or Asian British

Black or Black British

Gypsy/Traveller/Irish Traveller

Mixed or multiple

White or White British

Other:

Ending

Is there anything else you would like to say about gender and/or sexual orientation in LoL?

Do you want to participate in other phases of this research? If so, please provide your contact details.



Thank you very much for participating!

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Introduction



Geografias de Gênero no MOBA League of Legends

Meu nome é Vevila Dornelles, e eu estou estudando as relações de gênero em espaços de jogos online. Este questionário faz parte da minha pesquisa de doutorado em Geografia Humana, e vai me ajudar a entender como as pessoas interagem - e como essas relações se manifestam no mundo virtual de League of Legends (LoL). O estudo está acontecendo na University of The West of England (UWE), em Bristol, Inglaterra, e é financiado pelo Ministério da Educação do Brasil (CAPES).

Você precisará de menos de 10 minutos para responder à pesquisa. Sua participação é muito importante para que eu ouça as vozes dos gamers e entenda como vocês pensam e usam o espaço.

Você pode participar se:

- Vive no Brasil; e
- Tem 18 anos ou mais; e
- Joga LoL atualmente.

Não existe resposta certa ou errada. Eu quero conhecer os *seus* sentimentos e perspectivas.

Todos os dados coletados nesta pesquisa são completamente anônimos e serão armazenados de forma segura, em arquivos confidenciais e criptografados, na rede da universidade. Dados anônimos combinados serão utilizados na minha tese, em apresentações em conferências, e futuras publicações.

Este questionário foi projetado para ser rápido, seguro e não te fazer nenhum mal. No entanto, você é livre para interrompê-lo a qualquer momento e sem ter que dar explicações. Para fazer isso, basta fechar o navegador.

Atenção: por ser uma pesquisa anônima, não é possível desistir e apagar suas respostas após enviá-las.

Como outras páginas de internet, Qualtrics pode coletar os cookies do seu navegador.

Se você tiver alguma dúvida ou quer dizer algo mais sobre este estudo, entre em contato com Vevila Dornelles (Vevila.Dornelles@uwe.ac.uk) ou sua orientadora, Dra. MariCarmen Gil-Ortega (Maricarmen.Gil@uwe.ac.uk).

Nosso endereço é: Department of Geography and Environmental Management (GEM), University of The West of England - Frenchay Campus - Coldharbour Ln, Frenchay, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS16 1QY - Inglaterra.

Você entendeu do que se trata a pesquisa e como suas respostas serão utilizadas?

- Sim
- Não

Como a Geografia se aplica a lugares no ciberespaço? Qual é a relação entre espaços online e offline? Para entender essas questões complexas, estou explorando um jogo online e analisando as muitas diferenças entre os jogadores que vivem em dois territórios - Reino Unido e Brasil - para comparar e entender como as dinâmicas de exclusão, inclusão e agência de gênero se manifestam nos espaços de jogos on-line.

Nesta pesquisa, falarei com jogadores adultos de todos os gêneros e origens para explorar o mundo virtual de League of Legends, bem como suas arenas sociais, para descobrir como as práticas espaciais de gênero e as relações de poder (e eventuais conflitos) surgem através do design e prática de jogos on-line.

Se você tiver alguma dúvida, ou quiser participar via e-mail ou pessoalmente, por favor envie um e-mail para Vevila.Dornelles@uwe.ac.uk. Atenção: estas formas de participação podem dificultar o seu anonimato.

- Eu entendi sobre o que se trata a pesquisa e quero continuar.
- Eu não quero prosseguir.

Você concorda em participar desta pesquisa?

- Sim
- Não

Default Question Block

Com que frequência você joga LoL?

- Diariamente
- 4-6 vezes por semana
- 2-3 vezes por semana
- Uma vez por semana
- Nunca

Qual é o seu Field of Justice (mapa) favorito?

- Summoner's Rift
- Twisted Treeline
- Howling Abyss

Você joga Solo ou Grupo?

- Solo
- Grupo
- Ambos

Em relação a gênero, qual a configuração de sua equipe?

- Todo mundo do mesmo gênero
- Mista
- Não sei

Qual gênero? Por que você escolheu isso?

Por que você escolheu uma equipe mista?

Você acha que gênero e orientação sexual influenciam a maneira como uma pessoa joga LoL?

Você joga profissionalmente (atleta de E-sport)?

- Sim
- Não

Que critérios uma pessoa deve usar para escolher seus campeões e funções (Assassino, Atirador, etc.) em LoL?

Por favor, selecione suas funções favoritas em LoL:

- Assassino
- Lutador
- Mago
- Suporte
- Tanque
- Atirador

Em relação a gênero e/ou orientação sexual: você já teve experiências NEGATIVAS com outros players enquanto jogava? Como superou isso?

Em relação a gênero e/ou orientação sexual: você já teve experiências POSITIVAS com outros players enquanto jogava? Por favor descreva.

Pense sobre esta situação:

Você entrou num jogo solo e foi colocado num time aleatório. O jogo começa. Você fala pelo microfone e outros jogadores tiram conclusões sobre seu gênero, baseados em sua voz.

O que acontece depois?

Demographics

Estamos quase terminando. Deixe-nos saber um pouco mais sobre você.

Minha idade é...

- 18-25 anos
- 26-30 anos
- 31-40 anos
- 41 - 50 anos
- 51 anos ou mais

Eu moro em...

Meu gênero é... (escolha quantas opções quiser)

- Mulher
- Homem
- Não-Binário
- Neutro
- Andrógino
- Gênero Fluido
- Bigênero
- Agênero/Nenhum
- Outro não listado:

Prefiro não responder

Minha orientação sexual é... (escolha quantas opções quiser)

- Heterossexual
- Gay/Lésbica/Homossexual
- Assexual
- Bissexual
- Panssexual
- Outro não listado:
- Prefiro não responder

Eu me identifico principalmente como...

- Amarelo(a)\De origem asiática
- Branca(o)
- Indígena
- Mestiço(a)
- Pardo(a)
- Preta(o)

Ending

Existe mais alguma coisa que você gostaria de dizer sobre gênero e orientação sexual em LoL?

Você quer participar de outras fases desta pesquisa? Se quiser, por favor forneça o seu e-mail.



Muito obrigada pela sua participação!

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Appendix 6 – Final Thematic Clusters

Theme	Category	Subcategory/Code	Practice/Device/Analytical Code
Gendered Socialisation	Socio-cultural Structures	Double Standards	Contingent flattery or insults
			Divergent skill demands
		Gender Roles	Gendered ineptitude
			Gendered disinterest
		Stigma	
		Upbringing	
	Space of friendship		
	Bio-psycho-social Differences		
Demographics	Unequal gender rates		

Theme	Category	Subcategory/Code	Practice/Device/Analytical Code
Community Behaviours and Traits	Friend/Kinship		
	Online Misbehaviour	Trolling	Feeding
			Grieving
			Rage Quit
		Flaming/NWM	AFK
		Cyberbullying	Bigoted Slurs
			Harassment
			Hacking
			Coordinated Attacks
	Sexism & LGBTQphobia	Threats	
Racism & other intersectional issues			

Category	Cluster	Subcluster	Practice/Device/Analytical Code	Purpose/Motivation		
Agency	Exercised Negotiation	Actively Avoiding Stereotypes	champion			
			role			
		Excelling				
		Rewarding Good Behaviour				
		Raise Awareness				
	Passive Resistance	Elusion	Concealing			
			Muting			
			Quitting			
			Withdrawing			
	Reaction & Active Resistance	Evasion	Resettling (in new teams and groups)	Assuagement		
				Safety/security		
				Cooperation		
				Denouncement		
		Confrontation		Flaming as a reaction	Publicity	Taunting (counter-flaming)
					Flaming team mates	
				Scolding		
				Banning		
Reporting						

Theme	Category	Subcategory/Code	Practice/Device/Analytical Code
Program & Institutional Traits and Initiatives	Game Immersivity	Immersive - Embodiment	
		Not immersive - disembodiment	
	Champions	Hyper sexualisation	
		Attractiveness	
		Agreeableness	Designing relatable champions
	Representation Issues and Solutions	Misrepresentation	Streaming
		Lack of Representation	Social Media
		Male-oriented design	Champion design
		Aiding and/or affirmative initiatives	
	Positive Marketing & Customer Service	Male-oriented advertising	
		Female-oriented marketing	
	Negligence*, Complacency & management issues	Loss of faith in the company	
		Inaction	