

# Qualifiers of exclusion: discussion of GirlGamer Festival in Brazil

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## INTRODUCTION

This extended abstract presents a brief discussion involving denunciations of sexism and transphobia related to the Latin American qualification of the international event GirlGamer Festival (Alvarez, 2019). The allegations were reported by players and teams against the local organisers, the holding BadBoy Leeroy<sup>1</sup>, to the journalists of the website *Garotas Geeks*<sup>2</sup>.

This work adds to the literature a case study from a location that is not the centre of debate in the esports, as well as, contribute to the ongoing production of who is perceived as players and have opportunities to thrive a professional career in this segment.

The event brought to this discussion might not have international relevance compared to others. However, it allows us to present how companies are framing their interests in social movements and being held accountable for doing so. As well as, the efforts that need to be done for the inclusion of transgender in the competitive scene and its internal contradictions.

## METHODOLOGY

For this work we chose the case study of an event to discuss the subjects of professionalization and trans-inclusivity and the material collected was analysed by their content

The data were available to public online and came from three different areas: social media platforms, press, and the *Garotas Geek* website.

Social Media data came from the official website and social media account - Twitter, Instagram, YouTube of the companies responsible for the idealization of the event and the responsible for the Latin American qualifiers. We also followed the publications of the owners of those enterprises as they also have used SM to share news and personal opinions related to the event.

Press publications - specialized on eSports or in pop culture - from international and Brazilian sites were venues to observe the public appeal and potential of the event.

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The texts published in *Garotas Geek* (Alvarez, 2019 and Carvalho, 2019) brought to the public the denouncements related to the event. The comments made by the readers in their specific section were also incorporated. They were subject to moderation, and at a certain point, were disabled.

Twitter became a privileged space for collection and content analysis once they were actively used by the enterprises and individuals. In this platform we could also capture the opinions from the teams, players and the public.

### **GIRLGAMER FESTIVAL**

The GirlGamer Festival<sup>3</sup> is an eSports competition exclusively to women organized by the Portuguese group Grow Up eSports<sup>4</sup>. The third edition in 2019 happened in 4 different cities around the world and the finals – postponed to February 2020 – happened in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. And the modalities of competition were League of Legends (Riot Games) and CS: GO (Valve).

The responsible for the finals of the Latin American qualifying was BBL, a holding created in 2019, which also has its own competitions focusing on woman's in eSports - White Rabbit Cup, Mad Hatter, and Queen of Hearts. The presential event occurred in the city of São Paulo in 05 and 06 October 2019<sup>5</sup>.

The teams classified to the finals were Team Innova (I9) in LOL and the female squad from INTZ for CS: GO.

### **HYPOTHESIS OF ANALYSIS**

The term *gamer* is continuously associated with heterocisnormativity due to the involvement of groups of gamers in harassment against women and other minorities, so many women who play and are eSports fans feel uncomfortable identifying themselves as such. (Vermeulen, Abeele, Bauwel, 2016; Ruotsalainen and Friman, 2018) Besides this reluctance, events such as the GirlGamer Festival also provoke debates regarding gender policies seen as discriminatory, with practices such as the obligation to prove the gender of participants using software and documentation. (Castello, 2019; Yeo, 2019) Thus, the overall repercussion was divided between praise and endorsements, and criticism of how practices which purposely wants to facilitate inclusion, ending up reinforcing stereotypes of femininity and weakening the political potential of these initiatives.

The debate them oscillates between the necessity to think in other ways of diversification of the eSports scenario, overcoming the term *gamer* and its sexism, understanding and rejecting female-only competitions (Witkowski, 2018); or appropriating not only the term but also those events as a strategy of occupation of eSports by women. The events and conflicts that emerged during the GirlGamer Festival 2019 would be, in a sense, representative of those structural problems in the game culture and the eSports.

Events focusing on gender inclusivity in games are attractive to brands interested in promoting itself using the *marketing of causes* (Smith and Alcorn, 1991). The most significant part of the initiatives, like the event discussed here, are connected to the corporate mobilization, an issue that was already present in the Girls Game Movement, being at the beginning conducted in this direction, and a coalition conformed by academics and entrepreneurs.

Despite the denounces of transphobia, some trans women participated in the event, being two of them part of the winning team of LoL. None of them have manifested publicly against the regulations or having had problems with it.

Nevertheless, the team, which made the denounces, adopted a contradicted posture while removing only the LoL roster of the competition and keeping the CS: GO on the event.

The reports of the *Garotas Geeks*, which made the more extensive and incisive coverage of the problems in the event, ignored this information. Being so, it is possible to question if these denounce were a real worry with the inclusion of the trans women on the competitive scenario or were motivated by the economy of attention present in the digital activism, once public controversies are desirable to keep in evidence the activist figure which sometimes overlaps with the influencer, as well as its relation to the post-feminist. (Tufekci, 2013)

Just like the business companies with their convergence of interests' enthusiasts of the gender-sexuality debates related to the competitive scenario needs to be accountable of their productions and maturity to instigate and create knowledge in the general public.

## ENDNOTES

1. <https://bbl.gg/>
2. The website was created in 2010 for a university project to present and represent the female perspective in the geek/nerd culture. The first founders were replaced for another group of four females. The content of the website and social media is created by its collaborators that have to attend some requirements – 18 years or more; identify as female; linguistic skills; being able to produce at least one article per week; and agree with non-remunerated activity.  
The revenue for maintaining the website is achieved with publicity and partnerships. So, the operational model from this brand, like many other related to social movements is similar to *emotional or affective labour* which on itself brings contradictions with the aims of a gender empowering moment. Sources: <http://www.garotasgeeks.com/about/>, <http://www.garotasgeeks.com/seja-uma-colaboradora/> and <http://www.garotasgeeks.com/about/midia-kit/> (Brazilian Portuguese only)
3. <https://www.girlgamer.gg/>
4. <http://growupesports.com/>
5. <https://www.girlgamer.gg/saopaulo/>

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