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WHO'S THE SCARIEST OF THEM ALL?
Effects of woke on female game protagonists and
why women's diverse representation matters

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ABSTRACT

Women have been historically underrepresented in video games, and their scarce appearances have often been heavily sexualized. As the player base has shifted towards a more equal split between men and women, the representation of female characters has also improved. However, this has caused a lot of criticism, often associated with a phenomenon called woke. While the original intents of the movement are positive, they have also been heavily criticized. Some players even think woke is impacting games negatively.

The objective of this thesis was to answer the question of whether the female protagonists are ruining the games made in the 2020s by being "too woke", or are the critics misogynistic. This was done by utilizing two qualitative research methods: comparative case analysis and a survey. The comparative case analysis aimed to provide insight about the current state of female protagonists and how they appear in the context of woke. Meanwhile, the purpose of the survey was to find out if the players valued the same qualities that are generally associated with good protagonists. It was assumed that if a consensus was found, the protagonist's gender should not matter if the character was otherwise presented well. After all, the most common criticism against "woke" female protagonists has mostly revolved around qualities that male characters have not been condemned about. These studies focused on ready-made female protagonists' appearances, backstories, personalities, and roles. Gameplay mechanics, customizable protagonists, and woke's effects on the games' commercial successes were left out.

It was found that while woke qualities were present, they were not ruining these protagonists but rather added much needed diversity. However, many stereotypes also persisted, but their absence did not automatically turn the characters woke. These outcomes suggest the criticism is rooted in misogyny. Responses to the survey supported the hypothesis for the most part. However, some of the qualities ranked differently between genders and there were a few contradictions between open questions and rankings. The findings of both studies are beneficial to the gaming industry when considering future protagonists: they should appeal to the players all while supporting positive representation.

Keywords: female protagonist, video games, woke, feminism, misogyny

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

1 INTRODUCTION

Female game protagonists have been notoriously scarce and misrepresented through gaming history. Fortunately, this has changed during the last years with more diverse and complex women being cast in the lead role, such as Aloy from *Horizon: Zero Dawn* or Ellie from *The Last of Us Part II*. This shift can be associated with a larger cultural phenomenon that aims to recognize the flaws in patriarchal system and give voice to minorities. One of the movements supporting this ideology is called woke.

While woke aims to recognize and combat social issues, the term has also been misused and gained a negative reputation. As a result, female protagonists have been accused of ruining games for being “too woke”. However, some of the criticism focuses on superficial qualities which, apart from racial injustice, are not what woke is originally about. Thus, it can be questioned whether the issue lies in what woke represents, or in the characters’ gender.

This thesis aims to find out whether the female protagonists are ruining the games made in the 2020s by being “too woke”, or are the critics misogynistic. To achieve this, both stereotypical elements and the qualities of a good game protagonist are first discussed. Woke phenomenon and its occurrence in games is also explained. These attributes are then reflected onto three female leads made in the 2020’s. The analysed qualities are limited to the characters’ appearances, backstories, personalities, and roles, leaving out any gameplay mechanics as well as customizable protagonists. Moreover, the study does not compare the commercial success of games with “woke” versus “non-woke” protagonists.

Players’ opinions about game protagonists are gathered via a survey. The survey aims to find out if players prefer more complex and diverse protagonists, or if superficial qualities matter more to them. By analysing woke’s effects, this thesis also aims to provide answers to whose opinions should be heard when designing female protagonists for games and how developers should take this into account in the future.

2 GAME PROTAGONISTS

A protagonist is the main character through which the player experiences the events of the game. This kind of connection is unique to video games, as it involves the player in the narrative in a way that other media does not: without the player's input, the game's story cannot progress. Hence, keeping the protagonist alive is the most fundamental task, helping the player identify as the character. (Friedberg 2015, 12–13; Voimala 2023, 7.) This control over the main character and plot events creates an emotional bond between the player and the protagonist. The more control the player has over the protagonist, the stronger the connection becomes: for example, whether the player can customize the character's appearance, or has control over their dialogue choices. All these aspects help with immersion. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 21; Kamppinen 2024, 12.) The bond is not impossible to create with a ready-made protagonist either, as the most important aspect is the character's relatability (Friedberg 2015, 12–13).

At best, this unique experience can help the player face emotional challenges in real life (Carpenter 2022, 23; Kamppinen 2024, 11, 21–22). The protagonist offers a way to practice empathy and consequently, can have a huge impact on the players' self-image. Thus, it is important to consider what kind of protagonists are being portrayed and have enough diversity between them (Devčić & Sabol 2024; 43–44; Friedberg 2015, 15; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021; Rennick et al. 2023, 1). Indeed, without a well-written protagonist the whole game might suffer, despite all the other aspects being fine (Voimala 2023, 6–7).

Protagonist's qualities can be divided into their backstory, personality, appearance, and dialogue. The backstory and personality give psychological depth to the characters, and professional concept artists strive to reflect these aspects in their appearances. The visuals act both as a storytelling method and a distinguishing aspect. Dialogue helps the player feel immersed in the narrative as they progress through the plot, as well as highlights the relationships between characters. In general, having variety in both appearances and storylines is seen positive regarding representation, as it attracts a wider range of players

(Carpenter 2022, 15; Devčić & Sabol 2024, 43–44; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 23). Most importantly, the player must enjoy playing as the protagonist (Kamppinen 2024, 17).

2.1 Defining a good protagonist

The mere presence of certain qualities is not enough to make the character a *good* protagonist. As *good* is subjective experience, the term can be best explained by analysing several factors that are generally associated with positive response from the players. For example, players have enjoyed Aloy from *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Figure 1), since her portrayal is authentic and complex (Henley 2020). Several studies argue that the most important aspect is the player's ability to relate to and identify with the protagonist, with Kamppinen (2024, 17) further adding their memorability to the list (Friedberg 2015, 12–13).



Figure 1. Aloy is regarded as a good protagonist (Sony 2017)

Relatability can be traced back to psychology: humans are inherently thinking and feeling creatures and therefore connect via recognizing these feelings in each other (Nieminen 2017, 19). However, feelings do not exist in a vacuum, but are reflections of each person's past experiences, personality, expectations, and so on. As such, relatability is achieved by making the player emotionally invested in the protagonist's story (Kamppinen 2024, 8). This is achieved when the protagonist is given a motive to act, conflicts to overcome, and a personality that

has both good and negative traits. These elements should be combined believably, i.e. they should make sense in the context of the game.

While it is important to match these qualities well to create a believable character, their story would be boring without any flaws or conflicts. The game's narrative should challenge the character's values and motivation for them to be able to grow, further involving the player in their emotional journey. Those setbacks fundamentally belong to life experience and thus offer even more aspects to relate to. Indeed, the protagonist does not always have to make the right choices to be *good*: multiple studies argue that the psychological growth of the main character and the empathy it creates are the most important aspects when considering relatability. (Carpenter 2022, 15, 23; Kamppinen 2024, 8.; Nieminen 2017, 19, 25–27.)

Protagonist's relatability often ties in with their likeability and memorability (Figure 2). Successfully matching the character's motivation with their personality traits will increase their likeability, which further makes them enjoyable to the players. These are often the characters that the players will think of long after the game is finished. (Kamppinen 2024, 17–18, 38.) Likeability does not necessarily mean the protagonist has to act nice: even an evil character can be *good* if their behaviour matches their motivation. For example, they might have tried to protect their loved ones but done so in a questionable way. Indeed, the key to relatability is multidimensionality, which brings out the complexity of emotions in both characters and the players. (Kamppinen 2024, 17–18.) Nieminen (2017, 27) further suggests character designers delve into the subconscious mind to achieve this, as it can lead way to more interesting and unique material.

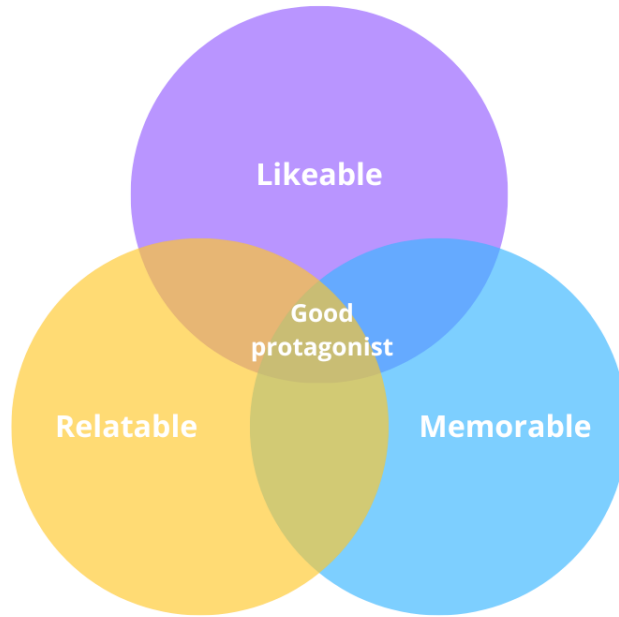


Figure 2. Qualities of a good protagonist

Most importantly, there should be consistent reasoning behind the protagonist's actions. This is what makes the character realistic. Moreover, it helps the player become immersed in the game as they experience its world through the protagonist. By being able to relate to the main character the player cares about what happens to them, which, in turn, makes the character someone the player wants to play as, i.e. "a good protagonist". (Kamppinen 2024, 17; Nieminen 2017, 19.)

2.2 Appearance of the protagonist

Appearance is often the primary feature the player notices in the protagonist and consequently, is key in first impressions. As such, particular care should go into the design: the appearance should make sense in the context of the game and reflect the character's personality, all while being interesting and unique (Kamppinen 2024, 25). Besides these qualities, many developers also prefer to make the protagonists physically attractive, as players tend to react positively to good-looking characters (Voimala 2023, 19).

The protagonist's appearance should align with both their personality and the narrative. For example, if the character is a physically strong fighter, they are

likely muscular and are wearing armour. If this character was thin and wearing high heels instead, it would create a dissonance in the player’s mind, making them associate the appearance with a different role. However, sometimes these contradictions can be used to give characters more complexity, which in turn helps making them stand out (Nieminen 2017, 38).

Another way to create associations is to rely on shape language and colour cues. Round and oval shapes are generally regarded as friendly, while triangles and squares are associated with strength and danger. (Kamppinen 2024, 25; Voimala 2023, 22.) The combination of shapes should be used to create a distinguishable silhouette that the player can instantly recognize, as is the case with Mario characters in Figure 3 (Voimala 2023, 29). Colours give helpful cues about the protagonist’s personality, with lighter colours typically being associated with heroism. However, these kinds of simplifications are not always correct: for example, a character wearing white with red accents might create a mental association to evilness. As with any character creation tool, it is advised to experiment with different combinations to create interesting visuals. (Nieminen 2017, 15–16; Voimala 2023, 36.)

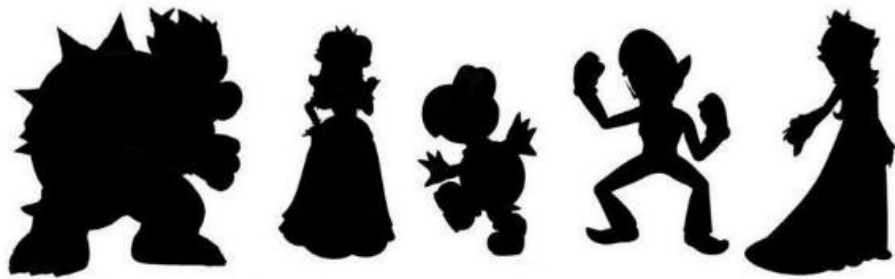


Figure 3. Distinct silhouettes make characters recognizable (Sporcle 2020)

Pleasant appearance is traditionally associated with goodness, both in the real world and in character design, despite the lack of a scientific correlation between them (Nieminen 2017, 37–38). However, focusing exclusively on physical beauty might have harmful consequences. “Attractive appearance” is often misinterpreted as depicting Western Eurocentric beauty standards (such as straight hair or pale skin) or having exaggerated body proportions. Solely portraying only certain body types not only makes all the characters look the

same but promotes unhealthy stereotypes and has a negative impact on the players' self-image. Conversely, thinking outside of existing stereotypes often leads to more interesting and relatable character designs. (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 43–44; Elmi 2024, 9, 12–19; Friedberg 205, 14–18, 23 45; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 24, 40; Kamppinen 2024, 27; Luo 2023, 134; Lynch et al. 2024, 1534; Skowronski et al. 2021, 2; Voimala 2023, 19–20.) Kamppinen (2024, 27–28) argues that attractiveness is not even considered the most important element of the protagonist's appeal, as the design of a good character consists of several different factors.

2.3 Backstory and emotional appeal

Backstory means past events that affect the protagonist's actions during the game. It is regarded as the most important aspect when designing a character. After all, it is the psychology behind the protagonist's actions that creates the emotional connection between them and the player. This connection helps the players to relate to the character and keeps them interested in playing the game. (Carpenter 2022, 15; Kamppinen 2024, 17; Voimala 2023, 6.)

When developing a backstory, inspiration can be drawn from psychology, since it is an excellent way of exploring the internal reasonings behind people's actions. This helps the character feel more like an actual human with their strengths and flaws and gives the players something to relate to. The best way to do this is to ensure the protagonist has a motive for their actions. The motive can be either physiological, personal, intrinsic or external. Physiological motive means fulfilling basic needs such as eating or sleeping in a survival game, personal motivation refers to the character's drive to succeed in a goal of their interest, and external motivation is something that comes from outside beyond the character's own control, such as a villain threatening the world. In short, the motive should explain why the protagonist acts the way they do. Moreover, the motive should align with the protagonist's personality. It would not be realistic for them to go against their morals or make decisions based on a whim. (Kamppinen 2024, 17–18; Voimala 2023, 16.)

While motivation gives the protagonist the reason to act, true character development happens when facing conflict. Several studies agree that the best conflicts are those that affect the protagonist on an emotional level, as they help them grow. (Carpenter 2022, 22–23; Kamppinen 2024, 18, Nieminen 2017, 27.) The more opportunities the protagonist has to grow and learn from their mistakes, the better. This evolution is what makes them feel human. (Kamppinen 2024, 8.) An example of this can be seen in Figure 4, where Max Caulfield from *Life Is Strange* faces the consequences of her altering time, when she needs to decide between saving her friend or the town she lives in (*Life is Strange Wiki*).



Figure 4. Max's actions lead to her facing a difficult choice (Square Enix 2015)

The protagonist should be a different version of themselves by the end of the game, as they have been challenged by obstacles that force them to reveal new aspects of themselves (Nieminen 2017, 28). Morality plays a key factor in how successfully this is conveyed: making difficult choices helps the player practice empathy in a way that can transfer even to real-life situations. Navigating the protagonist through emotional challenges can be used as a coping mechanism and help the player gain better understanding of themselves. (Carpenter 2022, 23–24; Kamppinen 2024, 22.)

Exploring the protagonist's emotional side further makes them relatable and memorable to the players, rather than a hero who is fearless and does not struggle with negative feelings (Carpenter 2022, 21–22). Nieminen (2017, 27–30) divides these conflicts into three categories: character against nature, where the

protagonist is fighting a situation they did not cause themselves; characters against one another, which can range from the battle between good and evil to a smaller conflict between friends and family; and character against themselves, where the protagonist needs to face a change or a negative trait in themselves. The way the protagonist deals with the conflict affects who they are by the end of the game and keeps the player involved in decision-making.

A classic example of a character arc is the hero's journey. It consists of twelve steps, which are depicted in Figure 5. The journey starts when the protagonist is presented with an opportunity or a goal, leading them to leave their known world in the pursuit of said goal. During the journey the protagonist is faced with trials and challenges that they need to overcome before succeeding. Finally, they return home but are ultimately transformed by their experiences. (Reedsy 2023.)

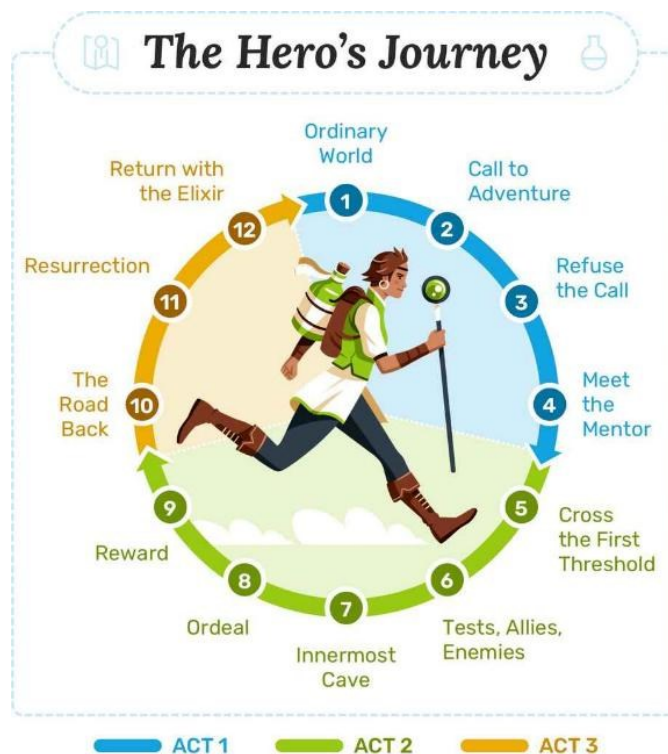


Figure 5. The 12 steps of hero's journey (Reedsy 2023)

While the hero's journey has been used in storytelling for centuries, it remains popular to this day for its timeless themes of growth, self-discovery and transformation. Hero's journey offers a clear, structured arc for writers to follow while focusing on character development. (Reedsy 2023.) However, solely relying

on this structure may make the narrative lack complexity and lead to homogenous portrayals of the heroes. For example, Christensen and Bond (2021) argue that hero's journey does not have room for people who do not fit the social norm, and the protagonists are often individualistic people who exploit weaker characters for personal gain. While being a powerful tool with important themes as its core, deconstructing the hero's journey might lead to more unique narratives that leave room for different kinds of character portrayals.

2.4 Personality of the protagonist

The general belief is that the protagonist must be a good person to appeal to the players, but this can make them appear one-dimensional. Thus, giving the protagonist some negative aspects is a good idea for establishing a well-rounded character. These traits can be utilized in creating conflict, which further helps the character grow and keeps them interesting. (Carpenter 2022, 22; Kamppinen 2024, 17; Voimala 2023, 8.)

Players tend to respond positively to protagonists that are portrayed as strong, determined and capable, and who have personal goals to achieve (Dębek 2020; Sirparanta 2018, 25). However, the term *strong* is debatable: does it refer to physical strength, or is the character fearless in the face of a danger? While both qualities appear heroic as a default, they can turn negative if used incorrectly. The game becomes boring very quickly if the hero can beat enemies down with a couple of punches and never appears to be afraid of anything the villain throws in their way. It can be argued that *strength* should refer to the protagonist's resilience: their ability to continue forward even when facing setbacks or scary situations. There is nothing wrong with having a physically or mentally strong protagonist, if there are obstacles for them to conquer to show character growth. This is why the protagonist needs flaws. (Nieminen 2017, 27–28.)

Flaws make the protagonist feel believable to the players. However, not any superficial flaw suffices, but rather they should be something that have consequences through the plot and the character's development. For example, the protagonist could be faced with a fear they need to overcome to succeed.

(Sirparanta 2018, 25–26.) One way to develop a balance between strengths and flaws is to use archetypes.

Archetypes mean specific character roles that serve a certain purpose within the game's narrative. A classic example of a protagonist is the hero archetype, who is brave, strong, helpful, intelligent, and trustworthy (Dębek 2020, Voimala 2023, 9–10). The rest of the archetypes usually refer to side characters but mixing them up is a great way to create more complex personalities. For example, while *the shadow* often refers to the evil antagonist, it can also represent the protagonist's inner darkness that they are trying to repress, creating an internal conflict. *The trickster* is described as a manipulative character with their selfish motivations to advance the plot, but it could also be used as a base for a protagonist who then goes through a story arc to become more caring. (Nieminen 2017, 22–24; Voimala 2023, 9–10).

While archetypes might be helpful tools, they need further development to appear interesting or unique. Oversimplifying them might turn the protagonist into a stereotype, who lacks originality and diversity (Voimala 2023, 9–11). However, complicating the protagonist's personality too much can become confusing. This is why it is important to always keep the character's motivation in mind for their actions to make sense. (Nieminen 2017, 24, 27.)

2.5 Dialogue

Personality does not exist in a vacuum, and therefore interaction with other characters is key in showing how the protagonist's personality is expressed (Kamppinen 2024, 18–19; Voimala 2023, 14–15). This is where dialogue comes into play. While silent characters still exist, most of the protagonists nowadays are non-silent (i.e. they are talking), thus allowing the player to immerse themselves in the narrative via dialogue choices. This is harder to achieve with a character who does not talk. (Kamppinen 2024, 15–16.)

A rule of thumb is that dialogue should be used to either advance the plot or reveal new information about the characters (Nieminen 2017, 40). This

information should tell the player about the protagonist's ability and competence all the while revealing their personality (Rennick et al. 2023, 8). Personality can further be emphasized by a good voice actor, who can bring the protagonist to life by conveying the character's feelings believably. Different dialogue options also give further control to the player, as they can choose how the protagonist reacts to situations. This is done, for example, in *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey*, as seen in Figure 6. By involving the player in the game's narrative, they are allowed to customize the plot for themselves. This is crucial in getting the player emotionally invested. (Kamppinen 2024, 12–13, 23.)



Figure 6. *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* has different dialogue options (Ubisoft 2018)

Not all communication is delivered with words alone. The meaning of the dialogue changes when using a different tone or speed. Nonverbal cues, such as body language, also add another layer to communication. A complete message requires all these elements to be combined correctly: a character's tone might suggest they are sad, but it is their words that inform the player *why* they are sad. Mixing up these messages creates subtext, which refers to the hidden meaning behind spoken dialogue. Subtext offers a glimpse to the protagonist's inner world,

which might differ from the one they are outwardly portraying. Both verbal and nonverbal dialogue are needed to reveal aspects of the protagonist's personality, which in turn makes the character feel more real. (Nieminen 2017, 39–40.)

3 STEREOTYPICAL PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE GAME CHARACTERS

Historically, a female protagonist does not really exist at all (Carpenter 2022, 11; Friedberg 2015, 4, 7–8; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 21–22; Rowe 2022; Tompkins & Martins 2022, 401). The first games featured male protagonists, as they were geared towards men who populated the arcade halls in the 1980's (Carpenter 2022, 11–12). Female characters were left in the sidelines if they appeared in the games at all and were portrayed in a sexist manner: their capabilities were limited and their personalities one-dimensional (Friedberg 2015, 7; Luo 2023, 132; Lynch et al. 2024, 1529–1530; Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 1; Tompkins & Martins 2022, 400.) Games were not the only culprits to this, but rather objectifying and sexualizing women was – and still is – a larger phenomenon happening in other media as well, leading to stereotypical portrayals (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 22; Skowronski et al 2021, 2).

3.1 Stereotypes

Stereotypes are thoughts and expectations drawn from previous experiences, which are then applied to new situations. They are mental shortcuts that simplify complex issues, allowing faster decision-making. While they are helpful in making quick judgements, they may also lead to biased thinking and oversimplifying of difficult topics. (Cherry 2024.)

Stereotypes are based on certain expectations people have about different topics. In the case of game characters, players draw conclusions from their gender, body language, clothing, race, etc. even before they have interacted with them. This ensures that there is no need to stop and evaluate every new person when their role can be somewhat predicted based on existing information. (Cherry 2024; Nieminen 2017, 34.) For example, a character wielding a staff can be assumed to be a mage.

While it was argued in Chapter 2 that stereotypical portrayal of characters is discouraged, mental shortcuts are not necessarily good or bad (Cherry 2024). After all, combining looks with certain personality traits is a common method in video games, as it helps the player make mental associations. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 37; Voimala 2023, 11.) However, stereotypes become problematic when they are used for reinforcing negative associations, as they can lead to prejudices and biases in real life (Cherry 2024).

The solution to these issues requires the individual to recognize their tendency to make generalized assumptions, before being able to deconstruct harmful thinking patterns (Cherry 2024). It is common for people to link certain mental images to whole groups of people, such as female characters, instead of seeing them as individuals. Focusing more on personal qualities helps empathize with the character and seeing them as their own unique self, without thinking of them as a representative of a whole group. (Jilani 2019.) In the case of the protagonist's gender, developers should question what role it even plays in the story, if any. For example, gender might not matter in combat but could be relevant in romance. (Dealessandri 2023.) Unfortunately, this is not always considered, as particularly female game characters have traditionally suffered from a very narrow portrayal.

3.2 Stereotypes and female game characters

While the successful use of good protagonist qualities listed in Chapter 2 has produced several iconic male leads, such as Geralt of Rivia from *Witcher*, Arthur Morgan from *Red Dead Redemption 2*, and Joel from *The Last of Us*, this has not been the case with female protagonists. Indeed, not even half of the characters mentioned are women in several listings of greatest game protagonists of all time. (Bafta.org 2024; Jessey 2024; Tyler 2024; Weber 2024.) Part of this is due to the lack of female protagonists in general: a study by Solitaired in 2022 found that across 150 games released between 1985 and 2022, only 6 % featured a standalone female lead compared to 69,3 % male protagonists (Rowe 2022).

While the number of female protagonists has increased in the 2020's, it is still less than half compared to men, as shown in Figure 7.

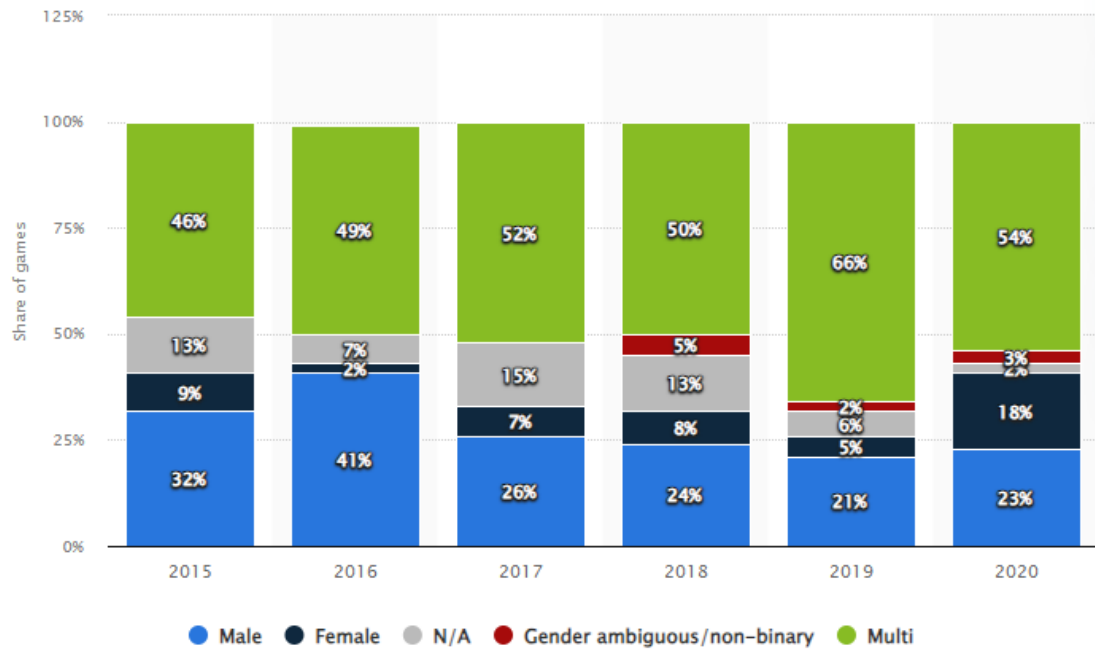


Figure 7. Share of video game protagonists by gender (Clement 2022)

Stereotypes may also partly explain the phenomenon: Voimala (2023, 11) argues that relying on them too much is considered lazy character design, which does not inspire the player. However, Luo (2023, 132) points out that some aspects of the stereotypical portrayal might have been due to the limitations of technology, which meant reducing character design to simple shapes and colour cues. For example, Figure 8 shows that the original Princess Peach and Ms. Pac-Man in the 80's were tiny, pixelated sprites, who could be identified as women by simple visual cues such as long hair, dress, and a bow.

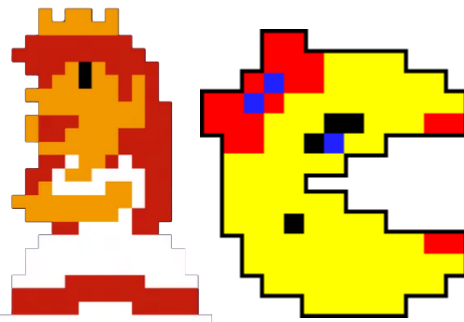


Figure 8. Princess Peach (left) and Ms. Pac-Man (right) (Nintendo 1985; Midway & Namco 1982)

Similarly, technological restraints were mentioned in a more recent study, which notes how game engines often use specific limitations when it comes to production. For example, this might mean dressing the character in tight-fitting attire to lessen computational expense. (Tompkins & Martins 2021, 411.) Interestingly, this issue does not seem to concern male characters' design to such extent.

Game engines do not work by themselves, they need a human to use them. A study by Tompkins and Martins (2021, 411–412) shows that developers have different opinions when it comes to realistic character design between men and women. According to the study, both genders need to fit functionally into the gameplay, but with women this needed to happen within the context of their physical attractiveness. However, the designer's own gender did not always affect the portrayal, which could indicate that sexism has become so normalized in the industry that it is not always even recognized.

3.2.1 Appearance of female characters

While it was argued in Chapter 2 that the backstory is the most important aspect of a protagonist, the emphasis is based on appearance when it comes to female characters. Women are often depicted having unrealistic bodies, being partially or completely nude or wearing clothing that conflicts with their role in the game. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 36–37; Skowronski et al. 2021, 2; Tompkins & Martins 2021, 401.) Joensuu and Rouhiainen (2021, 37) mention how these appearances make the characters look like each other: the ideal woman is presented often as white and skinny with little variations.

Common way to portray female bodies is to exaggerate the size of breasts and the waist-to-hip ratio. Women's attire is also often designed to overemphasize these features, even at the expense of realism: for example, a female character's armour might show unnecessary amounts of skin compared to their male counterparts, which would be a fatal disadvantage in an actual battle. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 36, 48; Kamppinen 2024, 27.) An example of this is 2B, a protagonist from NieR: Automata. Despite being a sword-wielding action heroine,

2B wears high heels and a short dress that shows both cleavage and buttocks – an outfit that would not be practical in real life (Figure 9). She is also very skinny, as is common for female characters: many of them are portrayed with a body mass index that would be below healthy range. (Voimala 2023, 19.)



Figure 9. 2B's outfit is unrealistic for an action heroine (Square Enix 2017)

The stereotypical appearance of female characters can be explained by the male gaze. It means women being designed as desirable, passive objects with weak abilities and submissive personalities (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 42–43). This type of design is specifically created to be looked at and enjoyed by heterosexual male gamers (Carpenter 2022, 31; Tompkins & Martins 2021, 401). Catering to the male gaze creates an effect where there is little to no diversity between characters, with particularly black women being left as outcasts (Tompkins & Martins 2022, 402).

3.2.2 Roles of female characters

Women have traditionally been reserved very limited and narrow roles in games. All of them tend to emphasize the idea how a woman is lesser than a man: they reduce women to side characters either in need of male protection, or as objects to be won by them. (Friedberg 2015, 25; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 22; Luo 2023, 132.) Some of the personality traits associated with these roles are shyness, childishness, and general withdrawal from any action (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 38–39).

Stereotypical roles for female characters include princess, who is typically a passive character in the background of a man's story; damsel in distress, who needs to be rescued by a man; a prize to win for the male protagonist; and a sexy sidekick, who exists as an eye candy while helping the main male lead (Friedberg 2015, 25; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 22, 34). In all of them, the woman is cast at the background of a male character's storyline, whether as a subordinate, side character, or a love interest. Along with these roles often comes a traditionally feminine personality, which is warm, nurturing, and emotional. (Lynch et al. 2024, 1534.) A classic example of a damsel in distress is Princess Peach, as depicted in Figure 10.



Figure 10. Damsel in distress (Nintendo 2000)

While the protagonist should have an active part in the narrative and experience growth through the events of the game, women's roles are characterized by

passivity and vulnerability. (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 45; Friedberg 2015, 25; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 22; Tompkins & Martins 2021, 401.) Thus, it is no wonder these one-dimensional, stereotypical characters have not been seen in the spotlight. This type of narrative design does not leave room for exploring the characters' background or personal growth, which are crucial for the player to feel connected to them. Furthermore, they reinforce the harmful idea that women are less capable than men. (Carpenter 2022, 16; Luo 2023, 132; Lynch et al. 2024, 1534.)

Cultural background and game genre may play a part in women's portrayals. For example, a study by Lynch et al. (2024, 1545–1548) found that Japanese studios cast female characters in traditionally feminine roles more often than developers in the United States. The same study also points out how some genres, such as fighting, shooter and action, tend to portray female characters as physically capable. On the contrary, this did not happen as often with adventure and role-playing games.

However, the traditionally passive roles and traits do not automatically mean a character is useless. Both Friedberg (2015, 42–43) and Lynch et al. (2024, 1535) point out how women are often the driving force behind a male protagonist's story. For example, casting a woman into the classic role of a damsel in distress gives the main character motivation to rescue them, consequently triggering the events of the game. It is also worth noting that while one of the protagonists' most important qualities is their competence, this is often measured by masculine standards, such as violence. This means that other traits typically associated with women, for example caregiving, may be overlooked or presented as less important. While these supportive roles are arguably needed, it is harmful and repetitive to reserve them for solely one gender and not displaying the full range of women's capabilities. (Lynch et al. 2024.)

3.2.3 Dialogue of female characters

Studies have found that female characters are often given not only less lines, but they also have more polite and gentle dialogue than their male counterparts

(Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 25; Rennick et al. 2023, 5, 8). The scarcity of dialogue might be due to the simple fact that there are more male characters in general, but tonal differences often come down to sexism. This can also be seen in the pattern where male characters tend to respond to other male characters instead of females. (Rennick et al. 2023.)

Overall, Rennick et al. (2023, 8) found that female characters' dialogue tends to centre more around family and relationships, negotiation, and gratitude than their male counterparts, who for example swear more. Another study by Joensuu and Rouhiainen (2021, 25) noted how female characters' voice acting might be in contrast with what is happening on screen. This means characters using either sexual, gentle or girly voice regardless of the situation: a woman might, for example, make sexual noises while getting shot.

Even with several lines of dialogue, problems may still occur. According to the Bechdel test, a stereotypical way to portray women across different media is to have them discuss about a man rather than their own personal problems or topics of interest. However, the test can be passed with a single line of dialogue, so it cannot be used as a scientific approach, even though some games still fail it. Instead, the test provides an observational tool for gender biases. These biases might also show up in the way other characters respond to the player depending on their chosen gender, with the NPC's (non-playable characters) commenting on the player in a stereotypical manner. Similarly, even when a female character has more dialogue, it might focus on flirting with a man. (Rennick et al. 2023, 8.)

4 THE DAMAGE OF MISREPRESENTED FEMALE CHARACTERS

Portraying female characters solely based on stereotypes has many negative impacts. Hypersexualization is proven to not only discourage women from playing, but also leading to body image issues, as the characters' physiques are not realistically attainable to most women. Similarly, presenting women as less capable than men may lead to the assumption that this applies to real life as well. (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 43–44; Friedberg 2005, 45; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 40, Luo 2023, 132, 134; Lynch et al. 2024, 1534; Skowronski et al. 2021, 2.)

4.1 Cultivation theory

It is argued that visual media has a great impact on cultural norms, and video games are not an exception: they influence the player's thoughts on what is acceptable whether they consciously think about it or not (Friedberg 2015, 9; Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 1; Skowronski et al 2021, 2). This phenomenon is called the cultivation theory. It is the reason why representation and the protagonists' relatability matters. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 23; Kamppinen 2024, 21; Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 1.)

While male players might relate more to protagonists of the same gender and enjoy the view of a sexualized woman, the cultivation theory suggests that harmful representation may have subconscious effect on players. This means players starting to associate stereotypical traits with a particular gender in real life. (Friedberg 2015, 13; Lynch et al. 2024, 1533.) The effect can be further linked to misogyny, which means the hatred of women and, by extension, other minority groups. Misogynistic standards at their core are about controlling and punishing women if they do not meet the oppressive patriarchal norms. (Loewen Walker 2022, 66.)

Cultivation theory works in the other direction as well. Adding more diversity in games, for example, in the form of character customization options, can create a more accepting atmosphere. Looking from a commercial point of view, this could also be used to branch out to a formerly neglected market consisting of minorities. (Carpenter 2022, 32.)

A person is always behind the represented character, and thus their opinions and beliefs are reflected in the said character. This is further linked to the larger cultural way women are being portrayed, and the characteristics that are associated with them. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 8.) When the perceived audience consists mostly of heterosexual men and the games are developed to cater to them, female characters often fall victim to the male gaze. As this issue is still prevalent even today, it could imply that sexism has become so ingrained in both developers and consumers that its multiple, subtle forms are hard to

recognize (Lynch et al. 2024, 1546; Tompkins & Martins 2021, 411–412). To combat this, developers are encouraged to create more diverse workplaces where a wider range of voices could be heard (MacDonald 2020; Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 5).

4.2 Gamer demographics

One justification for the sexist portrayal of women is their supposed marketability. As the target demographic for AAA games (produced by large studios) is largely assumed to consist of heterosexual men, sexualized female characters are used to bring in more sales revenue. Some companies even report purposefully relying on these stereotypical and sexist tropes, as they are quick and easy to implement and proven to make money. (Tompkins & Martins 2022, 410.) While this strategy might have made sense in the early days of gaming, it becomes questionable considering that in the 2020's, nearly half of the players are women, as shown in Figure 11 (Howarth 2024).

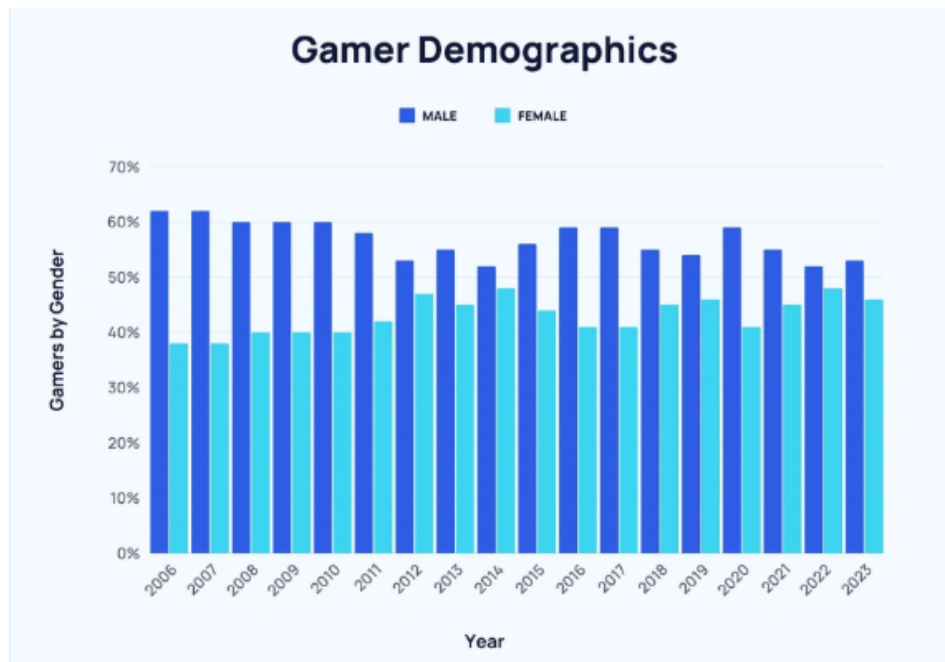


Figure 11. Gamers by gender (Howarth 2024)

This is not a small audience to disregard. As Figure 12 shows, female gamers spend on average three hours per day on playing, and similarly three hours weekly on watching gaming related content (Assaf 2022). If games were designed for their perceived audience like they were in the 80's, there should be

as many games with female protagonists as there are female players, yet this is not the case.



Figure 12. Playing habits of female gamers (Assaf 2022)

This discrepancy can be explained by men’s history of dominance over not only the gaming industry, but other economic, political, and social domains as well. The idea of women being inherently the weaker sex has led to a larger cultural phenomenon that legitimizes the idea. Video games are no exception when it comes to reflecting these paternalistic power structures. (Lynch et al. 2024, 1531–1532; Tompkins & Martins 2022, 407.) As it is, misrepresentation has proven to have a negative impact on women’s self-esteem and body image, as well as prevent them from playing (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 43; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 42; Skowronski et al. 2021).

4.3 Sexualized characters’ impacts on female players

Multiple studies show that the incorrect and improper representation of female characters has a negative impact on female players. These impacts include body image and self-esteem issues along with eating disorders, as women may feel inadequate compared to the female game characters. Therefore, it is no wonder sexualized characters have prevented some women from playing at all or made them choose a different game. (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 43; Friedberg 2015, 19–20; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 42; Skowronski et al. 2021). According to statistics, there is still a strong interest towards gaming among women, but as seen in

Figure 13, they might not always feel comfortable doing so (Assaf 2022; Howarth 2024).

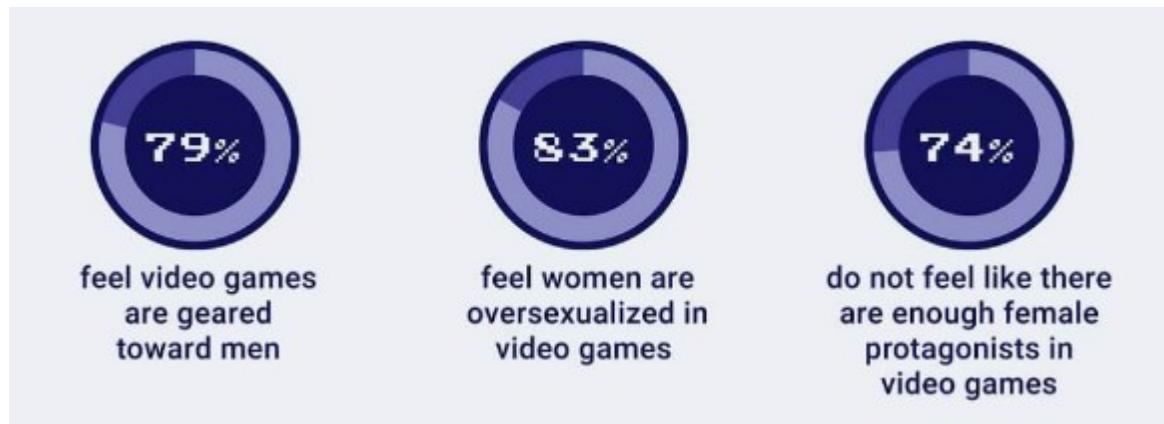


Figure 13. Many women feel like games are not geared towards them (Assaf 2022)

Friedberg (2015, 20, 22) argues that it is the interactive and repetitive nature of video games that makes these issues especially harmful. Because of their challenging nature, games usually take more time to finish than a tv show or a movie, and the immersion is often deeper due to the player's heavy participation in the narrative. This constant exposure leads to unconscious influence of the game's themes and portrayals. However, men and women experience immersion differently due to the gender discrepancy: having a character of the same gender helps male players identify with them, whereas women struggle with immersion if there is a lack of female characters.

Conversely, in a study by Joensuu and Rouhiainen (2021, 40, 43) female players reported not having issues with a sexualized female protagonist if they had chosen to be one themselves. This is because the players felt being personally in control of the choices regarding the character's appearance. Similarly, the external features do not necessarily hinder the players from relating to a character, as some players consider the characters' roles and personalities to be more important. It should also be noted that not every woman feels negatively affected by the sexist appearances, as they recognize these characters are not real.

Despite exceptions, there is a real danger in women internalizing these harmful messages and feeling like their value lies in external features. The sexist attitudes are also reflected on men, but instead of internalizing, men might exhibit these attitudes in their behaviour. For example, they might harass online game players if their avatar's gender is female. At worst, these portrayals can be linked with women being subjected to sexist jokes or rape threats in the real world. (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 46; Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 22–23.) As it is, the narrow selection of female characters and their lack of diversity is the main cause of negative impacts (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 49).

4.4 Women's opinions about a good female protagonist

Female characters were originally added into games to attract more female players, and to make more money. Ironically, studios are now facing criticism from the same audience. (Devčić & Sabol 2024, 43.) Women are not pleased with the one-dimensional, sexist portrayals, and have demanded more variety. Unsurprisingly, these demands comply with the good protagonist's qualities listed in Chapter 2. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 42, 44–46; Sirparanta 2018, 30–31.)

General opinion about the characters' portrayals seems to revolve around equality. If women are presented in a certain way, then same treatment is hoped for men as well. For example, if women are dressed in revealing clothing, then men should be too. If the game wants to use the "damsel in distress" trope, the character could be a man for a change. (Voimala 2023, 11, 19.) However, reversing stereotypical portrayals to apply to a different gender does not help in erasing them or negating their harmful impacts. Instead, a focus on diversity is encouraged (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 49; Lynch et al. 2024, 1531; Sirparanta 2018, 30–31).

More variety is needed in every aspect of female protagonists. Portraying them with strong, complex personality traits such as intelligence and confidence can empower female players by making them recognize these qualities in themselves (Luo 2023, 134; Sirparanta 2018, 30). There is also room for exploring different backstories for female protagonists, rather than relying on gendered stereotypes.

In a study by Sirparanta (2018, 31), respondents valued meaningful narratives without unnecessary tragedy related to rape or domestic violence. Similarly, the protagonist's abilities should expand beyond those traditionally associated with femininity, such as nurturing qualities (Lynch et al. 2024, 1531). Perhaps the most discussed quality is the appearance, which has far too often been portrayed through the male gaze. Several studies suggest players prefer a more realistic and diverse approach, such as portraying different body types and ethnicities, or even having "ugly" features. They also wish for more realistic attire that would make sense in the game's context. (Joensuu & Rouhiainen 2021, 24, 42; Luo 2023, 133; Sirparanta 2018, 30–31; Tompkins & Martins 2022, 409; Voimala 2023, 20.)

Those female protagonists that have broken stereotypes have become some of the most memorable ones. Lara Croft decomposed traditional gender roles by being portrayed as independent and capable on her own, without needing a man's assistance while facing danger (Luo 2023, 132). Similarly, an adept bounty hunter Samus Aran does not need a man on her mission to defeat aliens (Carpenter 2022, 16–17). The witch Bayonetta is portrayed with a witty personality, complex backstory, and problem-solving abilities (Luo 2023, 133). While these characters (Figure 14) seemingly check all the boxes for a great protagonist, each of them has been subject to criticism due to their sexist appearance: Lara Croft and Bayonetta are curvy women wearing either very little or provocative clothing, and Samus Aran's armour disappears under certain conditions (Carpenter 2022, 17–18; Luo 2023, 132–133).



Figure 14. Bayonetta (left), Samus Aran (middle) and Lara Croft (right) (Cunningham 2023)

Like these three examples and women's opinions suggest, there is clearly a market for well-written female protagonists who do not need to rely on skimpy clothing to make the game sell well. Fortunately, there seems to have been a positive shift in the past years: female protagonists have moved towards a more diverse portrayal, just as gamers have wished for. This is in part because of a larger cultural change related to a more inclusive representation in media. (Luo 2023, 134.) However, this change has not come without a fair share of criticism from an audience that has become accustomed to only a certain kind of portrayal.

5 WOKE

The term *woke* originated in the USA in the 1940's from the word "awake" but reemerged in 2013 as a result of Black Lives Matter -movement (Faye 2021). It was created by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi when George Zimmerman, the murderer of a black 17-year-old boy Trayvon Martin, was acquitted. The movement gained further support in the following years after other police killings of black men. The intention of the movement was to create an empowering network for black people, and it succeeded in drawing attention towards racism and police violence. (Black Lives Matter 2024; Campbell 2021.) Nowadays, *being woke* means being aware of social issues, such as racial and social justice, feminism, and environmental issues. While the intent of supporting equal rights and eliminating discrimination can be viewed as positive, the term

has received negative criticism for its misuse and misunderstanding. (Faye 2021.)

5.1 Support and criticism

Woke can be seen as a subcategory of feminism, which aims to achieve gender equality across several different fields (Varrial 2023). Typical woke issues centre around racism, gender, sexual minorities, and the representation of these. For a person to “be woke” essentially means actively recognizing these issues and trying to combat them. (Puttonen 2022.) Woke asks, for example, if a white person can relate to black person’s experiences, if trans women are advancing women’s rights, and if it is acceptable to appropriate something from a minority group or culture. It is no surprise that a movement supporting equality has gained the most popularity within discriminated groups. A study by Oskari Lahtinen (2024) showed that women’s attitudes tend to lean more towards woke than men. Similarly, the more left leaning a person’s political views were, the more likely they were to have woke opinions. Generational differences also affect how well woke values are accepted, as younger generations are more open-minded towards them (Milburn 2023).

However, woke has often been misinterpreted as a silencing method, with the sentence “nothing can be said anymore” being thrown around. This comes from the idea that some find the ideology threatening to their freedom of speech. Faye (2021) argues that woke may lead to the opinions of discriminated people being held in the highest regard while the standard straight white male is ignored. This might be seen as a threat by the latter group, as historically the larger institutions, including men, have had their way in decision-making. While such arguments are valid in recognizing that everyone should have equal right to voice their opinions, they are often used as an excuse for spreading hate speech, all while ignoring the opinions of the targeted groups. (MacDonald 2024.) Political right parties in the USA have also interpreted woke as a danger to their own rights and used it to justify further actions to discriminate minorities (Quarshie 2023).

The movement has also been accused of virtue signalling, which means declaring one's support without any effort towards actual activism. While this might be the case with some, it can be argued that bringing any kind of awareness to these issues is positive, as it helps to challenge the structural norms. After white men leading several industries for decades, it just might be the time for minorities to have their voices heard and give their opinions just as much visibility. (Faye 2021.)

5.2 Importance of woke

Woke is not a new phenomenon. Several other movements with inclusiveness as their core value have preceded the ideology, such as political correctness, social justice, and intersectional feminism (Meynell 2023; UN Women 2020). More recently, DEI issues (diversity, equity, and inclusion) have been a current topic following the 2025 presidential election in the USA. As the themes' prevalence over the years suggest, they remain relevant even today as the political atmosphere has become more polarized. (Loewen Walker 2022, 65.)

Movements such as woke have arisen to combat discriminatory injustices. According to Meynell (2023), the need for bringing up woke themes typically stems from three causes. These consist of a situation or practice being offensive to a certain group, providing false information about them, and endorsing discrimination. While the list helps recognize harmful practices, they might be hard to notice in everyday interactions due to ingrained behaviour. This is why it is important to educate people about the issues and make them known to the public. In the case of game studios Ubisoft and Riot, accusations of sexism in the workplace lead to overhauls of the whole workplace culture (MacDonald 2020). This example shows how bringing awareness to issues can lead to positive changes.

With any luck, equality may one day become so common that it does not need to be pointed out anymore. There is great potential in woke to play a major role in this, but as with any political movement, it can be turned negative. Without proper

implementation, woke can become a weapon that turns against itself by giving platform to opposing voices who are not ready to challenge their worldviews.

5.3 Misuse of woke

Woke has often been misused, i.e. several phenomena have been labelled woke despite them having little, if any, connection with the ideology. It is often done as an insult, yet this lacks any depth as criticism as it does not offer any explanation beyond the fact that a person does not like a certain phenomenon (O'Brien 2024). Reducing complex issues to one word demeans them by turning them into a label that is easy to attach anywhere, without the need for a deeper thought process. This leads to the non-woke alternatives being endorsed, i.e. practices that are racist, misogynistic and transphobic (Blustein Lindholm 2024). There is also an argument to be had about whether it is the inclusion of woke that ruins certain practices, or if the prejudices against woke are so strong that the mere knowledge of their presence is what gets them labelled as "bad".

Using woke in a negative sense can be viewed as an attempt to silence those who have faced oppression, and by extension, denial of the faults in structural norms. This stems from Western culture, which idealizes the individual's responsibility of their own life over society's influence. (Milburn 2023, 8.) In the case of women, their reluctance to conform to patriarchal norms can be seen as a threat by those benefiting from them (Loewen Walker 2022).

A common argument is that woke is an agenda forcibly incorporated into everyday practices to exclude straight white men (Haynes 2024; MacDonald 2024.) For example, Haynes (2024) accuses woke of taking away the freedom of the gaming culture, which he defines as attractive female characters being replaced by "bland and politically correct avatars" and the narrative becoming preachy. His opinion is in line with many right-wing supporters, who may view woke as an attack to their freedom of speech (Faye 2021). However, banning woke has similar effect, as it removes the freedom of women and minorities having their voices heard. (Blustein Lindholm 2024). Hence, it becomes important to question whose freedom is more important: those who are disappointed in their

chosen entertainment, or those fighting for their right to be seen as equal members of society. After all, promoting equality does not aim to take away one's rights, rather, it benefits everyone.

5.4 Approaching woke issues

As woke focuses on issues often regarding minorities, it might be hard for more mainstream groups to relate to them, as woke challenges people to rethink their learned behaviours and thought patterns. These are sometimes so deeply ingrained that they might not even be easily recognized. As such, it requires people to be willing to admit being wrong and possibly change their behaviour in the future. This is not a small achievement, nor is it something that many are willing to do. (Cherry 2024; Meynell 2023.)

Changing old habits might feel scary or even unnecessary if a person is used to acting in a certain way: for example, they might not understand why certain terms are insulting to other people. Thus, accusations regarding their choice of words might be interpreted as a personal attack. This only furthers the stereotype of woke supporters being overly sensitive and controlling about what can be said. Therefore, it matters *how* education about woke is executed: as studies show, preachy methods lead to hostility and overall negative response towards otherwise well-intentioned movement. Instead, honest conversations are encouraged to increase understanding. (Cherry 2024; Fenlon et al. 2022; Meynell 2023.) In workplaces and other communities this means having more diverse teams in the process of decision-making (MacDonald 2020; Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 5–6).

6 WOKE PHENOMENON IN GAMES

While woke aims to bring awareness to multiple issues across different minority groups, the term is used rather loosely on the internet when it comes to games. Misinterpretation of the phenomenon has led to some occurrences being labelled woke even if they have no connection to the ideology. Originating from a political standpoint, the movement has been accused of forcing political agenda to

players, who just want to use their games as a form of escapism (Hallamaa 2024; Respawn.fi 2023; Senior et al. 2022). At the same time, woke has succeeded in making female protagonists more diverse in several aspects.

There seems to be no clear consensus about what makes a game “too woke”, although certain similarities can be found. Woke content detector (2024) is a Google Sheet created by Steam community members that allows the players to see whether certain games include woke themes. These themes include, for example, LGBTQ+ characters, different ethnicities, customizable pronouns, pro-climate messaging and so on. Games are then split into three categories (Figure 15) according to whether they are recommended (contain no woke content), informational (subtle woke messaging), or not recommended (contain too much woke content).

Borderlands The Pre-Sequel	2014	2K Australia, Gearbox Software, Aspyr (Linux)	2K, Aspyr (Linux)	Informational	Contains subtly pro-LGBTQ+ messaging. Several characters have dialogue revealing homosexual or bisexual tendencies.
Borderlands Enhanced	2023	Gearbox Software, Blind Squirrel Games	2K	Recommended	Contains no Woke content.
Metro 2033 Redux	2014	4A Games	Deep Silver	Recommended	Contains no Woke content.
Metro Last light Redux	2014	4A Games	Deep Silver	Recommended	Contains no Woke content.
Metro Exodus	2019	4A Games	Deep Silver	Not Recommended	Contains overtly pro-DEI messaging. Features multiple female front-line combatants, two of whom are also leader figures. https://steamcommunity.com/groups/Woke_Content_Detector/discussions/1/601894472784125673/
Terraria	2011	Re-Logic	Re-Logic	Not Recommended	Contains overtly pro-LGBTQ+ messaging. Update 1.4.5 includes a retroactive removal of sex selection from the character creation menu. https://steamcommunity.com/groups/Woke_Content_Detector/discussions/1/4297069816684448270/
Sid Meier's Civilization VI	2016	Firaxis Games, Aspyr (Mac), Aspyr (Linux)	2K, Aspyr (Mac), Aspyr (Linux)	Not Recommended	Contains overtly pro-DEI messaging. Contains overtly pro-climate action messaging. Race swapped Suleiman and added historically unimportant female leaders. Global warming and carbon capture mechanics.

Figure 15. Woke content detector (Woke content detector 2024)

In the case of female characters, it is enough to portray them in important or leading positions to make the game woke and “unrealistic”, such as in Aliens: Dark Descent. The argument falls flat when considering some of these games feature fantasy settings, whose events could not be possible in the real world. For example, the events of the Alien franchise occur on another planet. Similarly, Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice is not recommended on the basis that there is no historical evidence of female Pict warriors, failing to realize that the game takes place in Viking Hell – a place that does not exist. (Woke content detector 2024.)

The main issue with the list is that there is barely any nuance behind the criticism. Rather, it seems that individual occurrences, such as rainbow graffiti, make the game woke despite its overall message. As such, games with minor details like

Beauty is not only about physical appearance, but also about perceived personality traits. This is called the halo effect: people tend to associate physical attractiveness with positive characteristics such as intelligence, trustworthiness, happiness, and success. The phenomenon occurs even though there is no scientific evidence backing it up. (Gulati et al. 2024, 1–2; Tompkins & Martins 2021, 412; Voimala 2023, 19.) Conversely, ugliness (i.e. the absence of beautiful characteristics) is traditionally associated with evilness, madness, and danger (Dębek 2024).

Studies show that in games, female characters' physical appearance is more important than men's due to consumerism and patriarchal structures. This is also reflected in how players tend to be more willing to play a game if it features an attractive woman. Similar correlation could not be found with attractive male leads. (Carpenter 2022 ,31; Dębek 2024; Tompkins & Martins 2021, 412.)

Woke is often blamed if the players are not pleased with a female character's appearance (Bevan 2024; Hallamaa 2024; Koivuranta & Typpö 2024; Laukkanen 2024). For example, The Witcher 4 has not yet been published but is already facing backlash because of the protagonist Ciri, and more importantly, her looks. Between the events of The Witcher 3 and The Witcher 4, she has not only aged, but improvements in technology mean she now looks different, as seen in Figure 17.



Figure 17. Example of criticism about Ciri's appearance (Bevan 2024)

Several players instantly deemed the game “too woke” to be enjoyed as they were not happy with the gender or appearance of the character. Conversely, some players are looking forward to playing as Ciri, as she was a fan favourite in *The Witcher 3*. (Bevan 2024; Henley 2024.) In the game, Ciri is portrayed as resilient, brave, and capable, but also vengeful and a bit naïve (Mitra 2020). In short, she was a multi-dimensional and relatable character, who people enjoyed playing.

Female characters’ clothing is a recurring theme in critiques when it comes to judging their attractiveness. For example, a YouTube creator AndyPants Gaming (2024) reminisces about older games, where women were allowed to be “hot”. He refers to the old games *Saint’s Row* and *GTA*, which have notoriously featured sexist and sexualized portrayals of women, as seen in Figure 18.



Figure 18. *Saint’s Row* games feature sexualized women (Volition 2011)

Another creator Think Before You Sleep (2024) uses Dove’s campaign picture as an example of “ugly” female characters. Figure 19 pictures women with different body types, ethnicities, and disabilities. According to Dove (Dove.com), the campaign’s purpose is to promote diverse representation of girls and women in games to make them feel more included. However, the YouTuber points out the supposed low quality of these characters, claiming more detailed designs could

have been created with the game engine to make them more “attractive.” Rest of his criticism focuses mainly on the size of these women, which the creator deems unhealthy.



Figure 19. Dove’s campaign picture for diverse portrayal of women in video games (Dove)

Interestingly, several critics do not define what it means to be a “beautiful” or “ugly” woman in their opinion. Considering the stereotypical portrayal of women in video games, “beautiful” in these cases could be interpreted to mean a young, white, skinny, and scantily clad woman – that is, a character who was created to specifically please the heterosexual male player. This theory is backed up by a character designer Del Walker, who laments how his idea of a “beautiful” female character (Figure 20) was changed into something he does not consider attractive (Baculi 2024).



Figure 20. Character artist's idea for a female character was changed (Baculi 2024)

The inspiration picture for this female character was portraying a young, long-haired woman posing for the camera in a put-together outfit and makeup. However, the finished character is older, has short hair, is more covered up, and stands in a commanding pose. This in Del Walker's opinion makes her look like "grocery store auntie", meaning it as an insult. (Baculi 2024.) While the tweet is right in saying that there is room in games for different kinds of appearances, this becomes an issue considering the historically narrow representation of women as eye candy for men. Interestingly, Del Walker does not state when it would be appropriate time for the latter portrayal, nor does he explain why this so-called "grocery store auntie" character would make the game unenjoyable for the players.

Despite the amount of negative feedback, the criticism is not entirely related to woke. Aside from demanding diverse portrayal, the phenomenon is not about physical beauty or the absence of it. As Del Walker's reaction suggests, the real issue might lie somewhere deeper, such as the roles of these female characters.

6.2 Woke and female protagonists

The roles of female characters have shifted during the recent years, with them appearing as protagonists more often (Luo 2023, 134). This increase has not occurred without issues: while players have been requesting strong, capable female characters, the “strong female protagonist” is a stereotype in itself. This is sometimes referred to as “girlboss”. (Morse 2024; Watson 2024.)

“Girlboss” protagonist, also known as a *Mary Sue*, has been a recognized stereotype in other media as well ever since the 1800s. She is seemingly perfect with her skills and stellar morals, does not have any flaws or struggles, and is loved by all the other characters. (Miller 2023; Morse 2024.) In short, she is the exact opposite of a good protagonist that was discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, it is no wonder that this character has received criticism. However, these attributes would make any protagonist bad regardless of their gender.

Some players argue that strong women are unrealistic, since their gender is what makes them inherently weaker than men. Furthermore, these players claim that female characters should be portrayed struggling more with physical activities, such as Atsu from *Ghost of Yōtei* (Figure 21) with sword fighting. (Morse 2024; Watson 2024.) According to a Steam community page Woke content detector (2024), it is enough for a game to be woke (and thus “bad”) if a woman appears in a leading position. While struggles are indeed an important part of any protagonist’s journey, it is interesting to note that these qualities are so often detested in a female protagonist.



Figure 21. Atsu from Ghost of Yōtei (Sucker Punch Productions 2025)

There is danger in casting characters into stereotypical or token roles just to be able to call a game diverse (Haynes 2024). However, the criticism seems rather exaggerated considering such amount of concern is rarely expressed when a white man is cast as the lead. Indeed, there seems to exist a perception that female leads are pushing some kind of political agenda onto players (Watson 2024). While a one-dimensional portrayal of a protagonist is not encouraged, there is an argument to be had as to whether the real issue lies in the character's qualities or gender.

6.3 Woke and political agenda

Another major criticism with woke themes in games is the concern about their connection to politics. Several players claim they do not want political agenda pushed onto them, as they want to use games as a form of escapism. (AndyPants Gaming 2024; Dr_uberbabe 2024; Fenlon et al. 2022; Hallamaa 2024; Respawn.fi 2023; Senior et al. 2022; Think Before You Sleep 2024; Watson 2024.) However, the statement is rather ironic considering it could be argued that all games are political in some way or another. For example, war games like Call of Duty (Figure 22) allow the player to step into the shoes of a soldier and kill enemies, which is undoubtedly a political setting.



Figure 22. Call of Duty -series focuses on war (Activision 2023)

Similarly, capitalism's influence is seen across many games, where it is used as a mechanism for levelling up the character's weapons and gear. This can even seep into real life in the form of microtransactions, where players can use actual money to purchase in-game upgrades. Some games are outright inspired by political themes, such as Far Cry 5 with its doomsday cult, Life is Strange 2 with immigration issues, and so on. (Fenlon et al. 2022; Knuuttila & Mantila 2023, 12–21; Nove 2020.)

Like any other media, games reflect the studio and people behind it, as well as their values and the time when the game was produced. Hence, it is rare not to find any sort of message behind them. Some casual games, such as puzzle games, might be an exception, but political messaging can present itself in several subtle ways. For example, while fantasy games might consist of made-up worlds and creatures, they are often a reflection of socioeconomical issues of the real world. (Fenlon et al. 2022.)

Games have been criticised for their perceived harmful messaging for decades (Knuuttila & Mantila 2023, 16–17). As such, it is no wonder woke themes are also facing objections. There is room for debate of whether they have been included in games in a way that does not feel forced – that is, if they fit in the game's overall narrative or if the sole purpose is to spread political agenda without caring about other aspects. However, merely arguing that woke is political is not enough to

make the game unenjoyable. This can be seen in how people are willing to play war games without thinking about any statements they make yet might be upset about a rainbow flag appearing in them. Thus, the criticism could be interpreted as players not wanting their worldview to be challenged. (Fenlon et al. 2022.)

A game can include political views and still offer a place for escapism (Fenlon et al. 2022). Playing violent games might not automatically translate into violent behaviour but rather they are a way for the player to enjoy their free time without thinking too much about the game's agenda (Knuutila & Mantila 2023, 17–19). While people can be negatively impacted by what they see in media, the converse is also true. As Nove (2020) points out, games can teach the players about real issues and influence politics. After all, a message about inclusivity is arguably more positive than the one promoting war.

6.4 Cognitive bias

Psychology recognizes a phenomenon called cognitive bias. Biases are unconscious errors that influence people's judgement when processing information, thus resulting in inaccurate perceptions. (Cherry 2024; Da Silva et al. 2023, 1.) This explains why the person criticizing a game sees individual objects as woke agenda, rather than taking the whole context into account. For example, Angela from *Silent Hill 2* was sexually abused in the past, and her covered-up appearance reflects how she does not want unnecessary attention from men. One player interpreted her modest attire in the game's remake as a symbol of woke "destroying" the character, and modified Angela according to his own tastes, as seen in Figure 23. This modified version's appearance is arguably the exact opposite of how Angela would look like, according to her backstory. However, her outfit in the remake is similar to the one seen in the original game, thus not making it woke. (Laukkanen 2024.)



Figure 23. Silent Hill fan modified Angela to suit his own tastes (Laukkanen 2024)

Cognitive biases are a natural occurrence, as they are used to make complex situations understandable. Like stereotypes, they are mental shortcuts to help with problem-solving but can have negative consequences as well. Improperly categorizing new information according to previous knowledge may lead to overlooking important details or misinterpreting the situation completely. (Cherry 2024; Da Silva et al. 2023, 2.)

As discussed in Chapters 3–5, certain stereotypes and archetypes have existed in games throughout their history, partly due to male-dominated focus. These qualities have paved way for certain expectations and norms when it comes to character portrayals. By deviating from the pattern, even in the slightest manner, it is easy for a woke critic to interpret it as the agenda being forcefully pushed onto them. For example, *Assassin's Creed: Shadows* was accused of wokeness solely for featuring a black main character as a samurai, all while ignoring the other protagonist option, who was Japanese. It was later pointed out by the studio that the black character was based on a real historical figure, rather than included as a way of promoting woke. (O'Brien 2024.) As not only are the cultural norms but also the player base shifting to a more diverse one, it is only natural

that the representation changes with them. Hence, it can be seen as positive that some studios are willing to adjust.

7 COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN 2020'S

Even though female characters have not historically been seen in the role of a protagonist, this has fortunately started to change. In the next couple of years, there will be several game releases featuring women as main characters, such as *Retrieval*, *Spine - This Is Gun Fu*, *Judas*, *Wuchang: Fallen Feathers*, and *Grand Theft Auto 6* (Figure 24) (Hitchcock 2025). However, as previously mentioned in Chapter 6, there has been a backlash against female portrayals in games (Bevan 2023; Bevan 2024; Hallamaa 2024; Haynes 2024). As such, the research question for this study is: are the female protagonists ruining the games made in the 2020s by being “too woke”, or are the critics misogynistic? The following case studies aim to answer this question and provide a closer look on the state of female game protagonists in the 2020s.



Figure 24. Several upcoming game releases will feature a female protagonist (Hitchcock 2025)

A comparative case study is used to analyse three ready-made characters. This form of qualitative research examines a small, specific group of subjects. It is beneficial in understanding how the studied phenomena show up in context – in this case, games. The same qualities of each subject are compared based on the theoretical framework. (Bartlett & Vavrus 2017, 900; Bronwyn et al. 2005; Esser

& Vliegenthart 2017, 2–4.) In this study, the qualities are limited to appearance, personality, backstory, and role. Gameplay mechanics, customisable protagonists, and the games' commercial performances are not analysed. The chosen features are reflected upon both woke themes and stereotypical portrayal of female characters. The goal is to find out if and how their influence is present in the characters, and whether this is positive or negative. According to the critics, the presence of “woke” elements should make these characters “bad”, i.e. the opposite of what is considered a good protagonist discussed in Chapter 2.

Two of the protagonists, Ellie and Saga, are from AAA games published in 2020 and 2023 respectively. The third character Melinoë is from an upcoming 2025 indie release, but the game has been in early access since May 2024. When performing a comparative case study, it is important to keep in mind that the context in which these protagonists are presented affects the results (Bartlett & Vavrus 2017, 908; Esser & Vliegenthart 2017, 2). By choosing these subjects from different years, the study provides a cross-section of the state of female protagonists in the current decade. This also ensures that the presence of woke phenomenon can be examined across separate games in separate instances. (Bartlett & Vavrus 2017, 911.) The protagonists are chosen for having had their share of woke used in a negative sense (Hallamaa 2024; Henley 2023; Woke content detector 2024).

While the results of a comparative case study cannot be used as a universal truth, they provide a holistic insight into the differences and similarities of the subjects studied. Comparisons are beneficial in understanding how the same phenomenon appears in different contexts. Learning how to better recognize these patterns helps finding alternative solutions in the future. The method also offers valuable information for further research. (Bronwyn et al. 2005; Esser & Vliegenthart 2017, 2–4)

7.1 Ellie Williams

Ellie Williams is the protagonist of *The Last of Us Part II* (published in 2020), sharing the title with the soldier Abby. The game takes place four years after the

first instalment, which focuses on Ellie and her guardian Joel working together to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. Part II tells about Ellie's quest for revenge after the murder of Joel. (The Last of Us Wiki.)

7.1.1 Appearance

Ellie is a 19-year-old woman living in a disease-ridden world. She looks much like a real person of that age, without any unnecessarily sexualized features (Figure 25). She is still clearly a woman, i.e. she has features that are typically associated with womanhood, such as long hair and slim body.



Figure 25. Ellie Williams (Sony Interactive Entertainment 2020)

While not feminine, her outfits are practical and suitable for the game's setting. For example, her most memorable outfit features jeans, Converse shoes and a collared t-shirt, which she switches to a long-sleeved jacket while patrolling in the cold climate of Wyoming. The remastered version of the game features a set of new skins, all of which are reflective of Ellie's story and personality (Figure 26): a

spacesuit gifted to her by Joel after telling him she wanted to be an astronaut, a pride top which showcases her sexuality, a print top that is a reference to the TV adaptation of the game, and so on (Moiseyev 2024).



Figure 26. Some of Ellie's outfits (Sony Interactive Entertainment 2020)

Other external features showcase Ellie's journey and change through the events of the game. On her right arm, she has a moth tattoo which she got to hide the bite mark that would reveal her immunity to the Cordyceps infection. By the end of the game, she loses two fingers from her left hand while fighting Abby. This prevents her from playing the guitar Joel had previously given her, symbolizing Ellie losing the connection to him. (The Last of Us Wiki.)

7.1.2 Backstory

At the age of fourteen, Ellie discovered she was immune to the infection that was turning people into monsters and causing an apocalypse. A friend of her mother believed her immunity was key in producing a vaccine against the infection and tasked Joel to take Ellie to Salt Lake City. The trip became a year-long survival journey, during which the two bonded. This resulted in Joel caring for Ellie so much that he refused to let her die to create the vaccine. Joel killed the head surgeon and escaped with Ellie, eventually settling down in Wyoming. (The Last of Us Wiki.)

In the second game Ellie is briefly able to enjoy a stable life and focus on achievements beyond survival. This development is interrupted by the dead surgeon's daughter, Abby. When Abby murders Joel, Ellie sets out on a quest for revenge. This violent rampage leads her to become merciless and cruel while struggling to ease the pain of her loss. Her behaviour affects even those close to Ellie, forcing her to face the consequences of her actions (Favis 2020; The Last of Us Wiki.) Eventually, Ellie's story becomes about an initially good person driven to do bad deeds (Birch 2020).

7.1.3 Personality

In the first game Ellie was portrayed as more optimistic and innocent than the cynical Joel, while still showing her temperamental side (The Last of Us Wiki). The game's writer Neil Druckmann claims this was done to highlight their opposite qualities, with Ellie bringing more feminine values to the dynamic. (Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 3.) However, she loses her childlike traits after Joel's murder in the second game.

Following his death, Ellie becomes more violent and merciless, even torturing or killing people for information. According to Druckmann, this dissonance was done on purpose to emphasize the brutality of the post-apocalyptic world Ellie lives in as a part of her character development (Favis 2020). However, she is also shown to have a softer side, as even Ellie herself is sometimes horrified by her own actions. The violent scenes are also contrasted by more tender moments shared between Ellie and her girlfriend Dina. (Birch 2020; Favis 2020.)

While Ellie was more dependent on Joel in the first game, the second part shows her being more than capable on her own (Favis 2020). Ellie can fight and use a gun and shows survival skills in a post-apocalyptic world. She is intelligent, brave, and actively takes part in the plot events. Although perfectly competent in a fight, her strength is not portrayed as unrealistic, as it takes her effort to beat enemies and even gets overpowered by them multiple times. Her best assets are her speed, agility, and resilience, as she can easily evade foes and endure quite a

formidable amount of physical pain. Perhaps Ellie's most important quality is her immunity to the infection that transforms people into violent monsters. (The Last of Us Wiki.)

When she is not punching enemies, Ellie is shown to enjoy artistic hobbies, most notably playing guitar. This pastime even becomes a symbol of her connection to Joel, as he is the one to teach her the skill. (Kennedy 2021; Luo 2023, 134; The Last of Us Wiki). The contrast between her sympathetic, humane qualities and the darker tendencies gives complexity to Ellie's personality, making her a multi-dimensional protagonist.

7.1.4 Role

While the first game portrayed Ellie as a young girl under the protection of Joel, she is mostly on her own in the second part. Now a young woman, Ellie's relationship has become strained following the discovery of Joel's brutal actions at the end of the first game. (The Last of Us Wiki.) He still acts as Ellie's father figure, emphasizing the power imbalance between the two characters (Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 3).

Even when not present, Ellie's role is still dependent on Joel as his death serves as the motivation for her actions. The game's narrative is all about revenge and how Ellie changes as a result (Favis 2020). Thus, her major personality shift can be understandably jarring to the fans of the first game. However, it is interesting to note that the character was generally more well-received when she was younger, under the protection of a man, and displayed "softer" personality traits, such as hope and humour, as opposed to Joel's gruffness. She was not without anger or guilt even then, but these qualities become much more emphasized in the second instalment. It could even be argued that Joel's moral ambiguity has influenced Ellie to become more violent. (Birch 2020; GameCentral 2021; Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 3.) However, this is contrasted in the final showdown with Abby (Figure 27), as the memory of Joel is what makes Ellie release Abby instead of killing her (Birch 2020).



Figure 27. Ellie fighting Abby (Sony Interactive Entertainment 2020)

Some of the criticism has stemmed from the notion that as the main character, Ellie is supposed to be likeable. Instead, players have pointed out how she is an “evil” protagonist, as the other characters seem accepting of her quest for revenge (Birch 2020; GameCentral 2021; Solbakk 2024). Birch (2020) even suggests that Ellie’s brutal actions could have been explored deeper in Abby’s sections as an opportunity to show how the hero can be a villain in someone else’s story. This ultimately does not happen, as the timelines of the two protagonists do not overlap. As it is, the game treats Abby as the main villain while often downplaying Ellie’s own actions.

While this would have been an interesting take for the character, Ellie is still far from a traditional hero who saves the day by defeating the big bad. Instead, she lets her emotions get better of her after witnessing a traumatizing event – an understandable, albeit rather questionable reaction for a protagonist. This portrayal also breaks the stereotype of women carrying their anger in silence, which could be an empowering experience for some players (Mustafina & Ismat 2024, 3). The quest for revenge is also somewhat justified, as Joel and his bond with Ellie were a major part of the first game (Birch 2020).

There is room for debate if Ellie’s story could have used some improvements to better get the point across about her being a sympathetic protagonist. However, the narrative could also be interpreted as a cautionary tale about who the player

should not look up to (GameCentral 2021). By the end of the game, even Ellie herself realizes that her violent actions drive her loved ones away and wants to repair the damage (The Last of Us Wiki).

7.2 Saga Anderson

Saga Anderson is one of the protagonists in Alan Wake 2 (published in 2023), sharing the role with the titular character. She is an FBI agent with supernatural telepathic abilities, who arrives at Bright Falls to investigate ritualistic murders. The crimes lead her to find the missing novelist Alan Wake, whose manuscript is becoming to life around them. (Alan Wake Wiki.)

7.2.1 Appearance

Saga is a 35-year-old woman, who looks her age with some subtle lines already starting to appear on her face (Figure 28). She dresses in an FBI work jacket, warm jumper, and jeans. Her long hair adds a touch of traditional femininity to her appearance, but it has been put into a ponytail in keeping with the practicality of her outfit.



Figure 28. Saga Anderson (Epic Games 2023)

Despite Saga's appearance being very realistic and fitting to the game's setting, it has not been exempted from criticism. The biggest issue has been her race, as an old trailer showed her as a white woman. This led to players questioning the change in Saga's ethnicity, and it was not long before the involvement of a consult studio, Sweet Baby, was discovered. In the players' opinion, this made Saga's appearance a part of woke agenda, consequently ruining the game. (Hallamaa 2024.)

However, no further elaboration was given on the critics' part as to how the game would have been better if Saga had been white. The game is also set in a world that does not conform to the laws of time and space, thus allowing strange occurrences (Hallamaa 2024). Consequently, it can be assumed that the main issue was not the skin colour but Sweet Baby's involvement, as the players assumed the studio was trying to force woke agenda onto them. This theory was backed up by the game's director, who stated that even without Sweet Baby, Saga would not have been white (Rowley 2024). It could even be argued that Saga being black makes more sense than her being white, as her father is presumed to be a black man (Alan Wake Wiki).

7.2.2 Backstory

Saga was raised by a single mother Freya Anderson, who is assumed to have had her with an interdimensional entity called Warlin Door. Saga inherited her supernatural ability of True Sight from her grandfather Tor Anderson. However, her mother discouraged Saga from using her gift, presumably due to Freya and Tor's previous falling out. As an adult, Saga joined the FBI where she could utilize her ability, gaining fame for being able to solve even the most difficult cases. In civil life she has a husband and a daughter. (Alan Wake Wiki.)

While working at the FBI, Saga and her partner Casey were tasked to investigate ritualistic murders at Bright Falls. This led to them finding a manuscript which explicitly detailed events from their life while also seemingly predicting the future. Saga's efforts in solving the mystery resulted in finding Alan Wake, who had been

missing for thirteen years. A discussion with Alan revealed that he used his manuscripts to escape the Dark Place, which consequently altered Saga's life. (Alan Wake Wiki.)

7.2.3 Personality

Saga is calm, level-headed and uses logic in crime-solving. Even though she is thrown into a horror setting with supernatural elements, she remains focused and unfazed by the events. (Castle 2023.) At the same time, some of her comments suggest she has a playful side as well (Alan Wake Wiki).

It could be argued that Saga's seemingly fearless attitude has the possibility to make her appear unrealistic. Indeed, her voice acting has received some criticism as certain players claimed it lacked emotion at times (Reddit.com 2024). However, as Castle (2023) points out, Saga's personality is a refreshing change to other horror protagonists who might be quicker to fall apart when facing scary events.

7.2.4 Role

Saga's role is heavily dependent on Alan. Their storylines get intertwined, echoing and foreshadowing each other as the player can partially choose the order in which their sections are played. This adds an interesting twist to the classic hero's journey that is heavily referenced throughout the game. (Alan Wake Wiki.)

Alan can alter reality by writing manuscripts, which is how he escapes the Dark Place. However, his writing affects Saga's life as well, throwing her in the middle of a horror story. This angers Saga as her daughter is killed as a result, but she eventually ends up helping Alan to rewrite the story so that no one dies. Consequently, Saga is needed to free Alan from the Dark Presence and put an end to the loop he is trapped in (Figure 29). (Alan Wake Wiki.)



Figure 29. Saga frees Alan by shooting him (Epic Games 2023)

Players have praised the dichotomy between the two protagonists, claiming their opposite personalities and gameplay elements complement each other well. While Alan's storyline is characterized by his mental struggles, Saga keeps her cool while solving mysteries and her own dark past. At the same time, some are of the opinion that Saga's sections are given more detail than Alan's, making them superior to his. (Fiddis 2023; Reddit.com 2024).

Saga is argued to turn Alan into a side character in his own story, as her sections are more grounded with their crime-solving mechanics. This is not necessarily regarded negatively, as many players seem to have enjoyed her gameplay more. In fact, majority of the criticism regarding Saga's sections seemingly stems from the repetitiveness of her puzzles and not her as a character. (Fiddis 2023; Rathnasinghe 2024; Reddit.com 2024.)

7.3 Melinoë

Princess of the Underworld Melinoë is the protagonist of Hades II (in early access, full release in May 2025). Her story sets in motion when the titan Chronos breaks free from his prison and takes control of the Underworld. Melinoë is sent to train with the witch Hecate to become a titan slayer and ultimately defeat Chronos. Being a chthonic nymph, Melinoë's abilities are associated with ghosts and nightmares. (Hades Wiki.)

7.3.1 Appearance

Melinoë's design includes many features that are associated with stereotypical female portrayal. She is young, slim, and wears a short dress and makeup (Figure 30). However, it should be noted that Hades franchise is renowned for all the characters being attractive on Western Eurocentric beauty standards regardless of their gender (Meehan 2024; Sledge 2024). The second game seems to be expanding the portrayal of different body types all while celebrating their physical beauty, which in the case of Melinoë, means she has a magical, prosthetic arm.

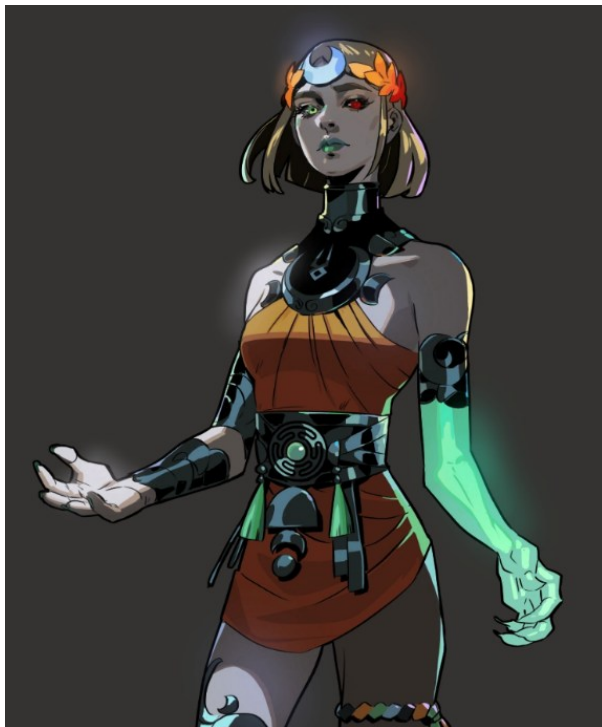


Figure 30. Melinoë (Supergiant Games 2024)

The elements of Melinoë's outfit reflect her backstory and affiliations in the game. The braided cord on her left leg along with lunar-shaped decorations are an indication of her association with the Silver Sisters, who are a group of moon goddesses. Her dress colour is inspired by an Orphic hymn where she is described as "saffron-cloaked". The green tassels hanging from the dress match those worn by Hecate, her mentor. Like her older brother Zagreus, Melinoë has heterochromia with one eye colour coming from each parent and wears a glowing

laurel wreath on her head. Her left arm was lost in an accident preceding the game's events. (Hades Wiki.)

7.3.2 Backstory

Melinoë was born to Hades and Persephone in the Underworld sometime after the events of the first game. Soon after that, the titan Chronos escaped from captivity and imprisoned Melinoë's family along with the rest of the House of Hades members. Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft, took baby Melinoë and was able to flee with her to a safe place at the Crossroads. (Hades Wiki.)

During their time in hiding, Hecate learned of a prophecy that predicted Melinoë would eventually overthrow Chronos. This made Hecate decide to train Melinoë in witchcraft to one day fulfil her task. Melinoë's childhood was filled with extensive training, leading her to become narrowly focused on her mission and acting fearlessly while trying to achieve it. Because of never knowing her true family, Melinoë grew up feeling like something was missing. Only once she finished her training and set out on the journey to Underworld, she finally met some of her Olympian relatives who decided to help her along the way. (Hades Wiki; Tang 2024.)

7.3.3 Personality

Melinoë's defining trait is her obsession with killing Chronos. Her capturing her family gives Melinoë the reason to act, as she is driven by vengeance and the need to fulfil the prophecy. While this trait makes Melinoë fearless in the face of danger, it has also drawbacks. Because of the high stakes, she constantly doubts whether she is ready for the task and puts herself down whenever she fails. However, this also gives Melinoë motivation to improve her skills. After all, her biggest goal is to meet her long-lost family. (Tang 2024; Randell et al. 2024.)

Despite her upbringing, Melinoë has not lost her kindness or polite manners. She is helpful and regards everyone she meets with respect. These traits lead to a certain level of naivety, which shows up as somewhat idealized thinking and

curiosity. Melinoë is a dedicated and hard-working student but has a humorous side as well, occasionally making jokes or sarcastic comments. As a witch, she is also an animal lover and has her own pets and familiars that assist her during fights. (Hades Wiki.) Melinoë has the possibility to pursue a romance with either a man or a woman (Childers 2025).

7.3.4 Role

With the game still being in early access, not everything is yet known about Melinoë's storyline. However, it seems that several aspects of the first game are reversed in the second instalment. Regarding Melinoë, this means changing her fighting style, storyline, and goal to contrast that of her brother's.

While Zagreus was actively trying to escape the Underworld, Melinoë's goal is to break into it to kill Chronos. As a witch, she does this by utilizing magic as her main weapon instead of a sword. Even with Melinoë being a fierce fighter, it is interesting to note this contrast in fighting styles between different genders, as Melinoë is less physical. (Hitchcock 2025; Josi 2024; Randell et al. 2024; Tang 2024.) A completely new addition to her abilities is the different clothing options offered by Arachne. Along with visual upgrades, these dresses (Figure 31) provide Melinoë with powerful passive effects. (Buchalter 2024.) While a common practice in other games and an interesting addition to Hades II as well, this element focusing on physical appearance was notably missing from the male protagonist's story.



Figure 31. Melinoë has different dress options (Supergiant Games 2024)

Both games' narratives revolve heavily around reuniting families with the Olympians helping along the way. In Melinoë's case, the stakes are higher as she is prophesied to fight against an evil force threatening both her home and Olympus. This serves as both a motivation and a weakness, as Melinoë feels unworthy whenever she fails the task, thinking killing Chronos is her only purpose for existing. (Hades Wiki; Tang 2024.) As such, Melinoë has an added layer of personal motivation for succeeding and getting to know the family she does not remember (Josi 2024).

Melinoë is affiliated with several other women. These include a group of moon goddesses and her mentor Hecate. The dynamic with the latter character serves an interesting contrast to the strained father-son dynamic from the first game, as Hecate acts encouragingly towards Melinoë. (Hades Wiki; Josi 2024.) Introducing this many important female characters has not gone without criticism about their amount, but the cast seems to be rather equally split between two genders (Nemo 2024). As witches have traditionally been women, the emphasis on them may be a reason behind the biased thinking. It could also hint towards sexist attitudes, as some of the critics focus specifically on these women's physical appearances (Nemo 2024).

7.4 Case comparisons

It might be a matter of coincidence considering the small sampling, but it is interesting to note that all these female characters are protagonists in sequels after a man has had their turn. However, it could also hint towards a larger trend, as seen in a listing of upcoming releases featuring women in the main role (Hitchcock 2025). While all three examples have been criticized for their wokeness, the reality is not so black and white.

7.4.1 Appearance

Each character's outfit and design are clearly reflective of them as a person as well as the game's setting. Both Ellie and Saga wear practical attire that lack sexualized features: Saga has a work jacket, while Ellie changes her outfits

according to the climate. All three have personalized elements in their appearances: Ellie has a tattoo, Saga wears a colourful jumper, and the trinkets in Melinoë's outfit represent her affiliations. However, there are still stereotypical elements present, particularly in Melinoë's case. The dress she wears is barely long enough to cover her, not to mention her being young, slim, and white-skinned. It is notable how the only protagonist wearing a dress is sexualized the most, even though there are different ways a character can appear feminine without a revealing outfit. Interestingly, it is still Saga's character that has received the most criticism about her appearance. This suggests racist attitudes being prevalent in the gamer community, as Saga's race has no effect on the gameplay.

Though Melinoë's exact age is unknown, she appears to be on the younger end of the spectrum along with Ellie, who is under 20. Saga is the oldest at 35 while still maintaining quite youthful appearance. There is little variety in the characters' body types, with all of them being either average or slim build. Melinoë has a prosthetic arm which adds a bit of diversity, although it seems to be functioning like a normal one due to magic. While coming from different cultural backgrounds, only one of the women is black. Based on these observations, there is room for more diverse female protagonists that not only represent different ages and body types, but races as well.

7.4.2 Backstory

All three backstories are clearly defined, and their effects are reflected on the characters. Each of them gives the characters motivation to act while also setting them susceptible to drawbacks. That is not to say there are not any stereotypical elements present.

Ellie's survival in the first game was largely dependent on the older male character's protection, which falls under the stereotypical portrayal of women. Likewise, Melinoë being prophesied to overthrow the big bad is an old, rather clichéd storytelling method. However, the whole game revolves around Greek mythologies, making the prophecy somewhat justifiable. There seem to be no

issues regarding Saga's background, rather, she is portrayed as capable and turning her odd abilities into working to her advantage. It is only later that her story becomes intertwined with a male character. No woke themes could be detected from any of the backstories.

7.4.3 Personality

The protagonists' personalities seem to be complex with both positive and negative traits present. An exception to this is perhaps Saga, with her being almost too stoic at times. However, as stated before, her calm demeanour is a refreshing change compared to many other horror protagonists. It also displays her professionalism, which has been generally praised. Still, there is danger in making a character one-dimensional if their traits are not properly balanced.

Ellie and Melinoë's strengths and flaws are more equally divided. They both show deep care and affection to the people close to them, while being merciless to their enemies. Ellie is riddled with the pain of loss, while Melinoë is haunted by self-doubt. These qualities make the characters appear more human while also giving them motivation to fight for their goals. The fighting abilities are realistically portrayed in their respective contexts, as both women struggle against powerful enemies.

While Ellie's personality shift has been criticized, her display of rage is equally unique to a female character as is Saga's calmness. Thus, an argument could be made about these qualities being woke, as female protagonists are not often seen expressing them in games. After all, woke aims for a diverse representation. However, balanced traits as well as the full range of human emotions are qualities that are encouraged to be present in any protagonist, not just women. Nevertheless, these characterizations are a step in the right direction.

Another change can be seen in the protagonists' sexualities and romance. Saga is married to a man, but not to the other protagonist, Alan. Ellie is a lesbian, while Melinoë can romance either a man or a woman. These portrayals reverse the stereotypical role of the woman as the male lead's love interest, while also giving

visibility to LGBTQ+ members. At the same time, it is interesting to note that two out of three leads belong to a minority, contrasting the historically heteronormative portrayal of game characters.

7.4.4 Role

As previously stated, all three women are protagonists in sequels. It is notable that in each case, a man has been the lead in the first game. To increase equality, there could be different gender options, including non-binaries, for the player to choose from even in the first instalment. If this is not possible, developers should challenge their beliefs about the default option so often being male.

Multiple protagonists are present in two of the analysed cases. While Ellie's counterpart is another woman, *Saga* shares the spotlight with a man. Alan and Joel both influence the female protagonist's stories even when not physically present. The plot of *The Last of Us Part II* as well as Ellie's character growth depend on Joel's death. While *Saga* does not necessarily rely on Alan in crime-solving, they both need each other to survive through the horror story they are trapped in. Interestingly, the whole ordeal originates from Alan's actions, and it is *Saga* who finally frees him. As such, she is an active protagonist – more specifically, a black protagonist, which is a minority within the minority of female leads. Melinoë's only major association with men is having Chronos as her enemy, otherwise she is affiliated with multiple women. It is still worth noting that both her and *Saga*'s franchises are named after men (*Hades* and *Alan Wake*, respectively).

7.5 Conclusions on the case studies

The analysis shows that both stereotypical and woke elements are present in each of the three protagonists. To illustrate this, two graphs were created. While the sampling is small and thus cannot be scaled for larger groups, the graphs provide an interesting insight into the occurrences of both phenomena. A point was given each time either quality was present in one of the analysed categories.

Stereotypical traits were evaluated according to those listed in Chapter 3. Similarly, woke elements were compared to the ones discussed in Chapter 5. It should be noted that woke points were not given to qualities that the players criticized in Chapter 6, as many of these features (such as beauty) do not relate to the phenomenon or are subjective. The graphs can be seen in Figure 32.

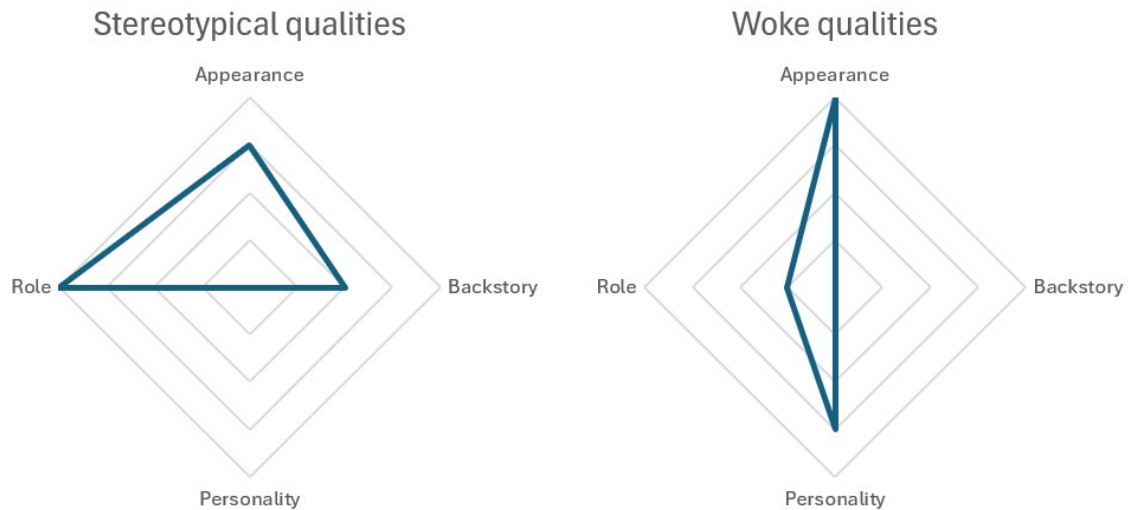


Figure 32. Stereotypical (left) and woke qualities (right) of female protagonists

According to the analysis, most woke qualities are present in characters' appearances and personalities. In contrast, most stereotypical elements are seen in roles and backstories. Interestingly, stereotypical features can be found in appearances, even though they also scored high in woke points.

Some qualities, such as personality traits, are rather difficult to analyse in terms of woke. This is because woke is an ideology meant to criticize societal issues, and if not explicitly present in a character (for example, in the form of activism), may be hard to judge. In the graph, one combined woke point was given to the portrayal of Ellie and Saga's personalities. While their direct connection to the phenomenon leaves room for debate, these portrayals are a step towards female protagonists' more diverse representation.

To answer the research question, woke does not ruin these protagonists. They all possess woke traits, but not in a negative manner. Rather, they mostly represent the same values as the phenomenon promotes: racial equality, sexual diversity,

and feminism. Thus, they add much needed variety to the female protagonists' representation. However, each woman still possesses stereotypical traits, but their absence does not automatically turn the characters woke, nor does their gender. There is still a long way to go for the developers to create truly diverse protagonists. These findings suggest that the criticism against female game protagonists' wokeness is rooted in misogyny, since the characters do not entirely conform to patriarchal norms.

8 PLAYERS' EXPECTATIONS FROM A PROTAGONIST

With the amount of criticism woke has faced, it is important to turn the attention towards players. As established in Chapter 7, female protagonists still possess stereotypical elements even if they are called "too woke" by some. It seems that any detail deviating from women's historically narrow portrayal gets these characters labelled. This begs the question of whether the players truly wish to see more stereotypical characters in the main role even if such portrayal is often negatively regarded, or if the real problem lies in the characters' gender.

As a continuation to the research question presented in Chapter 7, players' expectations towards game protagonists are examined. The aim is to answer the secondary research question: do the players want to see complex, multi-dimensional protagonists, or do superficial qualities matter to them more? The hypothesis is that the players' expectations should line up with the good protagonist qualities that were listed in Chapter 2. If they do, the criticism about female protagonists' wokeness is likely rooted in misogyny than anything else. By exploring these opinions, the two studies aim to form a holistic understanding of woke's effects on female protagonists and how to approach these themes in the future.

8.1 Survey

A survey is used to map out opinions, as it is a flexible and versatile method for collecting data (McCombes 2019). In this case, it provides information from the players themselves. The study is cross-sectional, meaning it is performed once

with multiple participants. This ensures variety between respondents to help gain a wide perspective of the subject. Online cross-sectional study is also a fast and cost-effective tool for this purpose and its results can be used in further research. However, being a qualitative method, some of the answers are subjective and may not be generalized. (Goodfellow 2023, 1312; Thomas 2020.)

Selection criteria for participating in the survey is for the respondents to have some kind of background or interest in gaming. This is done to ensure the results are applicable to the research (Goodfellow 2023, 1311). A questionnaire (Appendix 1) is sent to XAMK game designer students as well as several other acquaintances of the author. All of them have previous knowledge about game protagonists. Aside from age and gender, no personal data from the respondents is collected to make them feel more comfortable in telling their honest opinions (McCombes 2019). The results of the survey are reflected on woke themes to find out if the criticism towards the movement's influence in female game protagonists is valid, or if it is rooted in misogyny. However, no mentions of woke are included to eliminate biased answers (Bhandari 2021). Similarly, gender is referenced only when asking how important it is for the players to be able to choose it themselves. The questionnaire does not ask about the protagonists' playability regarding the games' mechanics, nor does it consider customizable protagonists.

To ensure the questionnaire has enough variety yet stays concise, it is divided into six different sections consisting of both open-ended and close-ended questions (Goodfellow 2023, 1312). Close-ended questions are placed first for easy collection of categorial variables. These include both nominal and ordinal variables, which are used to map out the participants' genders and ages in the first section. (Bhandari 2021.) The second section asks the respondents to rank the protagonist's qualities from most to least important. These qualities are chosen according to the ones depicted in Chapter 2. Similarly, the annoying qualities in section three are presented as opposites of the important ones, which the respondents are also asked to rank.

Open-ended questions are placed last, as they require more time and effort to answer and thus could turn participants away from the survey if asked first (Bhandari 2021). The fourth section asks the respondents to explain in their own words which qualities they enjoy or dislike in a game protagonist. The fifth section focuses specifically on relatability and how important it is for the respondents, if they find it important at all. The final section is optional, asking about the favourite and least favourite game protagonist of the respondents. This section provides the most subjective and unscalable answers, but it is interesting to see if any similarities can be found in the results.

8.2 Results

Twenty-five people answered the questionnaire. As such, the scalability of it remains minor. However, there was some variation among the respondents, which helped provide different perspectives. Figure 33 shows that the respondents' ages ranged from 20 to over 40 years old, with 31–35 years old being the largest group. Over half of the respondents identified as male, while 36% identified as female and 8% as other.

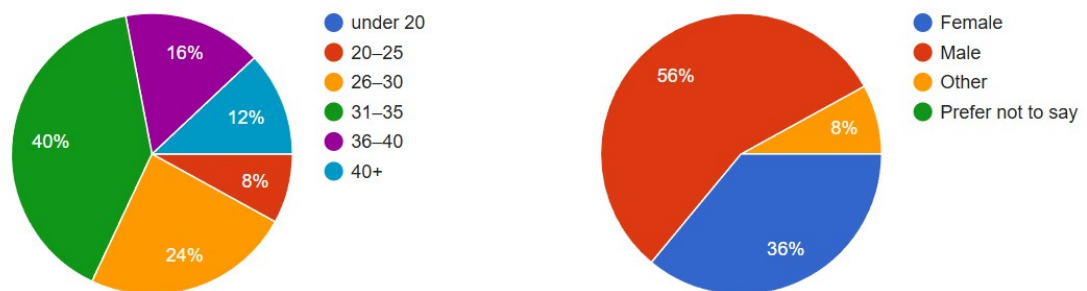


Figure 33. Age and gender of the respondents

Correlation could be found when the ranking of the most important qualities was compared to the ones discussed in Chapter 2. As seen in Figure 34, personality, backstory, dialogue, appearance, and relatability were regarded as the highest. However, their importance differed between genders: For example, backstory was ranked among the most important qualities by almost 56% of women, whereas cliché backstory was not an issue for almost 29% of men.

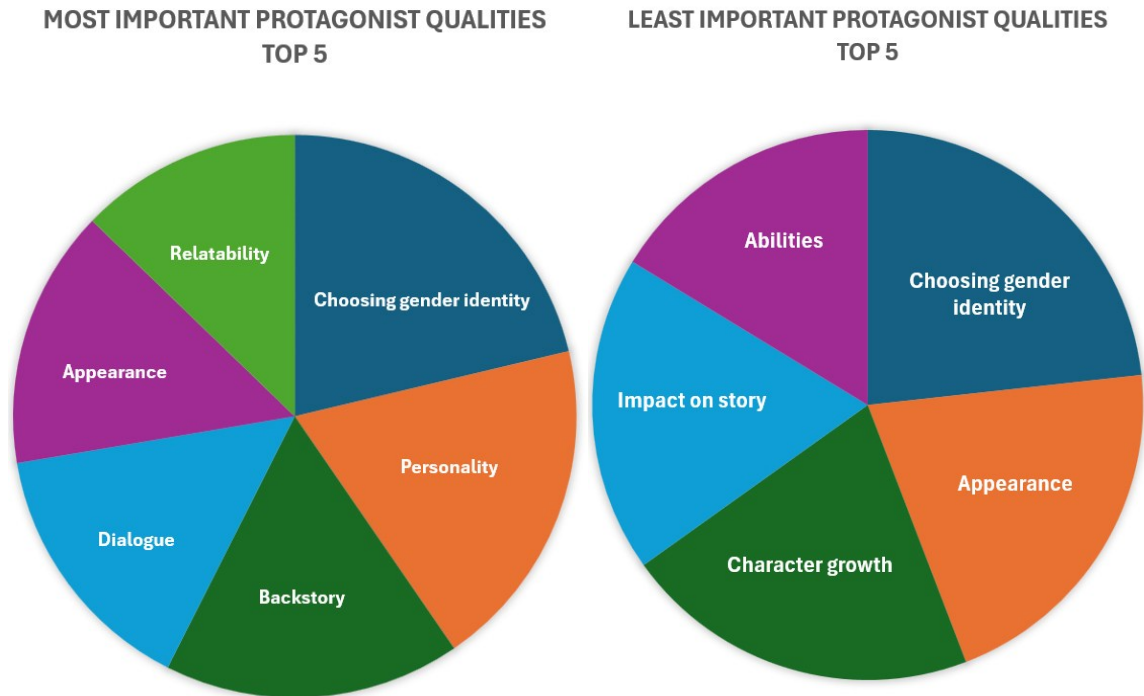


Figure 34. Players' top 5 of most and least important protagonist qualities

Interesting similarities could be found among both ends of the spectrum. The ability to choose gender identity as well as the protagonist's appearance were both ranked among the most and least important qualities. This division becomes more drastic when examining the answers according to the respondents' genders: 67% of women ranked gender identity as least important, whereas 36 % of men ranked it as both most and least important. 50% of others ranked it as most important. Perhaps surprisingly, gender was mentioned only twice in the open answers, despite ranking high in importance. One respondent explicitly stated disliking white male leads, while the other thought that choosing gender would be nice, but not a must.

Appearance was the preferred quality among almost 29% of men, whereas 33% of women and 50% of others ranked it among least important features. However, the questionnaire did not ask the respondents to clarify what they meant by this, and thus it might have had different interpretations. Nevertheless, this and the responses to gender identity could mean that while some players want a customizable avatar, the good protagonist qualities (complexity, relatability etc.) are appreciated regardless of the character's gender. Some answers to the open

questions support this theory. One respondent further clarifies appearance mattering more if the player can see the character all the time, whereas in first-person games it is not that essential.

Majority of the answers to the open questions stressed the meaning of an interesting, unique protagonist who is authentic, memorable, has a well-balanced personality, and fits into the game. However, a few respondents claim that some qualities have different levels of importance between game genres. This might explain the contradiction between some of the open answers and rankings. According to the former, learning from mistakes is an important aspect of a protagonist's journey, yet character growth was ranked low in meaning.

The ranking of the most annoying qualities (Figure 35) supports the previous findings for the most part, as they are the opposites of the most important qualities. It can be interpreted that the protagonist being passive and breaking immersion make their relatability suffer. However, there were some conflicting findings among the least annoying qualities.

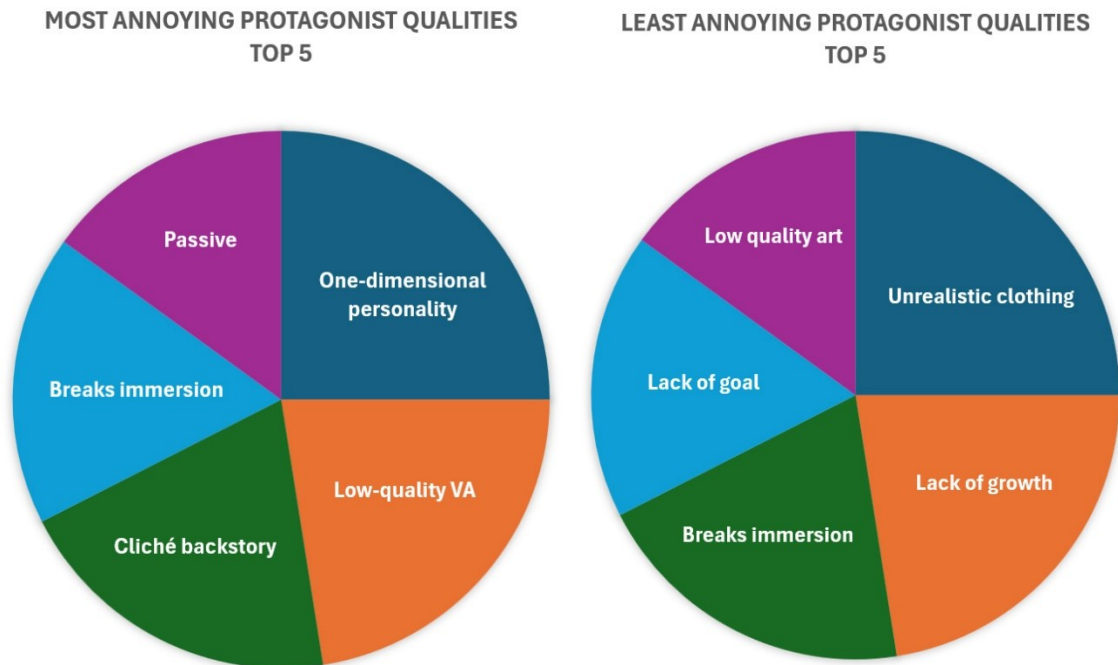


Figure 35. Players' top 5 of most and least annoying protagonist qualities

Protagonist breaking immersion was ranked among both the most and least annoying qualities. In the questionnaire, breaking immersion was defined as acting unrealistically, which might have led to different interpretations depending on the game's context. This is somewhat supported by the open answers: while others were annoyed by it, some claimed the game genre and setting also played a part. Interestingly, the protagonist's passivity was regarded negatively, yet their lack of growth or impact on the story did not seem to bother players much. This contradicted the open answers, many of which claimed character growth to be important. It is also notable that 64% of those who ranked the quality irrelevant were men.

Perhaps the most interesting split happened among the responses to the importance of relatability. While generally regarded as an essential quality, it did not matter to 52% of the respondents (Figure 36). Again, the answers were unevenly split between genders: while relatability was important to 100% of others, it did not matter to 67% of women. Men's opinions were divided in half.

Is it important for you to be able to relate to a game protagonist?

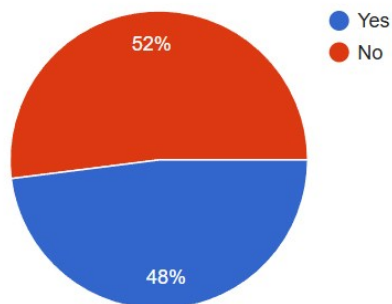


Figure 36. The importance of protagonist's relatability divides players

Open answers bring clarity to this dissonance. People who considered relatability important claimed it helped with emotional connection and immersion. One player described the experience as wanting to feel their presence in the game world as an extension of themselves. This group of respondents also wanted to be able to support the protagonist's choices: for example, if the character was a killer, it was important that they only killed bad people.

In contrast, some of those who considered relatability insignificant expressed interest in exploring options whose morality differed from the respondents' principles in real life. Others stressed how the protagonist should fit into the game's context first and foremost. Many wished for well-written characters who could offer the players alternative perspectives that differed from those they had already seen before. It was also pointed out that sometimes, gaming is just for fun without the need for any deeper connection.

When asking opinions about the best protagonists of all time, 83% of the characters mentioned were male. Most of the mentions went to Zagreus from Hades and Geralt from The Witcher series (Figure 37). Zagreus's personal growth, relationships with other characters, and understandable goal resonated with players, while Geralt was praised for his complex personality and how he fits into the game's world. In general, respondents valued complex and balanced personalities as well as believable struggles mixed with humour. A couple answers mentioned customizable protagonists, which were excluded from the count.



Figure 37. Zagreus (left) and Geralt (right) (Supergiant Games 2020; CD Projekt 2015)

There was no protagonist who was most hated than anyone else. Instead, similar qualities were mentioned multiple times: one-dimensional personality, lack of important choices, having great visual design but lacking in depth etc. It is notable that many respondents claimed they did not hate these portrayals, just that they did not find them enjoyable. As with the best protagonists, most of the least liked characters were also men.

These results are in line with most main characters being male. However, the qualities that the players considered important or annoying could be applied to any gender. As such, this does not explain why one gender remains overrepresented, while the other so often gets reprimanded for displaying any deviation from stereotypes. While the players' responses suggest that being able to choose their gender identity matters, it can be argued that several other qualities are equally important. Indeed, the only respondent who mentioned gender being an issue disliked seeing white men as protagonists.

In the light of these results, it can be argued that players value well-written, complex main characters. Nevertheless, the importance of superficial qualities (such as appearance) cannot be overlooked, as they are a part of a good character design. The protagonist's gender should not be a defining factor for the presence of these qualities, even if some players place more value on the character's identity. Most importantly, the protagonist should fit into the world and story of the game.

9 CONCLUSIONS

Not every protagonist is for everyone and consequently, criticism will always be present. However, there is a difference in whether the reviews concern actual gameplay issues or if characters are judged based on misogynistic standards. While the sampling of these studies remains small, they point towards woke not ruining female protagonists, but rather the criticism being rooted in misogyny. However, it should be noted that the interpretation of woke is at times different from what the ideology represents, and consequently, some critics might disagree with the statement. According to the survey, players wish to see complex character portrayals. Although some questions could have been worded differently to avoid conflicting answers, they indicate that the qualities of a good protagonist are important regardless of their gender.

The strong, negative responses to these so-called "woke" female protagonists may stem from the players' fear of having their worldview challenged. After all,

gaming industry stayed the same for years with a certain, rather narrow audience in mind. Hence, it is natural that change brings up objections. However, the hate being targeted on women is a part of a larger societal problem. Therefore, it is important for games and other media to participate in positive representation. Looking from a commercial point of view, this might even make new target groups available. To get more people to enjoy games and make especially female players feel empowered instead of inadequate, it is important to have diverse depictions of women.

As a multifaceted phenomenon, woke's effects could be explored more. Besides women, there are even smaller minorities who have been notoriously absent from games, such as trans or non-binary protagonists. It would be beneficial to investigate these characters' representation as well. Even though woke is not directly related to physical beauty, this study examined the characters' appearances according to Western Eurocentric beauty standards. People from other cultural backgrounds might have a different approach to the subject, and it would be interesting to see how both woke and stereotypical elements appear to them.

It remains to be seen whether the inclusion of woke themes will eventually create new stereotypes. It is debatable whether these themes' inclusion in the games' narratives feels organic, or if diversity is added for tokenism. While woke aims to bring visibility to certain issues, it is up to people how to apply it in practice. Preaching or misusing terms may cause more harm than good and thus the approach should be carefully considered. Even a well-meaning ideology can be turned into a weapon. Developers should question whether they want to add diversity for diversity's sake or if they genuinely want to tackle the root of sexism, as the actions towards the latter start from challenging personal beliefs. While both sales and the gamers' opinions are important, it remains as the studios' responsibility to decide whose voice matters: those who can already see themselves in games, or those who wish to be equally included.

In the author's opinion, there is a delightful amount of positive representation emerging in the female protagonists of present day. Overall, it seems that their portrayals are becoming more nuanced despite the criticism. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go before women's diverse portrayal becomes as normalized as men's. The findings of this study will further help developers when considering what kind of main characters will be designed in the future games, and what kind of feminist themes need to be explored.

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Game Protagonist Qualities – Survey for Bachelor's Thesis

The following survey is part of a bachelor's thesis research. The survey aims to collect data on video game character preferences; therefore, no other identifiable or personal data, such as name, aliases, digital addresses, or geolocation, are needed or registered. Only gender and age are necessary for the conclusions derived from this survey. All answers are anonymous.

The results collected by this survey are only valid for the duration of the research.

All information will be deleted after the thesis has been concluded.

* Pakollinen kysymys

I give my permission to use my responses in the final thesis: *

- Yes
- No

Your age: *

- under 20
- 20–25
- 26–30
- 31–35
- 36–40
- 40+

Your gender: *

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Rank game protagonist qualities from MOST annoying to LEAST annoying (1 = most annoying, 10 = least annoying) *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
One-dimensional personality (too perfect or too many negative traits etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low quality voice acting (is not able to convey emotions correctly, is too silent or loud etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cliche backstory (predictable events, does not feel unique)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low quality art style / design / animations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Breaks immersion (acts unrealistically)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of personal goal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Passivity (does not have active part in the story)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overpowered (no struggles)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of character growth (stays the same through the story)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unrealistic clothing (impractical to the situation, does not make sense in the setting etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



What qualities do you enjoy in a game protagonist? *

Oma vastauksesi

In your opinion, what qualities make a game protagonist unlikable? *

Oma vastauksesi

Is it important for you to be able to relate to a game protagonist? *

Yes

No

Why is it important for you to be able to relate to the game protagonist? *

Oma vastauksesi

Why isn't it important for you to be able to relate to the game protagonist? *

Oma vastauksesi

Optional: Who is your favorite game protagonist of all time and why?

Oma vastauksesi

Optional: Who is your most hated game protagonist of all time and why?

Oma vastauksesi