Avatars, Gender and Sexuality for Brazilian Players on Rust

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand what the aspects are that make players identify with and relate to avatars, including discussions on issues of gender and sexuality. To carry out this research qualitative experiments were conducted using gameplay sessions and semi-structured interviews. The Massive Multiplayer Online game *Rust* (Facepunch Studios 2013) was chosen for empirical study because of its gender-based system, a controlled variable for the experiments. Volunteers from the study were divided into two groups: one with the gender of the participants matching the gender of the avatars they controlled; the other not matching. From the results we were able to determine: the level of identification between player and avatar was not so important and did not affect how they played; there were mixed feelings about the race of one of the avatars in the experiment; having avatars appear nude also made the participants feel uncomfortable, especially regarding the male avatar; female participants responded to gender questions more easily than males; overall, the participants were not aware that they were playing a game related to gender swapping; and even though they were not comfortable speaking about sexuality, the participants were able to recognize patterns in the representations as well as critique them and offer other suggestions.

Keywords
avatars, gender, sexuality, Rust, Brazil

INTRODUCTION

We are currently living in a time where there are heated debates and conflicts about sexuality and gender. Video games are full of social and cultural references, which have been the concern of Game Studies since its inception. As a consequence, it would be impossible to cover in one article the whole literature and all aspects which have been discussed so far. For this reason, the bibliographical references included here are just a small fraction of the diversity and possibilities on the field. We found most literature on video games has been written primarily by researchers in countries located in North America (excluding Mexico) and Western Europe. So, this article aims to add to the existing data in the area, most notably, to topics such as gender and sexuality, and avatars which come from a remote locale.

In addition to the many theories and discussions which already exist in academic circles, we found a wealth of information on gender and sexuality written by journalists, designers, activists and players. There are a number of individual and collective

experiences occurring behind the scenes of video games. Maybe this collective of individuals is able to quickly share their thoughts at the speed at which events occur, something that is not always reflected in academic environments.

Clearly, the repercussion of actions organized by people who identify as being women or transgender, or even just within the parameters of LGBTQ, have experienced all types of aggression. These experiences make up the limits in virtuality so much so that have a serious effect on their lives. In Brazil, we found more superficial events and critical observations of both what was viewed from afar and what unfolded locally than in countries like the United States and Canada (like Gamergate for example) over the last three years.

An exploratory study[1] was carried out on Facebook, examining pages, groups and communities in order to map out protests and demonstrations on gender violence. No evidence with any real numbers or regularity were found, contrary to common belief (Fragoso et al., 2017). However, we must be very careful with these results as they could be used as arguments towards diminishing these issues. The article suggests possibilities for the lack of registers like a fear of being subjected to violence.

The goal here is to understand the reasons players might have for relating to and identifying with avatars, to understand the gender labels and to understand how the choice of gender might influence the way players identify with the avatars. In the next sections I will present the theoretical references used for studying avatars, gender and sexuality set forth by other *game studies* researchers. Followed up the methodology applied and discussion of the results.

CHOOSE YOUR AVATAR

While checking game references we found at least two main terms we can use to refer to the images represented and controlled within the games: characters and avatars. It is common to hear these terms being used interchangeably in discussions, or even used as synonyms for one another. However, we cannot diminish the features of these terms, for example, the fact that the different types of characters are not the same as the avatars. Therefore, the characters were understood as visual identities in fictional narrative structures – either simple or complex – and were widely discussed in Literary Studies and in video games as the heart of actions. These actions could have other characters linked to the previous story.

We use the term 'avatar' as a fictional and allegorical reference. (Mukherjee, 2012) It is a term used for more than just characters, it can be used for image identification on social networks, and it does not depend on any particular narrative structure to contextualize it. (Coleman, 2011) Bailenson et al. (2006) refer to avatars as "*virtual humans*" controlled by people. This is different from "*embodiment agents*" which are subject to programming command codes.

Representations of avatars themselves, whether images or texts, have been studied extensively by researchers, looking at behavioural, cultural, sociological and psychological aspects (for example, Kafai et al., 2010). The '*Proteus Effect*' by Nick Yee (2007) suggests that players' behaviours conform to the digital self-representations of their avatars. So, when working with stereotypes like length, width and strength (within a controlled environment) players tend to be more assertive or wary, depending on the avatar they are using. Sherrick et al. (2014) tested this theory by seeing if players' gender

stereotypes corresponded with the avatars they were using. However, the data indicated that this was not the case. The authors believe these alterations in behaviour occur unconsciously, an effect known as *priming*.

More functional approaches to avatars can also be found in works from Westecott (2009) and Kromand (2007). Westecott goes back to the playfulness and performativity typical in theater productions to describe actions performed by players as part of the allure and visual appeal these games provide. Kromand (2007) talks about the design and creation of avatars as being "central and open", in other words, they are more likely to have players identify with them whereas the emerging actions are valued in fictional worlds.

Relating this theory with the object of study leads us to name the controlled images by the term, avatars. Some of the reasons behind this choice are: the game allows for esthetic alterations; there is no pre-determined narrative structure, your actions determine your survival; you are able to protect yourself or identify yourself as the players evaluate your progress and power inside the fictional system; and the ability to build groups and organized communities for survival purposes as part of the strategy

THINKING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN VIDEO GAMES

The works of Friman (2015) and Kafai et al. (2016) are organized by topics and trends by decades (or periods) of studies published on gender and sexuality in *game studies*. The authors have different starting points that shape their study, but when presenting something state-of-the-art they both use the term "waves". This can be a reference to history of the feminist movement, after all, it is the theoretical and analytical base for many studies.

These theoretical models help us understand development in the field of macro and help us understand more than just making topics fit and making discussions invisible that do not "fit" into their period.

Like many other forms of media, video games have struggled with representational problems concerning race, particularly those of races which are not who perceived as white. (Gray, 2012; Nakamura, 2012; Richard, 2016) Discussions of those questions normally intersect and overlap them with other aspects, such as gender and sexuality. Authors such as Consalvo (2012) and Fox & Tang (20014) warn us about the relation between those issues and the toxicity of certain game communities. Even though for some players, or groups of players, they are minor issues, which configure an 'excess of preoccupation', or are unrelated to video games.

Just like discussion from other fields of knowledge, sexuality appears to be less explored than gender is. When talking about sexuality in games there is a tendency to focus on fetishes and eroticize the female body, similar to pornographic language and the moral repercussions realized by media which occur in some countries. Not only is it quantitatively less in terms of production, sexuality seems to still be far from maturity or its investigational power in works with video games. (Schott, 2005; Gallagher, 2012; Brown, 2012; Harviainen et al., 2016)

We can also find references on this specifically literature about *crossgender play*, *gender swapping*, *queermasks* and *gender bending*. (Schmieder, 2009; Schröder, 2008; Eklund, 2011; Rosier & Pearce, 2011) The pre-established systems for games have delimitations that interfere between other aspects in representation of gender, in addition to being

capable of developing types of functions, for example. Therefore, the gamers' experiences with characters and avatars with their personal identification tend to be numerous. But what do they mean to these gamers?

According to some researches, (Stabile, 2013; Cote, 2015; Ratan etl al. 2015) there are gamers (both male and female) who see strategic opportunities with female characters in the game because they are more well received in groups, they are protected in confrontations, they acquire in-game items and strengthen sociocultural standards of power relations between genders. Therefore, we found a vast number of possibilities that need to be analyzed as they appear.

One growing perspective called *queer game studies* has expanded its inclusion, describing queers "a method or paradigma to dramatically rethink game scholarship" (Ruberg & Shaw, 2017, p. xvii). A collection of studies called Queer Game Studies, organized by Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw (2017) mention that "much of the existing literature is focused on LGBTQ content rather than queerness as a model of critique" (*ibdem*, p.xv). More than a simple transposition of theories or methodologies, these thinkers, developers and researchers intend to increase the understanding of issues addressed in *game studies* that are not limited to just gender and sexuality.

Just the same as other video games, *Rust* has one female and one male avatar. This pre-condition suggests a binary representation of genders confined to a working logic of heteronormativity. However, there is nothing explicitly given by the game that prevents gamers from breaking this rule. From a strictly visual point of view, the avatars used for the purpose of experiments are: one medium-height, white woman with no exaggerated body parts like we found in other games – enormous breasts, for example. There is also one slightly taller black man with muscular arms and torso. Both genders are nude, with clothes and accessories made available throughout the game. Even though the game rating is sufficient to have nudity, there is an extra option available in the settings menu to censor it. The nude censor (the name of the setting option in the game) blurs the "erotic areas" like breasts and the genitalia of both sexes.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The main references for the methodology in this study were taken from the book Game Research Methods: An Overview by Petri Lankoski and Steffan Bjork (2015) – especially the chapters on qualitative research – as well as the more applied techniques in revised theories and studies carried out by the Laboratory of Digital Artefacts[2] [Laboratório de Artefatos Digitais (LAD) in Portuguese].

Lankoski and Bjork's book (2015) presents different research practices used by researchers in *game studies* as well as operational reports on these models including difficulties encountered during the research itself. As Frans Mäyrä (*ibden*, 2015, p.11) highlighted, studies on video games, both analogic and digital, have just as many innovative aspects as they do cumulative. More than just elaborating on a methodology or new techniques, previous approaches should be evaluated in the area of interest. The documentation of procedures used in the studies is recommended because it allows for a better assessment and validation of the results, something that does not always occur in published works.

Therefore, a qualitative approach seemed to be the most appropriate in order to achieve the objectives in this study. It contained self-observation of the game, gameplay sessions

and semi-structured interviews. The participants in the study were invited as volunteers either by recommendation or through an online form. All scheduling and confirmation for participants was done virtually (Facebook Messenger or email). Those responsible for the study had not had any prior contact with the participants. Besides availability, there were only two prerequisites for participating: being 18 or older at the time of the study and having some basic knowledge of video games.

The video game selected to use in the experiments was the Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) game *Rust* (Facepunch Studios 2013), available on Steam. It was chosen for its random and permanent gender distribution system for its avatars – at least that was the model being used at the time this paper was published[3]. This is not really new in the world of gaming, but it caught the eye of media that specializes in dissatisfied video game players, most of whom are male and were surprised by the updates. This was not the first "controversy" surrounding the game; there was a previous version which used to have only white male avatars but moved forward to include many different races.

The number of participants was decided on according to the length of time needed to conduct the experiments. They were divided into two groups – one group with avatars of the same gender and the other one with the opposite gender. There also had to be at least two participants in each group who identified with the female and men avatars in the game.

They were not told that there were two groups or in which one they would be placed. Pilot testing was performed with one participant who went through the same steps in the experiment as the real participants did. The data from this participant was not used in the analysis.

Being a qualitative study dealing with sensitive issues (gender and sexuality) it was evaluated and approved only after it had passed two stages of the Ethics Committee, one internal (Compesq Fabico) and the other external (Plataforma Brasil). The experiments were conducted in a laboratory room inside the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS in Portuguese) in January 2017.

Research Sample
This research sample gathered nine individuals who identified with female and male genders, had varying sexual preferences, lived in the city of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul (RS), Brazil, were former or current students at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (where the research was conducted), and fit between the age groups of 19 and 32.

In order to protect their identities, a three-digit system was put into place. The initials M (men) or W (women) indicated the gender of the participants and their avatars. The numbers 0 to 2 were used for the order in which the experiments took place. The table below shows the information given by participants on gender and sexuality, and to which group the experiments were assigned. These groups were formed according to when the participants confirmed their availability. If some change in day or time did occur, the first scheduled appointment was upheld.

Participant Information			Experiments	
Identification	**Gender**	**Sexuality**	**Group**	**Avatar**
HM0	Male	Heterosexual	No match	Female
HM1	Male	Heterosexual	No match	Female
MM1	Female	Lesbian	Match	Female
HM2	Male	Heterosexual	No match	Female
MH1	Female	Asexual	No match	Male
MM2	Female	Heterosexual	Match	Female
MH2	Female	Bisexual	No match	Male
HH1	Male	Heterosexual	Match	Male
HH2	Male	Heterosexual	Match	Male

Table 1: Participant information and organization of experiments.

Methodological Techniques

Self-observation was carried out over a nine-month period. It contained a survey of the game materials for specialized press, the game's official site containing a blog for system updates written by the developers, discussion topics on Steam, Reddit *boards*, Wikia with all the game's information, reviews and gameplays available on YouTube, and also playing on the same computer that was to be used for the experiments.

Gameplay sessions for the study lasted a minimum of 30 minutes which could be extended to 45 minutes if the participant requests. This length of time was considered sufficient enough for the participants to get a handle on how the avatars moved, to better understand how the fictional environment works, and to get them some experience with the gaming environment or with other avatars. The only task that all participants had to complete during this phase was to look at the game inventory. The audio from these sessions was recorded on a smartphone application because it has the ability to capture the different intonations in the participants' voices and what they were saying at the time. All participants verbalized something in all the gameplay sessions, some more than others. This showed a level of engagement with the game or even more familiarity with the game. Notes were also written for consulting purposes for interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were held after the gameplay sessions. After they had stopped playing the game the participants had a short break before the second stage began. They were told beforehand that the stages were sequential, so they were able to organize their time accordingly and participate for the entire duration. The average length of time for an interview was one hour, and no complaints were made if the time elapsed a

little. The interviews were recorded the same way the gameplay sessions were and subsequently transcribed.

Transcribed interviews were submitted to thematic analysis in order to identify patterns in the responses given by the participants. Correlations where made considering not only their individual responses, but also taking into account which group they were assigned to (gender corresponded with the avatar or not) and the gender they identified with. This is a type of qualitative approach which, according to Braun & Clarke (2006), lacks a proper delimitation (or definition) but is widely used due its flexibility. The authors also claim that thematic analysis may look like other qualitative analytic methods, such as discourse analysis, but differs from them in its theoretical framework. Thematic analysis is also different from content analysis. The former aims to identify themes through a more in-depth evaluation of the collected data, while the latter focuses on the incidence of decoded information. Janz & Martis (2003), for example have used content analysis to establish some categories to analyze the portrayals of gender and ethnicity across a sample of games available in the period of 2002-2003, and Suominen (2011) used the same method in his work with Finnish computer hobbyist magazine MikroBitti to analyze changes in the production of game reviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Picking up from the theoretical reference, I will present the results from the experiments and organize the discussions according to the participants' impressions of avatars and characters in video games, what were their impressions of the Rust avatars during gameplay, how gender affected their experiences in Rust, the participants' impressions of games with no gender correspondence between avatar and character, and lastly, their impressions of sexuality in video games.

Avatars or characters: What's the difference?

As stated earlier, I looked at other researchers' references or definitions for naming the images that gamers control in the game. During the interviews I asked participants to tell me, in their own words, what they would call these images and if they differentiate between the terms characters and avatars.

Outside of conventional terms used to define the images, the participants also used terms like puppet, little puppet or guy. These first two terms can be found in Westecott's theory (2009) which likens avatars to puppets. We had a few assumptions about this more functional relationship between players and avatars, but these terms might just be symbolisms or nostalgia from childhood when games were just another toy out of many. Or "that guy" in the game might just be a mere element, something I do not develop a relationship with or attribute any meaning to.

All participants said that avatars and characters were different, but when asked to explain what they meant only three were able to do so clearly. Two participants said they had never thought about the two terms as having different meanings. The elements of distinction were customizable images and complete control of actions. Both elements were identified as specific features of avatars whereas the characters were defined differently than avatars with features very similar to those used in other fictional beings from other areas like cinema. Some participants used their avatars for their Snapchat stickers or profile images on social networks, highlighting what Coleman (2001) developed about the use of images to identify ourselves on social networks.

Both academic and theoretical references on common impressions contain inconsistencies of delimitation or general use of the terms. Normally, this does not alter how we refer to things, but they could cover up or weaken some capabilities, or even the body of theoretic work that embodies this terminology.

The participants did not have any preferences as to what character or avatar they were going to use. They identified with some aspect of the image whether subjective or visual features. One participant who was unhappy with the narrative ending of his character in Heavy Rain (Quantic Dream 2010) kept playing the game until she got the ending she felt was best suited to the character. Another participant stated how it would be good to have a virtual representation of himself where he could alter small details like eyebrow shape, etc. This made the participant happy because he was able to built an avatar that resembled himself physically.

According to the participants, the characters and avatars do not have as much of an effect on their behaviour as some theoretical models suggest, such as the Proteus Effect. One participant said the same problem repeats itself when he plays because the features he chooses for his character do not work. This makes him particularly angry because he is constantly imagining himself in these spaces and does not enjoy the emerging situations that games can provide. The roles of gender and sexuality also become an obstacle for some women because they see issues with how they are represented.

The strange avatar I used in Rust: race and nudity

Participants who used the male avatar did not report anything unusual about its gender but did about the race. They reported the avatar having a "red face" yet there were no problems with the monitor used in the study[4]. So, I took this to mean that the participants had a preconceived idea that the avatar would be white. Racial issues did not enter into the scope of the analysis and questionnaire for this study, and therefore evaluating the racial system in the game was not deemed to be very important, it was an emerging issue. None of the participants controlling a male avatar were considered to be black. The demographics of the city where the study was carried out showed a predominantly white population in contrast to black population[5]. So, any reported unusualness about this avatar emerged from a combination of certain features of video games – racial representation – and from the place where the participants were from.

Participants who used the female avatar were pleasantly surprised by the gender. Even though they had no idea what kind of avatar the game would have, their reaction showed they weren't expecting the avatar to be female. And this female avatar was completely different from the stereotypical idea of how females are represented in games. The only strange feature expressed by one participant was that the avatar had no hair. There were no comments made about the female avatar being white.

Regardless of the gender of the avatars or the group in which the participants were placed, the nudity in the game made most participants feel uncomfortable. The nudity censor was turned off, so the participants saw the avatars' bodies in their natural state – or as close as possible to it. Some participants quickly created clothes with the resources from their inventory – *cloth* was used for making a balaclava, there was even a pumpkin that could be used as a mask. One of the more interesting things about this is that the game is in first-person, in other words, the players do not see their avatars' bodies while they are playing, only when they switch to the inventory screen.

The uncomfortability with the nudity was expressed with the genitalia – particularly the male genitalia – and the participants felt as if the other players/avatars were looking at their naked bodies. The lack of body hair also made the avatars clearly artificial looking. The men who played with female avatars did not say anything about them being nude, but the women immediately recognized "they were" nude.

How does gender and sexuality affect the gaming experience?

The participants were asked if they thought their avatars' gender and sexuality might have had some effect on them and their online interactions. The more generic responses came from males and heterosexuals controlling female avatars. Both stated that chauvinism had an effect on the player/avatar relationship but did not explain how. The presence of chauvinism stretches across a wide range of contexts, more recently becoming a popular term to describe both the cause and effect in any discussion on gender and sexuality.

The other two male and heterosexual participants did not see how gender and sexuality could have an effect on Rust because they believed the game only dealt with survival. Regardless of the gender or sexuality of the avatars in Rust, these players think about self-protection and consequently direct confrontation.

The female participants felt that their online interactions in Rust would revolve around gender performance expectations. They tended to be more cooperative with female avatars but more cautious and likely to engage in confrontations with male avatars. One participant stated that "males/men are a disgusting race/animal", showing a lack of trust and responsiveness in gender relations.

Overall, the participants had some criticisms about how both women and men were represented in video games. It might be easier to find negative aspects against women since they are documented in detail in academic literature as well as in different sources produced by players. There are still minimal questions about masculinity in terms of production and circulation. The participants in this study stated that the typical super-masculine, aggressive male is also far from ideal, a perspective echoing results from works from Geraci and Geraci (2013).

Even though gender discussion in this study is categorized into male and female, one participant while being interviewed said that she thought there could be more characters and avatars that did not fit into these "categories". She defined these characters and avatars (found in some other games) as being neutral and said they had made the gaming experience more pleasurable for her.

The results showed a notable difference in the participants' impressions of gender and sexuality identification between games and gamers. The women that participated in these experiments appeared to be more aware of these possibilities because they connected their personal impressions, and overall perceptions with some prior knowledge of feminist perspectives, for example. There has been a lot of discussion in Brazil recently about gender and sexuality both online and offline. Turning our focus specifically to video games, we found many groups of young women who are discussing this, but we were unable to confirm if Gamergate, for example, has had any significant impact in Brazil as these groups are still being formed.

One man out of all the men who participated in this study criticized the gender construction. The other participants have shown lack of interest regarding the issue. However, this disengagement seems to contrast with the attitude of a very specific group of men (the cisgender, white and heterosexual) that are very organized and determined to shut down every contrary opinion online using threats, hacking and leaking sensitive data of their targets, as we have been seeing lately.

What is gender swapping anyway?

We expected all participants to have had some experience with *gender swapping* with either characters or avatars, and they had. However, the participants were unable to recognize these experiences. According to the responses given, some participants appeared to think it was a particular behaviour some other players had. There were few examples given and those that were from experiences their friends had had or from stories involving people they did not know. Most of the responses were therefore assumptions.

One participant said that her experience with characters and avatars is connected to the lack of identifying with how her gender is represented in the images she sees and controls. For a while that activity was a "boy's thing". She was the only woman in a group of male siblings and participated in groups where the majority of people were also male. Because of this she started to question how she identified with her gender, thinking she "could be a transgender man" because she liked playing video games. Later on, she met other girls and women who related well with the games, and she started questioning less.

According to the participants, male players who identify with the male gender use, choose or create feminine avatars/characters for the following reasons: using or sharing access with another person's game account who identifies with female representation, whether actually a woman or not; wanting to control a female character and acting in accordance to how they believe women should behave; if the game has an option restricted to female gender; if female and male avatars are treated differently online, as in chauvinistic behaviour; wanting to objectify the virtual body of female avatars or characters as one participant ironically stated "I'm a naked warrior princess"; transgenders connecting with female avatars even though only fictionally; or even players wanting to escape from the hetero-dominated world of most games.

According to the participants, female players who identify with the female gender use, choose or create masculine avatars/characters for the following reasons: they want to feel stronger, more courageous, more powerful and more skillful in games; they like the feeling of autonomy and freedom of not being harassed or assaulted by other players because of their gender; they reject the female stereotype in games; they like the experiences the game's replay value offers; and they like the way other players online treat them, like they were equals.

When comparing the responses there is a noticeable gap between the reasons for choosing between genders. Some explanations for this could be the participants not realizing that the game asks them to go beyond their identifications, or they think this performance is an exception or something is wrong with it, or even just the lack of player feedback.

Colleen Macklin's study (2017) reveals some concerns about what is considered queer in video games. It is by no means a guide to what is right or wrong, but she describes game play as form of subjective exploration for players in video games. This is similar to the

experiences expressed in this study. But regardless of the nomenclature, we are referring to ways of controlling gender – so what about sexuality?

Where can we find sexuality in games? And what is the point of it?

The discomfort previously expressed with the nude avatars in *Rust* led to some questions about sexuality. We included feelings about sexuality with nude bodies, or more specifically, we observed these bodies through a sexual and erotic perspective. The naked bodies and their exposed genitals (not pixelated) are basically representations of reality. The game itself does not have any signs or contexts in which erotic or sexual relations can occur.

Only one participant from the experiments suggested that it would be interesting if her female avatar could have sexual relations with other male avatars. None of the other participants talked about this possibility. Acts of eroticism were studied by Brown (2012) for a group of MMO players.

While researching *Rust* we found some gameplay videos[6] which contained avatars and their penises. In one such video, the players form a group called Penis Brothers where male avatars (controlled by male and female players) move through the game world carrying guns, bows and arrows or any other kind of weapon in order to force other male avatars to "convert" to the brotherhood. Those who refuse to participate or who do not leave their genitals exposed are executed. In another video showed players comparing the sizes of their avatars' genitals by taking off their pants and exposing them. Although they do this for fun we did not find any glorification (not even comically) of female genitals.

The participants in the experiments were asked if their sexual identities were represented in video games and if they noticed the prevalence of any sexuality in particular. They reported an active heterosexual standard in games and the male participants who identified with this sexuality acted assertively. The group of female participants was split, some of them did not see their identifications as standard or positively represented.

Two participants (one man and one woman) found it very difficult to answer these questions, the man in particular did not want to elaborate on any sexuality. The woman however did elaborate on her change of view over the years and how she developed her sexuality. In a regretful tone of voice, she told of how she used to think it funny to create homosexual couples on The Sims. She currently does not play games anymore and identifies as being a lesbian.

Some participants want other sexualities to be represent, however the way in which this is done presents a few problems. Bisexuality, suggested as being a better way to represent sexualities in video games, should not be understood as just players switching interests and choosing how to move forward. This is used in games to a certain degree. Even still, this was suggested by the woman who identified as being bisexual and described difficulties of trying to make others understand her sexuality. There was an asexual participant in the experiments who found it difficult to build an asexual character/avatar. Asexuality itself changes how one thinks about sexuality as it describes individuals who have no sexual interest and do not have any disorders.

Out of all the responses given by participants, the most problematic regarding this discussion came from a man. In his view, there are few women players who he considers hardcore and worthy of the title "real gamer". The prevalence of heterosexuality was not so problematic because he believes "there are enough homosexuals (sic) in games, too". However, he could not reference any game that supported his opinion, and when confronted about it, he started giving the answers he felt the interviewer wanted to hear.

CONCLUSION

With the goal of observing and analyzing feelings that players (particularly Brazilians) have about gender and sexuality through the use of avatars, and applying qualitative research methodologies with the empirical object *Rust*, were we able to see that the avatars used in the experiments did not provoke any feelings of identification among the participants and did not interfere in their in-game behaviors or how they played the game, at least not in terms of what was being evaluated for this study. We also saw that the participants were not so clear about certain character and avatar features even though they may be able to relate them to other forms of entertainment, and some participants were fascinated with the visual elements of the avatars. However, this effect within the game could not be further researched since the empirical object chosen was limited. When we evaluated the reaction to the avatars in each control group we noticed that racial issues surfaced in those controlling male avatars, and the issues of gender surfaced in those controlling female avatars. The nude avatars and genitals also made a big impression on both groups for varying reasons. Gender was a feature that influenced the way interactions occurred in the game with avatars and players, tending to be more cooperative between female avatars and players and more reactive between male avatars and players. Some female participants were wary of men who could become angry depending on the situation, contrarily, male participants did not speak much about this issue or how the gender they identified with was represented. Not having corresponding genders between players and characters/avatars appeared to be unfamiliar to participants. None of them realized that they had already been in situations (intentional or otherwise) similar to the one they were asked about, and what they had to say about it came from other people. There were many reasons given for men intentionally choosing female avatars/characters, but it was not so clear for women. The discussions on sexuality were conducted around the nude avatars in *Rust* and the players were not exposed to any erotic or sexual interactions. Despite recognizing heterosexuality as the standard representation for sexuality, any ways for changing this outlook are unclear. The suggestions made about bisexuality appeared problematic and we even heard ideas expressed on asexuality.

In future research, we intend to focus on the intersectionality relations, which could result in more accurate or in-depth analysis of both game content and gamers (or participants) responses. The subject of race will be especially important if we invest in intersectionality.

ENDNOTES

1. Since this work was only published in Portuguese, I will give a short summary of the methodological procedures used. This study was carried out using pages, communities and groups on video games administered by Brazilians. Data was collected over a six-month period (July to December 2015). There was a small part dedicated to the overall violence in both video games and in the community. In order to obtain more data, we decided to study activity on a particular page [League of Jungle, related to MOBA League of Legends (Riot Games) which has a wide audience in the country] during the

course of 2015. 419,711 posts were collected, 2,046 of which (a little less than 5%) were related to issues we wanted to study.

2. The laboratory contributions to this study are based on the theoretical analytical model developed by Fragoso (2015) and the experiment performed by Amaro (2016).

3. The access to the accounts was an obstacle to study procedures because it was necessary to have an avatar of each gender available. The family sharing option in Steam was used but all accounts had avatars that looked similar to the main account. In order to have all the avatars we needed to buy the game three times.

4. Servers accessed by participants did not have avatars of any other race or ethnicity included in the Rust system, Blacks and Asians, for example

5. According to a 2010 census taken by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) the city of Porto Alegre had an increase of 1.48% in the black population over the course of 10 years (the time between censuses). 24.18% of the black population in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) live in Porto Alegre. Added to this unequal representation is the fact that Porto Alegre is the capital with the highest segregation by race. Sources: https://www.nexojornal.com.br/especial/2015/12/16/O-que-o-mapa-racial-do-Brasil-revela-sobre-a-segrega%C3%A7%C3%A3o-no-pa%C3%ADs
https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/rs/porto-alegre/panorama [Access in January 2018]

6.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=in4zdlJhxdM   and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9X84LVsuYs [Access in January 2018]

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