Female protagonists on the box

A discourse analysis of the visual and textual communication about female gender in video game box art advertising.

Introduction

I am drawn to analyzing box art of games featuring woman because there is a long history of objectifying and sexualizing women in games as well as in advertising. The combination of the two resulted in an incredibly hegemonic female gender representation on box art. The traditional audience of video games is men and so the advertising on video game boxes has targeted men. Both the visuals and text has embedded traditional gender norms and followed hegemonic ideals. The depiction of woman in games and on covers has traditionally been hyper sexualized, and passive.

Over the years more women have started to play video games and I want to know if the video game industry has responded by changing their advertising, and incorporating alternative roles for female characters in games to attract this female audience. In more recent years female gamers, and social justice groups have also been protesting against the hegemonic portrayal of women in games which might have been another imputes to the industry for reducing hegemonic gender norms in game advertising.

My research questions target the way advertising communicates gender through both visual and textual elements, and how this invokes discourse surrounding gender: How do organizations mobilize hegemonic and non-hegemonic ways of being female through ideological gender practices in their advertising on game box art? If non-hegemonic gender identities are communicated how are these constructed, and how do they tie into existing discourse?

Theoretical framework

A lot has changed in the representation of female gender in video game advertising. Janz and Martis describe the possible trend of empowered and empowering female protagonists as "The Lara Croft phenomenon":

Anyone even slightly familiar with video games must have noted the recent advance of tough and competent female characters. The massive popularity of female protagonist Lara Croft ever since the release of the first Tomb Raider game in 1996 seems to have paved the way for a woman who contrasts the dominant image of passive sexualized characters. In our study we tried to ascertain the existence of a so-called 'Lara

phenomenon,' that is, the appearance of a tough, and competent female character in a dominant position. (2007: 3).

Their results indicate that a shift in representation is taking place. They cite several precious studies who taken together indicate this shift. A study done in 1998 showed a pattern of dominant men and submissive females, were the few woman who acted were villainous characters, the good female characters being cute and passive. A study in 2001 found that half of all female characters were props that did not engage in action . The female characters were hypersexualized, showed a lot of skin and games are populated with stereotypical female characters. However Ramírez et al found in 2002 that 50% of the female characters held a dominant position, and they even found five male characters in a submissive position." (7). The dominant trend of male domination of video games and of the passive women in them might be shifting.

The protagonists analyzed in the study of Janz and Martis themselves (2007) all held a dominant position in the game with respect to other characters. In contrast with traditional gender stereotyping, all female protagonists were heroes. The researchers found no main female characters in submissive roles, a result opposed to many earlier studies. Appearance however has remained heavily gendered: Sexy clothing was exclusively worn by female characters. They also found that most women had large breasts and buttocks, whereas men were muscular. It appears that "Gender stereotypes are particular robust with respect to physical features" (18). "In other words, quite a few women became leaders in the game, but they continue to be presented in a sexualized way. As a result, these powerful women are depicted as sex objects as much as their powerless predecessors were." (18).

Burgess et all (2007) found the same trend in remaining sexualization of female characters but doubts their increased empowerment and active role. Female characters on box art have increased and are represented on half of video game covers now, but they are dramatically more likely to be portrayed as negative, this negativity centering around their lack of action and exaggerated physical portrayal. In video games violence is the main representation of power. Female main characters were presented as violent much less often than men and there was a significant correlation between bustiness and being violent, making a connection between female sexuality and violence. Excluding women from violence on video game covers is portraying them as powerless. Representation of women as passive, dissociated and/or sexualized ties into discourses around the role of women as secondary characters in life, women as unlikely team members, 'natural' unequal power relations between men and women, the danger of female sexuality and a (in)secure physical identity of women.

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When women do wield power in games, they are often represented as hyper sexualized, with big busts and revealing clothing instead of being portrayed as fit, muscular and athletic, like powerful men are. This ties into the hegemonic discourse of dangerous female sexuality. Female characters are also very likely to be represented as partial body parts because of framing by the cover as opposed to cut off by environmental factors like legs being invisible in a car. Bergess et all (2007) conclude:

> Over the last 20 years, there has been a steady call for increased representation of female characters in video games. And certainly [..] the number of female characters has increased dramatically. However, when looked at with the developing identity of the average gamer in mind, there is not a single component in which women are portrayed in a positive way: women are dramatically less frequent as characters, particularly less likely to be given any meaningful action (vocation and agency issues), women, in spite of their less frequent presence, are far more likely to be portrayed in objectified and unrealistic ways (body image and relationship issues). While the call for increased representation has been heard, it is difficult to interpret the type of representation as truly a step forward. (429-430)

In addition Martins et all (2009) have found that perversely the more advanced video gaming technology has become, and the more capable of producing naturalistic bodies, the thinner female video game characters have become. Overall female characters have smaller hips, waist, and chests with a relative bigger breast size compared to their girth, than the average American woman. They also have larger heads than their real counterparts: "The realistic video game characters chest, waist, and hip sizes are significantly smaller resulting in a figure that conforms to the thin ideal seen in other media." (2009). Female video game characters are part of the (visual) hegemonic discourse of 'thinness' as the ideal body for female gender. The larger head size of female video game characters is posited by the authors as preventing the "uncanny valley- effect" of portraying something very (but not quite) realistic. However because the uncanny valley has already been crossed, with computers being able to render images and trailers with people that are difficult to distinguish as virtual, I think the large head might be a form of child-like appearance and body clowning as described by Goffman (1976), where female characters in advertising are presented as child-like and as a consequence as needing protection. Large heads also give the opportunity to enlarge eyes and pupils, and sexualize characters. (Johnson, 2008).

At least eight years later than the research presented above I will take another look at female

representation on game covers. Much may have changed, the Lara Croft phenomenon might have persevered, or another shift may have occurred to present female characters as not only capable but also less sexualized. My research compliments this previous research by explicitly examining how women are represented when they are the playable character and thus can be presumed to hold power. It can show if and how female gender is linked to power or powerlessness.

Method

To get a sense of gender ideals visual data can be a valuable resource. Visual data can reveal what is hidden in the inner mechanisms of the ordinary and taken for granted. (Rose et all, 2013). For example, advertising can reveal hidden taken for granted gender ideals. Advertising practices are linked to the wider cultural discourse because advertising wants to attract and be implicitly accepted and be interpretable at a glance. (Johnson et all, 1997). Advertising tries to achieve this using visual and textual elements that speak to widespread accepted ideologies and hegemonic discourse. I will focus on how things are pictured and not what is pictured, on the visual instead of the visible, and on the symbolic and communicative activities in the text instead of the objects, to get at how texts communicate hegemonic gender roles. (Rose et all, 2013). Rose argues that: "images tend to be deployed much more as communication tools than as representational texts.". I am particularly interested in the "power relations that are performed through those activities [meaning making and communicative activities]" because I want to look at hegemonic and non-hegemonic communication of gender. Are female protagonist portrayed as powerful in advertising? Rose et all writes that "Visual research methods are methods which use visual materials as some part of the process of generating evidence in order to explore research questions". (25). In this sense my research uses a visual research method.

My visuals originate from pre-existing societal visual artifacts, namely publicly available advertisements/products. I will use photographs of the boxes available for download on the producer websites and as such my material is in fair use. My subject is both the material cultural of objects and the concepts and relations between the visuals and wider discourse. My analytical focus is depiction in the sense of representational choices that have been made. My choice of theory applied to my specific data is gender theory and advertisement theory, both of which have a significant visual dimension. Theory related to visual analysis I use is semiotics, rhetoric, iconology and visual communication theory. Visuals have their own way of communicating, which is at once more abstract and less specific than language. However like language visuals can be said to have a vocabulary of images, and a syntax based on juxtaposition and composition. (Johnson, 2007). I will

analyze visual and textual elements of my data as one whole because it is together they communicate. My sampling will be exploratory and opportunistic as I will use a limited non-representational sample of found images of game covers of games with a female protagonist.

My own position is as follows: I have active knowledge of the language and visual convention of game covers in their context of gaming culture, as I am myself an avid gamer and also have an academic interest in the field. As a female gamer I am extra sensitive to the hegemonic gender depiction in games and the unequal power relations between men and women in games. This sensitivity might help me decode how the images communicate this. I can use my sensitivity as a honed research instrument but will have be very reflexive in not going to far to interpret images as gendered. At the same time I am very willing to believe in, and hopeful about, positive developments of alternative female gender depiction and remain open to representations of this kind. I will also monitor this willingness to see progress and question myself when I see it. (Pauwels, 2010).

The ways in which visual materials can be analyzed are diverse. As Pauwels (2010) argues visual researchers can make use of methodological theoretical frameworks and methodological techniques. He writes: "Visual scientific competence thus implies a thorough insight into the specific characteristics of visual media along with the skill to translate scientific insights into verbo-visual constructs. Ultimately, visual scientific literacy manifests itself as a form of visual thinking and doing throughout the complete research process." To my mind, using visual data is not a method an sich, nor implies the use of a specific analyzing strategy. Visual data analysis requires sensitivity to the medium, as does analysis of text. I think visual culture such as advertising is a data source that can be analyzed using a variety of methods such as content analysis and discourse analysis.

I use discourse analysis to answer my research questions because I believe it to be the methodology most suitable for identifying how visual and textual 'language' in advertising construct gender, and how this construction makes use of, and at the same time constitutes larger societal discourses around the subject. Johnson (2008) writes: "I believe conceptualizing advertising as steeped in 'discourse culture' opens the lens wider on ways in which advertising works as cultural text."(2). Discourse creates a version of the world by embedding assumptions about reality in the text. Discourse analysis of adds can be very effective because adds construct images embedded with hegemonic norms to make their products universally appealing and recognizable at a glance. Images are as much part of this process as text: "Advertising is a purveyor of ideological codes and cultural patterns through the arrangement of discourse elements that are calculated to produce certain 'ímages' [meanings]. An ad has 'meaning' by virtue of the verbal and visual imaging of its text."

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(Johnson, 2008: 3). I use discourse analysis to investigate how my objects/texts arise out of and bring new ideas into the world. Johnson (2008) writes that "The linguistic elements circulate with the visual images in and out of the larger cultural discourses from which they are drawn and which they impact" (4). The discourse analysis approach is also very sensitive to power relations and this is important when I am examining hegemonic and non-hegemonic constructs. (Woofit, 2014).

The implicit nature of images makes it particularly useful for making hegemonic discourse seem natural. And for embedding hegemonic but contested meaning in content. Messaris (1997) writes: "the potential superiority of the visual statement became evident in cases where the advertises message would have sounded overdrawn or presumptuous when put into words, or when the advertiser sought to play upon such 'inappropriate' emotions as religious awe or thirst for power". For example you could not say in an advertisement "play this game where a woman conquers others with her dangerous sexuality", but you can use image to imply this.

For this reason I think it is very important to view visuals as part of discourse surrounding gender. Much about unequal power relations and female gender that cannot be said anymore in public can still be shown. "By virtue of their iconicity visual adds are able to erect before our eyes a mirror world, with whose inhabitants we are invited to identify or imagine we are interacting. These acts of identification and interaction have real world consequences […] viewers use the characters they see in ads as reference points." (Messaris, 1997:266)

. But because image often stays implicit "arguments made through visuals often need to be supported by words". This is why I analyze the visual elements in conjunction with the textual elements of my texts.

My research question is open and explorative and I look at implicit meaning in the ads. (Johnson, 2007) I describe how language and visuals are used to make claims about the world, specifically gender and how they are made to appear convincing and natural. (Wooffitt, 2005) and (van Dijk, 1993). I use open coding, but keep a focus on hegemonic and non-hegemonic gender representations, aspects of female power(lesness), the context of the genre as described in my theoretical section, and the overarching context of advertising gender. I look at word and image use, visual and textual syntax, vocabularies (iconic and language), institutional language, institutional norms around images and visual style, story elements in word and image, and rhetoric through words and elements of image and composition.

Data

I believe the advertisement on video game covers are places were "hegemony is enacted, contested, resisted and challenged" (Cottingham, 2013). I have chosen to analyze box art of games produced by the triple-A games industry (the most powerful and popular game developers) because their images are the most prevalent throughout society and reach the largest audience. All games I analyze have been released in the last 10 years. I have chosen to analyze games that have a female protagonist (make you play as a women the whole game) as the lead character, because it would make sense if these games portrayed the most alternative and active gender roles for women. If hegemonic gender ideals that construct these women as powerless or passive are still prevalent here, this would suggest that these ideologies of gender inequality are even more embedded in games were the protagonist is a man. I have not looked at box art where you can choose to play either as a women or a man because in my experience it is always the male variant who is portrayed on the cover.

What surprised me during data collecting and image selection was the small amount of triple-A games with a female protagonist. There are more games with female protagonists in the indie-game scene, were smaller developers have more freedom to construct alternative gender roles because of their smaller target audience, their diverse own background and their less corporate structure. I still chose to deconstruct triple A-games because these games with their financial obligation of reaching a large audience will be influenced more and contribute more to the prevalent discourses in society surrounding gender, and show the state of hegemonic gender norms. All the games I have analyzed are sufficiently technologically advance to show detailed body proportions, and stance, natural movement, detailed expression and textures of clothing and skin.

Data used:

P 1: Assasins Creed Liberation, October 30, 2012, Ubisoft, gamers, box art.
P2: Bayonetta 2, October 2014, PlatinumGames, Nintendo, gamers, box art
P3: Lightening Returns, February 2014, Square Enix, gamers, box art
P4: Metroid other M, September 2010, project M, Nintendo, gamers, box art
P:5 Mirror's Edge, November 2008, EA Dice, EA, gamers, box art
P6: Portal 2, April 19, 2011, Valve, EA, gamers, box art
P7: Tom Raider, 5 may 2013, Square Enix, Crystal Dynamics, gamers, box art

Results

The Gendered Body

The thin body ideal that is presented in most advertising and that is prevalent throughout western culture is an important aspect of the body identity of the protagonists of the games I analyzed. Six out of seven women are thin to very thin, the exception being the only African-American character. What all characters share is an hour-glass figure, and this figure is part of the hegemonic female body ideal. Five out of seven characters have relatively large breasts and butts for their slim figure, the exception being two protagonists with Asian characteristics. A third character with Asian characteristics does sport large breasts. An alternative explanation of using thin female figures in ads comes from Johnson: "Thinness does not stem from misreading of real world sex cues but rather it represents a deliberate suppression of those sex cues to heighten the sense of the female body as status display." (Johnson, 2008: 49). It would make sense to give main characters a high status and make this visible, and to counter the game stereotype of women as sex objects. However since their thinness is coupled with an hour-glass figure and large breasts/butts in most cases, I think the figures of the protagonists communicate female body ideals, and are part of the larger discourse in the media of thinness as a 'normal' and desirable female body shape.

The fact that the African-American is an exception and has a larger overall body shape, could be interpreted as linking to the sexualization of black women, but other characteristics of her appearance, such as her being completely covered by thick 'unsexy' clothing suggest the image instead communicates a more realistic body image. Two of the three Asian characters have proportionally realistic curves for their body-type, however I think this is tied more to the iconicity and communication of the stereotypical 'cute Japanese **girl'** than realistic body portrayal, because their breasts are focused on in other ways. In one image by a very tight jacket and in the other by cutting of the bust right beneath the start of the breasts.

One character is exceptionally tall, and this could communicate an alternative female body type. However her tallness is contorted in a very sexualized position and her breast and buttocks are the largest of all covers I have seen. Her tallness is also part of her persona as a dominatrix. The style of the image is not realistic but cartoony. All this makes her body appear very unnatural and abnormal. Five out of seven characters had big heads for their bodies, and this makes them appear even thinner than they are. Their proportions invoke the ideas of dolls and children, and as such link to discourse about women being fragile and needing protection and care.

There were body markers to counteract this connotation. Four out of seven women were

portrayed as athletic, either through clothing, through muscles or scenes involving athletic activities. This might tie into the thinness discourse as women are encouraged through adds, other media, and medicine to work out, and as it is presented as a way to reach the body ideal. It might be that athleticism is deployed as a status symbol and sign of both mental and not just bodily strength. However it is a more realistic image of protagonist when linked to their activities and does constitute them as physically capable. It also makes them more similar to male protagonists. All protagonists actively held some kind of weapon, another sign of strength. Most protagonists looked directly at the audience, and five out of seven characters had a serious expression that conveyed competence. In six of the seven covers there were symbols of male gender connected to the women: a pirate hat, tattoos, short hair, armor, robotic implements. However in all six front covers that featured the protagonist there are things that would not be there if there had been a man on the cover, for example: lip-gloss and mascara in unlikely situations, unnecessary skin showing, pink hair, and words emphasizing female gender like "une FEMME assasin", while a cover would never say "un HOMME assasin". These aspects tie into hegemonic female gender identities.

Doing Diversity

A theme that came out of grounded observation of the covers was the diversity of the characters. Most protagonist have one or more characteristics that are not part of the hegemonic norm for video game protagonists or 'normal' western women. However every character that had an alternative characteristic combined these not with the other expected characteristics of this race, ethnicity, subgroup, male symbol or alternative life-style, but with hegemonic white bodies.

This is an advertising regime of representation, called "doing diversity" by Johnson (2008). A token of a certain identity is taken such as in my data: tribal tattoos, Asian eye shape, Asian face shape, nerdy glasses, short boyish hair, hipster clothes, bdsm clothes, and is integrated in a hegemonic body. Johnson (2008) writes: "One way to think about representation is to think of it as edited re-issue [..] When someone is represented, the object of representation is revised to highlight certain aspects and diminish or disappear other aspects of that which is represented." (73).

Except in Japanese video game culture this 'doing diversity' is almost exclusively applied to women in video games. It is a way to interest the audience by presenting an original and exceptional image, but to prevent alienation by adhering to most hegemonic visuals. It can communicate that the game is a way to 'try out' an alternative female identity to female gamers. And it speaks to the interest in living other lives through gaming for all players. Examples from my data not mentioned yet are elements from stereotypes like Dominatrix, Hipster, Japanese anime personages, Tomboy,

and grizzled woman. A save way to signal exoticism without alienating audiences with alternative race/gender portrayal are also the names of characters like Lightning, Bayonetta, Chell, Faith, Samus, Lara Croft and Evangeline.

However gaming advertising apparently assumes the larger public would be alienated by a protagonist they would perceive as 'other', and this includes non-white women and women fully committed to an alternative lifestyle. Doing diversity is tied to the image and discourse surrounding the mysterious black woman as strange and exotic. Johnson writes "blacks are extracted and shaped for white consumption, as part of commodity culture." (2008: 105). In video gaming this is now also true for other races/ethnicity and non-hegemonic female gender identities.

Female Protagonists and Their Audience

One expression of power in context is the role of the protagonist in the game-world. For example some games explicitly state in the text that this game contains the story of the protagonist, they are the main focus. Examples are: Tale of Samus, Lightnings saga, You are faith and The origin story of Lara Croft. This text characterizes the women as powerful in the game.

Another consideration is who tells the story, who has the power to act and decide? The developer, the protagonist, the player or a combination? I find that the relationship between protagonist and player can be posited in different ways in adds and this effects the communication about the character. It is common practice in the interactive medium of video games for the player to either be acting out the story through the protagonist, to be in controle of the protagonist actions and choices or te identify with the protagonist. There is some nuance in textual and visual representation about how much the character is posited as an actor or a tool. Identification without objectification is achieved easily when the game is first person. You as the player/audience are seeing through the characters eyes, and are not looking at her. Only two of the games I analyzed were first person. In these games the character were drawn as engaged in action, and the screen-shots (in-game footage) looked through their eyes. These games merge audience with character and the character remains powerful.

In the third person games almost all art was of a passive protagonist. The protagonists only performed action in the screen-shots. This communicates that the characters have to be controlled by the payer to perform action. While it is true for the medium of video games that in game protagonist do not move without input, protagonist are active in cut-scenes and are story wise posited as having a separate identity from the player. So why are they not drawn as active on the cover? Why communicate to the audience that the female protagonist needs them to perform action?

I find this troubling communication to a mostly male audience. Even when the intended message might be to provide a powerful woman, like in Tomb Raider, the fact that on the front Lara Croft is displayed as very passive and vulnerable, on the back as transformed into a tough but passive hero, and in the screen shot as drowning/swimming, the juxtaposition can communicate the need for a player to guide and protect her. This can contribute to discourse about women as passive.

What I also find troubling is that third person games can posit the player/viewer as the controller and the viewer of the protagonist. When the viewer identifies with the character this is not a problem, but when the add emphasizes interaction with the character or objectification of her this can degrade the protagonist. When this concerns a protagonist like Bayonetta, a dominatrix whose moves are highly sexualized, and the visual and text make this clear with visuals of these moves, mock fights, and text like "master new moves" and "punish enemies" it communicates the possibility of controlling her sexuality and creating a titillating spectacle by controlling a fictitious woman. This is also true for the game Lightening returns where the protagonist appears on the front cover in a sexualized leather armor and the text promises "hundreds of outfits". These messages both visual and textual contribute to the discourse of women as sexualized objects.

Female Protagonists and Power

In this section I discuss the sources of power of the protagonists on the covers I have analyzed. The primary source of power in video games is violence. As the literature indicates female characters have traditionally been denied violence. From the covers I analyzed it emerged violence was available to all protagonists. This was shown visually through the characters holding weapons and wearing armor, by screen shots of them fighting. It was also made clear in the general description and captions of the screen shots by words like: fight, master, punish, assassinate, battle, battles, gun (verb), weapons. A word I expected to find, but did not was 'kill', a word very common on game blurbs. While fighting was not the core mechanic of all games, all women had the capacity to do so.

Previous findings indicated a link between sexualization of a protagonist and their capability for violence. Bayonetta is a clear example of playing into the ideology of female sexuality as dangerous, as she is a dominatrix whose violence comes from her sexual tendencies and appetites. This game has fighting as its main game play mechanic. The only other game I analyzed where sexuality seemed to be tied in any way to violence was Lightning Returns, where Lightning wears sexualized armor and the game play is centered around fighting and collecting more weapons and outfits. In Assasin's Creed the game play mechanic is also mostly centered around fighting but from what can be seen and read on the cover the protagonist is not sexualized. The same is true for

Metroid. The three games least centered around violence; Tomb Raider, Mirrors edge and Portal 2 also have the characters that are least sexualized or gendered. This can be seen as corroborating the connection between female sexuality and violence. I think that in some games the trope of dangerous female sexuality is still used as a base of power and linked to violence, but the games I analyzed mostly do not tie into this discourse, which may have become less prevalent in society today.

Athleticism is also an empowering factor in some of the games. For example Mirror's Edge positions the protagonist as a 'runner', a messenger who can do parkour running through the city to deliver messages. Samus from Metroid can 'run and gun'. In fact most characters are shown combining fighting with athletic feats like running and jumping. In Tomb Raider exploring and surviving a hostile natural environment is stated as the main goal, and Lara Croft is said to find physical strength beyond human capability. Assassin's Creed also has an athletic focus, as the game series is part free parkour running through and over cities, part fighting.

Intelligence is communicated as a source of power explicitly in Portal by the words on the blurb :START THINKING, WITH PORTALS," Intelligent, innovative and massively entertaining." Portal 2's unique game play challenges you to use wits over weaponry in a fun house of diabolical science. And by the visually confusing front cover, and visual link between the protagonist and technology. The other games also communicate the intelligence of their protagonist by either serious expressions, giving them aims like search and discover, stating that weapons can be upgraded, or by visual links between the characters and using technology.

Technology is an interesting source of power. In hegemonic discourse women are dissociated from science and technology, but some of the games I analyzed tie into the empowering counter discourse that women are capable when it comes to working with technology. Portal links technology visually to the identity of the female protagonist by having her hold a scientific instrument, juxtapose her image with that of robots and a technological facility. The text above her encourages the viewer and/or protagonist to start thinking, and use your wits. Bayonnetta is seen holding futuristic looking weaponry and her glasses might be reference to female nerd. In Metroid an exoskeleton/robotic suit is worn by woman and you can view the world trough her scanner. Mirror's edge is set in a futuristic setting, but the protagonist is forced to go back to non-technological methods because of a big brother government. Visually the character is still associated with modern technology however as she is positioned in the modern landscape.

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Conclusion and Discussion

In advertising via video game covers multiple discourses surrounding gender are invoked to communicate. The hegemonic discourse that constitutes the normal female body as thin and attractive is referred to visually. Elements from non-hegemonic ideologies and non-Caucasian appearance are used within a hegemonic framework of 'white' culture. While this can be seen as commodifying or appropriating culture, it can also be a step towards including more diverse (gender) identities in games and advertising. The Lara Croft effect of the inclusion of powerful female protagonists in games can be seen in my sample. Female protagonists in my sample have power through violence, athletic physique, intelligence, and technology. Framing women as intelligent and good with technology counters hegemonic discourse about the inability of women to do science. Athleticism and giving woman their own stories and voices in video games strengthens discourse that posits the normal woman as active and an individual in her own right. The forms of power mentioned are all video game tropes, and it shows the inclusion of women in this genre that female protagonist now share this power. This contribution to discourse that constructs women as active subjects is in some instances negated by the sexualization of characters, the encouragement communicated to the player to objectify the protagonist and the passive attitude and inaction of protagonist in the cover art. There is still room for improvement for communicating about female video game protagonists as diverse empowered subjects, but compared to earlier studies much has improved. An interesting point of discussion is whether not emphasizing the gender of the protagonist as is done in Portal, Mirror's edge and traditional Metroid games is the best way forward for empowering women, or that diversifying female gender roles for protagonists to for example tom-boy, traditional, athlete, scientist, hipster, and more to increase choice is more empowering.

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