Gender in LittleBigPlanet

Analysis of LittleBigPlanet’s Costumes

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June, 2015
Abstract

In this study, ninety costumes from the *LittleBigPlanet* (Media Molecule, 2008, 2011; Sumo Digital 2014) franchise were analyzed in order to answer the question on how the *LittleBigPlanet* series have represented diversity of different genders through the available costumes to a seemingly gender neutral character. This is done by dividing the costumes into three categories: feminine, masculine and neutral. The costumes are categorized according to set criteria, and in the results it is revealed that there are mostly feminine costumes, even though the difference is minor. The study also analyses how different gender-coded costumes in the *LittleBigPlanet* series are portrayed, and several traits are found to be reoccurring. Finally, it is discussed whether having portrayed stereotypical body images were suitable for the age of their audience, and it is also stated that the costumes of the *LittleBigPlanet* franchise are generally diversified.

**Keywords:** Gender in videogames, *LittleBigPlanet*, character customization, sex roles, stereotypes in games.
Abstrakt


Nyckelord: Kön i spel, LittleBigPlanet, karaktärsanpassning, könsroller, stereotyper i spel.
Table of Contents
1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Purpose .................................................................................................................... 1
2. Background .................................................................................................................. 3
   2.1 Customization .......................................................................................................... 3
   2.2 Costumes ................................................................................................................ 4
3. Previous Works within the Subject Area .................................................................... 5
   3.1 Gender Diversity in Games .................................................................................... 5
4. Method and Materials ............................................................................................... 7
   4.1 Content Analysis ...................................................................................................... 7
   4.2 Analysis & Coding .................................................................................................. 7
   4.3 Rating Criteria ........................................................................................................ 8
   4.4 Delimitation ............................................................................................................ 9
5. Results ....................................................................................................................... 10
   5.1 First Game ............................................................................................................. 10
   5.2 Second Game ......................................................................................................... 10
   5.3 Third Game ............................................................................................................ 11
   5.4 All Three Games ................................................................................................... 12
6. Analysis ..................................................................................................................... 14
   6.1 Reoccurring Non-Criteria Attributes .................................................................... 15
   6.2 Body Proportions .................................................................................................. 15
   6.3 Complications ......................................................................................................... 16
      6.3.1 Animal Costumes ............................................................................................ 17
      6.3.2 Facial Hair ...................................................................................................... 17
      6.3.3 Colors ............................................................................................................ 18
7. Discussion ................................................................................................................. 19
   7.1 Gender Diversity in Other Games ......................................................................... 19
   7.2 Possible Effects ....................................................................................................... 20
   7.3 Personal Thoughts ................................................................................................. 20
8. Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 22
Appendix A .................................................................................................................. 5
Appendix B .................................................................................................................... 8
Appendix C .................................................................................................................... 9
Appendix D .................................................................................................................... 11
1. Introduction

Gender representation in games seems to be a topic which is growing in popularity every year. Sometimes it is a matter of misrepresentation, and other times there is a clear minority of one gender (Glaubke et al., 2001).

Games’ avatars have been proven to impact players. Avatars are able to affect the self-representation of players controlling them (Yee & Bailenson, 2007), and different gendered avatars can influence players’ level of aggressiveness (Eastin, 2006). Smith and Moyer-Gusé (2006) argue that stereotypical conclusions might be drawn from games, as there are studies suggesting that messages found in games can have antisocial effects.

In the LittleBigPlanet (Media Molecule, 2008, 2011; SumoDigital 2014) game series, which consists of three main releases, aside from spinoffs and handheld versions, the playable characters are called sackpeople. The one reoccurring character in these three titles has a default appearance: a small humanoid puppet made out of sack cloth, a zipper over its torso, two black buttons for its eyes and a mouth (figure 13 in Appendix B). This generic character has been named Sackboy, although the appearance does not indicate any gender specific expression. The games’ narrator often refers to the playable character as a sackperson, although it happens that both the narrator and other characters you meet throughout the games’ stories call the player Sackboy (Media Molecule, 2008, 2011; Sumo Digital 2014). The player can customize their characters using the available costumes, stickers and other decorative items.

1.1 Purpose

This scientific essay’s intention is to analyze the costumes of the three main LittleBigPlanet games according to gender roles or gender specific stereotypes. Using the results of this analysis, this paper will try to answer the research question: how have the LittleBigPlanet series represented diversity of genders through the available costumes to a seemingly gender neutral character, as well as how different gender-coded costumes in the LittleBigPlanet series are portrayed.

In many games, one is able to assign a gender to one’s playable avatar, which will then present separate costumes for the different genders. However, in the LittleBigPlanet series the player uses costumes to assign gender to a gender neutral character.

The LittleBigPlanet games were chosen for this study for multiple reasons. First, according to the PEGI ratings for the three games they are suitable for people aged 7 years and over, while according to the ESRB ratings the games are suitable for everyone (PEGI, 2016; ESRB 2016). LittleBigPlanet producer Eric Fong also told gamesinsutry.biz that their “target audience is everyone” (Minkley, 2008). There are also several sources indicating that the games are suitable for children (Edutaining Kids, 2009; Common Sense Media, 2016; Ask About Games, 2016).
It could be interesting to see how the gender representation have changed over time, especially since the two first games were developed by Media Molecule, whilst the third game was developed by Sumo Digital. Also, as the *LittleBigPlanet* series handles gender different from many games, having a gender neutral character on which one applies gender through costume instead of choosing an already gendered character, it is interesting to look at how they have represented and diversified gender in their character.

Players of *LittleBigPlanet* have speculated about the genders of the Sackpeople. In different forums there are posts about topics such as how to change the Sackboy to a Sackgirl (which can only be done through customizing your Sackperson to wear feminine costumes) (GameFAQs, 2008) and whether there should be an option to choose the gender for a Sackperson so that they can have different shaped bodies (LittleBigPlanet Central, 2010).
2. Background

The *LittleBigPlanet* franchise is a puzzle platform video game series, but also well known as a game creation system. This is because of how the games allow players to customize their characters, create their own levels and be creative in different ways. In the two earlier main titles, the players are able to play as the character Sackboy, while in the third title, three new playable characters are introduced.

2.1 Customization

Players can customize the characters by wearing costume items, and attaching stickers and decorations. Through the pop-up menu, the players can choose to use the customization menu, where the types of costume items available in the game are categorized on three pages: materials, head, and body. Figure 1 shows a player in *LittleBigPlanet 2* using the customization menu on the head page, with one of the hair costume items selected. The first page, with the material items, show the material, texture, color or pattern of the character’s skin. On the page containing head costume items, the player can choose eyes, glasses, hair, head, mustache, and mouth for their character. On the third page, different costume items for the body are shown, divided into groups of feet, hands, legs, neck, torso, and waist. All costume items have their own names, and most of them are each part of a themed costume set. Examples of these themed sets are “Sack Ninja” and “Wooden Knight”. The number of items included in these sets varies, but every set can only have one item from each type of costume. On the last page of the customization menu, the player can switch between different menu colors. This color will affect both the color of the pop-up menu and certain costume items. One example of a costume set, of which all items change color depending on the chosen menu color, is the Boxer costume from the second game, which can be seen in figures 11 and 12 in Appendix B.

![Fig 1. A screenshot of LittleBigPlanet 2 featuring a player using the customization menu. (IGN, 2011).](image-url)
2.2 Costumes

There are numerous of ways for players to get costume sets. Default costume sets and items are given to the players automatically and are available from the very start of the game. Other costumes can be found in the story mode of the game, either in the beginning of levels, when finishing levels or by completing multiplayer tasks. By collecting all prize bubbles or completing levels without losing lives, the players can gain additional prizes, such as stickers or costume items. In the third LittleBigPlanet game, the players can buy specific costumes using “collectabells” as currency, which can be collected through gameplay. When a player has all items which are part of a set, the set will be displayed as a themed set. There are also non-official in-game costumes, which can be bought and downloaded using Playstation Network (Playstation, 2016) or the LittleBigStore (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2016). If a player has played a previous title, the costumes from said titles will transfer into the new one as well.
3. Previous Works within the Subject Area

Games’ avatars have been proven to be able to impact players, as mentioned in the introduction section. Yee and Bailenson’s (2007) study, on how digital avatars could affect the player, showed that the self-representation of the players changed depending on the avatar they were shown. Similarly, Eastin’s (2006) study showed that player’s level of aggressiveness was influenced by what gender their avatar was, which also shows that avatars can have different impacts on the players.

According to both Beasley and Standley (2002) and Smith and Moyer-Gusé (2006) games can teach sex roles and stereotypical gender attributes to players. Smith and Moyer-Gusé (2006) discuss how children could draw stereotypical conclusions from games, and how the portrayal of different genders is presented in many games. They argue that messages found in games can have antisocial effects, and that “exposure to popular console-based game content may be having a negative impact on male and female children’s sex-role socialization” (Smith & Moyer-Gusé, 2006).

In Beasley and Standley’s (2002) study on the portrayal of female characters in 47 games, they discuss how children can learn stereotypical gender attributes from media products. They also argue that one can view clothing as a prime indicator of sex roles in our society and in video games (Beasley and Standley, 2002). Beasley and Standley (2002) refer to Wroblewski and Huston (1987), and explain that children form schemata of masculine or feminine behaviors, attitudes, and clothing through accumulated experiences, and they argue that games are one of many sources for information about what is masculine or feminine.

Bulfin, Johnson and Bigum (2015) studied how children used stereotypical attributes whilst playing LittleBigPlanet. When playing, the oldest male child of the four players told a younger female player to wear the bride costume without equipping cape item, as he seemed to want her to follow the stereotypical dress code of which he knew of beforehand.

3.1 Gender Diversity in Games

There are multiple studies on the diversity between different gendered playable characters in games, as well as how their costumes are portrayed. However, not many studies examine the quantity of clothing available for different gendered characters.

As already mentioned in the introduction section, the player uses costumes to assign gender to a gender neutral character in the in LittleBigPlanet series. This is unlike many other games, in which one is often only able to either choose an already gendered character, or choose a gender to one’s playable avatar, which will then present separate costumes for the different genders.

The only way of expressing gender in the LittleBigPlanet series is through character customization. The costumes have to be analyzed in order to determine the diversity of gender in these games. Therefore, this study views the results of the other studies regarding the
diversity of gender of characters related with the diversity of the LittleBigPlanet series’ costumes.

Many of the other studies on the gender diversity of different games’ results show that female characters are less featured than male characters (Glaubke et al., 2001; Downs & Smith, 2009; Beasley & Standley, 2002; Mou & Peng, 2009; Feminist Frequency, 2015; Feminist Frequency, 2016). The two most recent examples done by Feminist Frequency (2015; 2016) shows data regarding the division between male and female solo protagonists in the games showcased during the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) events year 2015 and 2016. E3 is a premier trade show for computer, video and mobile games and related products in which publishers such as Sony and Nintendo showcase their upcoming products (Entertainment Software Association, 2016). In 2015, there were 9% female protagonists, 32% male protagonists, and 46% in which the players are able to choose the gender of the protagonist of the total of 76 showcased titles (Feminist Frequency, 2015). In the 2016’s E3, there were 3% female protagonists, 41% male protagonists, and 49% with either gender of the 59 showcased games (Feminist Frequency, 2016).
4. Method and Materials

Here, the method, materials and delimitations used for the study are presented.

4.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a research method often used for systematic analysis of large numbers of images. This is an explanation according to Gillian Rose’s (2016) book about visual methodologies. There are four key steps of content analysis in order to achieve replicable and valid results (Rose, 2016).

The first step is so find the images to use in the study. These images must be appropriate for the research question, and one must address all images which are relevant to the study. One can choose to use a sample of the images in order to make it manageable (Rose, 2016).

The second step is to devise the categories for coding the images. The coding categories have three necessities. They must be exhaustive, exclusive and enlightening. Exhaustive means that all images must be covered by one category. To be exclusive, the categories must not overlap each other. Finally, to be enlightening according to the coding categories must produce a breakdown of imagery that will be analytically interesting and coherent (Rose, 2016).

The two final steps are to code the images and then analyze the results. The coding process must be replicable, if the study is re-done using the same codes and same set of images, this should produce the same results. The analysis of the results can be presented in multiple ways. Some examples given by Rose (2016) are to present the frequency counts, compare the results with other values, or show a comparison over time. Rose (2016) also writes that relations between different coding categories can be done both qualitatively and quantitatively (Rose, 2016).

This study uses both visual and textual content analysis, as the costume sets’ names and visuals will be analyzed. The images used in this study are all costume sets of the LittleBigPlanet’s three main titles, and the sampling made is presented in the delimitations section of this chapter.

4.2 Analysis & Coding

The costume sets available in the story modes of LittleBigPlanet’s three main titles are be divided in three categories: feminine, masculine and gender-neutral. This categorization is done by examining how the game’s costume sets have been structured, and the appearance of the costume sets will also be examined. First, the name of the themed set of which the costume item is part of is inspected. If the name indicates some kind of gendered theme, for example a bride theme, this will help to categorize those sets.
All costume sets are compared to masculine and feminine attributes, which are determined beforehand and according to Western gender roles. Costume sets are regarded as gender-neutral when neither of the masculine or feminine attributes are applicable. When costumes portray an animal they are seen as gender neutral, as animals do not apply to human gender roles. The sampled costumes used in the analysis are listed in Appendix A.

4.3 Rating Criteria

Studies have shown that blue and bold colors are often perceived as masculine, while pink and pastel colors are more often perceived as feminine (Shakin, Shakin & Sternglanz, 1985; Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990; LoBue & DeLoache, 2011; Frassanito & Pettorini, 2008; Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Auster & Mansbach, 2012, Stone, 1962). When analyzing costumes using these perceptions as criteria, they only apply when the colors are a dominant part of the costume, and not if the item’s color is changeable through changing menu color.

There are also certain clothing or appearance traits that are associated with different genders. For example, Dictionary.com describes dress as “an outer garment for women and girls”, and beard as “the growth of hair on the face of an adult man” (dress, 2016; beard, 2016).

Clothing perceived as feminine in Western culture are for example dresses or skirts, and appearance traits associated with femininity are for example long hair. Appearance traits commonly seen as masculine are for example facial hair, and clothing perceived as masculine is for example a suit. The different traits found in the analysis are presented in the analysis section.

As already mentioned, the names of the costumes can indicate some kind of gendered theme. Therefore, the feminine and masculine names are seen as important criteria, as it also shows how the game’s designers classify the outfits. Feminine names could both be feminine roles/titles (bride), or given names that are commonly associated with femininity (Maria). Masculine names are the same, with roles/titles perceived as masculine (groom), or given names commonly perceived as masculine (Vincent).

The criteria were decided upon by using these studies and associations. The costumes do not have to meet all criteria to be categorized as either feminine or masculine. The criteria are listed in order of priority. For example, if a costume meets the first criteria of the masculine category (name indicating masculinity), and the second criteria for the feminine category (clothing perceived as feminine), the costume will be categorized as masculine. The costumes meeting criteria in both categories are presented in the discussion section.

Costumes are categorized as feminine if they match any of these criteria:

1. Name indicating femininity
2. Clothing or appearance traits perceived as feminine
3. Pink and pastel colors
These are criteria for being categorized as masculine:

1. Name indicating masculinity
2. Clothing or appearance traits perceived as masculine
3. Blue and bold colors

4.4 Delimitation

The analysis is conducted on the three main games of the *LittleBigPlanet* series, excluding the handheld and spinoff games. Costumes from downloadable content (DLCs) will be excluded as well, as these costumes are not part of the originally released games. As Sackboy is the only reoccurring character through the three main games, the three additional playable game characters’ costumes in the third title will not be analyzed. Likewise, special costumes featuring side characters from the second and third games’ story modes (such as curator Larry Da Vinci from *LittleBigPlanet 2* or the antagonist Newton from *LittleBigPlanet 3*) are not part of the study, as they portray characters who do not have similar design to Sackboy, and their gender is affected through the dialogue of the games. Additionally, there are costumes given to the player in *LittleBigPlanet 3* when the player owns other specific games, which are not part of the analysis. Costumes given to players who have pre-ordered the games are excluded from the analysis.

The sampled costume sets are gathered through own gameplay and by researching what players have posted online, which were posted on the LittleBigPlanet Wiki page (LittleBigPlanet Wiki, 2016). No complete lists of the costume sets were found online. It is possible for some costumes to be missed, as the games are played by the author herself, and therefore she is not able to complete the multiplayer challenges, and may not be able to finish levels flawlessly. If this happens, it is not done deliberately, as all of the available costumes are attempted to be gathered and included in this study.

Both the game related costumes given in *LittleBigPlanet 3* and the costumes of all games’ DLCs often portray characters of other works, such as from other games or movies. This means that the DLC’s costumes, as well as the costumes related to other pieces of work, will most likely be associated with the gender that the original portrayed character is expressing.
5. Results

Here are the presented results of the study, together with charts showing the distribution of the different categories in the three games of the franchise. More in-depth results will be presented in the analysis and discussion sections, such as what attributes were most common in the three categories. The percentages are rounded to hundredths, with two decimals.

5.1 First Game

In the first game of the franchise, a total of twenty-six costume sets were available. The sets had an average of three to four (3.461...) items per set. The lowest number of items was two and the highest number of items seven. Figure 2 shows how many of these costume sets were categorized in each category. The results were 7 feminine (26.9%), 11 masculine (42.3%) and 8 neutral (30.8%).

![Fig 2. The categorization results of LittleBigPlanet’s costume sets.](image)

5.2 Second Game

There were a total of forty-seven costume sets in the second game of the franchise. The number of items per costume ranged between two and six items, and with an average of three to four (3.829...) items. The results were 24 feminine (51.1%), 10 masculine (21.3%) and 13 neutral (27.7%), which is shown in figure 3.
5.3 Third Game

In the third game of the franchise, there were a total of seventeen costume sets. The average of items was between 4 and 5 (4.705…) items, with the lowest number of items one and highest eight. In figure 4 the distribution between the three categories is shown, of which four feminine (23.5%), nine masculine (52.9%) and four neutral costumes (23.5%).
5.4 All Three Games

In all three games of the franchise, there were 90 costumes in total. Of these 90 costumes 35 was categorized as feminine (38.9%), 30 as masculine (33.3%), and 25 as neutral (27.8%). Even though the masculine costumes were the most common costumes in both the first and third game, the feminine costumes were the most common costumes across all games.

![Bar chart showing the categorization results of LittleBigPlanet franchise’s costume sets.](image)

Fig 5. The categorization results of LittleBigPlanet franchise’s costume sets.

There were more masculine costumes than feminine in both the first and the third game. However, the feminine costumes were the majority across all three games, because of the feminine costumes found in the second game. The feminine costume sets were five costumes more than the masculine costume sets. The number of neutral costumes were not far behind either, with only five costumes less than the masculine ones.
Fig 6. The results of *LittleBigPlanet* franchise’s costume sets divided into the three games.
6. Analysis

The most common attribute of feminine costumes was the second criterion, that they featured a dress or skirt. Many feminine costumes met both the first criterion (62.9% of all feminine costumes), having names indicating femininity, and the second criterion (82.9%), regarding feminine clothing or appearance traits, but the third criterion, regarding pink and pastel colors, was less frequently met (28.6%).

![Fig 7. The Sack Señorita costume, Cupcake costume and Red Riding Hood costume (LittleBigPlanet Wiki, 2016; ThePassionOfGaming.com, 2014).](image)

For the costume sets that were categorized as masculine, the third criterion regarding colors was also somewhat less frequent than other criteria (33.3% of the masculine costumes). The second criterion, masculine clothing or appearance traits, was as frequent as the third one (33.3%), and the first criterion, having names indicating masculinity, was the most common (63.3%). Most of the male attributes discovered were facial hair.

![Fig 8. The Ringmaster costume, Andreas costume and Paul of Jarvington costume. (LittleBigPlanet Wiki, 2016; ThePassionOfGaming.com, 2014).](image)

Although the neutral costumes did not require meeting any criteria, except when costumes portrayed animals, there were some attributes that were seen in multiple of these costumes.
32% of the neutral costumes were portraying animals, and 20% were portraying some kind of machine or electrical device, such as a robot or a lightbulb. There were also neither non-animal nor machine costumes that were categorized as neutral. Examples of an electrical device, an animal costume and a clothing costume which is shown in figure 9.


6.1 Reoccurring Non-Criteria Attributes

Not all costume sets have their own unique eyes item. However, wearing eyes are required, hence all costumes without their own item have a pre-set item for their eyes. Some noteworthy reoccurring attributes were found whilst analyzing the costumes which were categorized as feminine. 80% of the feminine costumes had pre-set eyes featuring longer eye lashes. All 80% of these costumes, except for one which featured its own long lashed eyes item, used the Long Lash Eyes items, which is worn in figure 14 in Appendix B. Otherwise, several costumes used the Button Eyes as their pre-set eyes item, which is shown in figure 13 in Appendix B. Two other reoccurring attributes were hair or hat items featuring longer hair, which was found in 68.6% of the feminine categorized costumes, and items with flowers or flowery patterns, which were found in 17.1% of the feminine costumes.

6.2 Body Proportions

Some feminine clothing items change the chest and waist size of the character. This was seen in multiple costumes’ items, which is shown in the figures presented in Appendix C. An especially visible case of this is the Scarlett costume’s dress. By hovering a sticker over a player’s character, one can use the controller’s shoulder buttons to make the character turn around or sideways. The figures in Appendix D show this being done with the default costume (Sackboy) and the Scarlett costume, both facing to the right. Then, their torso’s silhouettes were outlined and overlaid on top of each other. The result of this is shown in figure 10. The red lines and dots are the silhouette of the default costume, and the blue are the silhouette of the Scarlett costume. There are four dots placed on every silhouette: one on the shoulder, one where the back ends before being hidden by the arm, one on the top of the chest
and one by the waist. It is visible that the Scarlett costume has smaller shoulders, larger breasts and a thinner waist than the default body.

![Fig 10. Outlines of the default character’s and the Scarlett costume’s silhouettes.](image)

6.3 Complications

There were a few complications when analyzing the costumes. Some roles and titles can sometimes be more often associated with a certain gender. Examples of this can be a pirate or ninja, which were both costumes of the first game (Arr! Pirate and Sack Ninja). However, none of the criteria covered this subject, and therefore these costumes were categorized as neutral.

Another complication was bare chested costumes, which were not part of the criteria. It could be associated with the second masculine criteria, clothing or appearance traits perceived as masculine, as it is often illegal or socially unacceptable for feminine bodies to be bare chested in public. This only works in the correct context however. Two bare chested costumes are the Boxer and Babyface costume from the second game. The Boxer costume was categorized as masculine, for the reason of bare chests not being publically accepted for feminine bodies. The Babyface costume however, is portraying a baby with a diaper, rattle, pacifier and baby headwear. There is not any dominant color for this costume, as part of the headwear’s color can be changed by choosing different menu colors. As babies are not fully physically developed, their bare chests are commonly socially acceptable, and therefore this costume could not be categorized as either feminine or masculine.
6.3.1 Animal Costumes

Costumes portraying animals were not going to be categorized as neither masculine nor feminine, since animals do not apply to human gender roles. There were however cases when animal costumes met the third criterion of either the feminine or masculine criteria. One of these cases was the Bunny from the first game which met the third feminine criterion, having pink or pastel colors as their dominant color. The Dinosaur from the first game and the Magpie costume from the third game met the third masculine criterion, which is to have either blue or a bold color as the dominant color. These costumes are shown in figures 15, 16 and 17 in Appendix E. All three cases were categorized as neutral, as the colors is part of the represented animal and not to signalize gender.

Another animal costume which was a cause for further discussion was the Sack Lion costume in the first game, which can be seen in figure 18 in Appendix E. This costume portraying a lion features a mane, which is most common for male lions. The mane could be used as an indication for portraying a lion, as it could be perceived as any cat animal without it. With this in mind, and the fact that the costume did not meet any of the feminine or masculine criteria, the Sack Lion costume was categorized as neutral.

The third complication regarding costumes portraying animals was the third game’s Regal Wolf costume. The costume features seven items which make a full body suit which portrays a wolf. However, the torso item has a red coat, with an epaulette and aiguillette. This coat somewhat resembles the uniforms of Her Majesty's Bodyguard of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms, which are bodyguards to the British Monarch. The two is shown in figure 19 and 20 in Appendix F. The jacket would be categorized as masculine if it was by itself, but in this case it is part of the costume portraying an animal, and therefore the Regal Wolf costume was categorized as neutral.

6.3.2 Facial Hair

There were two cases where facial hair items were portraying seaweed or other non-hair material. This is in two costumes of the third game, the Marina costume and the Norris Emptynet costume. The Marina costume consists of eight items, one of which is the Marina Goatee, a moustache item. The whole costume is shown in figure 21 in Appendix F. It is difficult to tell what material the goatee is, but as it is green and part of a costume which looks similar to a sea monster, one could guess that it is some kind of seaweed. Likewise, The Norris Emptynet Moustache item, seems to portray some kind of seaweed material. This costume is shown in figure 22 in the same appendix. Although these items are not normal facial hair, they are referred to as goatee and moustache, which are both commonly received as masculine traits. Thus, these costumes met the second criterion of the masculine category, and were categorized as masculine.
6.3.3 Colors

The third criterion of the feminine and masculine categories, regarding colors, was rarely the reason for why costumes were categorized. 28.6% of the feminine costumes met the third criterion, and of masculine costumes there were 33.3% which met the third criterion. The majority of these costumes met either one or both of the other criteria of their categorization. The exception is the Console Kitty costume from the second game, which has pink as its dominant color, and was therefore categorized as feminine according to the second criterion. Figure 23 in Appendix F shows a screenshot of the whole costume. The Console Kitty was not categorized as neutral according to the animal criteria, because it does not portray an animal, but rather some sort of machine.

It is questionable whether the criteria regarding colors were useful for this study, due to multiple reasons. First is the reason already mentioned, which is that this criterion was met by some costumes, but it was rarely the single cause why costumes were categorized. There were also cases when this criterion conflicted with the other criteria of the other categorization. Examples of when this happened are the Coach Rock costume from the third game, which has a dominant bold color whilst also having a skirt, a feminine clothing item. The Coach Rock costume is shown in figure 24 in Appendix F. The other example is the Henrik costume from the same game, a fully white costume which is a pastel color, but the name of the costume is a masculine given name, thus the costume was categorized as masculine. Finally, some items’ colors can be changed by switching menu colors. Therefore, these items cannot be the reason on why the costume should meet any of the criteria regarding colors. This is further discussed in the end of the discussion section.
7. Discussion

The following segments are discussions on various topics, which might include both deductive and inductive reasoning.

The final result of the categorization was 38.9% feminine, 33.3% masculine and 27.8% neutral of the total ninety costumes. Many costume sets given to the player in the beginning of the story mode’s levels seemed to come in pairs, with one feminine and one masculine costume. Examples of this are the Sack Groom and Sack Bride from the first game, and Mr. Moon and Mrs. Sun from the second game.

7.1 Gender Diversity in Other Games

Studies have shown that sometimes male characters are featured more frequent than female characters. One study published in 2001 showed that of 874 playable characters from multiple top selling games, 73% of the characters were male and 12% female (Glaubke et al., 2001). Other studies have had similar results (Downs & Smith, 2009; Beasley & Standley, 2002; Mou & Peng, 2009).

Both Downs and Smith’s (2009) and Mou and Peng’s (2009) studies were executed around the same time as the two first games of the LittleBigPlanet series were published, which was in 2008 and 2011. The third game however, was published in 2014, and as many games are published every year, studies regarding games can quickly get outdated. The results of Feminist Frequency’s (2015; 2016) analyses of the games showcased on E3 show that the gender diversity in playable protagonist characters might still be unbalanced. These works have already been presented in the section regarding previous work in the subject matter.

This can be related to the results of this study. The results of this study however, showed that of the ninety sampled costumes from the LittleBigPlanet franchise, there were more feminine costumes (38.9%) than masculine (33.3%) or neutral costumes (27.8%). The difference was not as significant as in the other mentioned studies, as in this study there were only five more feminine costumes than masculine ones, and ten more feminine than neutral costumes.

Another reoccurring result in studies is stereotypical physical features of male and female characters (Glaubke et al., 2001; Beasley & Standley, 2002; Dietz, 1998; Downs & Smith, 2009; Jansz & Martis, 2007; Mou & Peng, 2009). Glaubke et al refers to hyper-sexualised voluptuous bodies as having “large breasts and very small waist”, and hyper-muscularized as extremely muscular (Glaubke et al, 2001). The analyzed costumes do not completely match these descriptions, with one exception being the Scarlett costume from the second game, which seems to portray large breasts. This was also made clear from the silhouette outlining in the analysis section. The costume also bears a resemblance to the character Jessica Rabbit, which is well known as a sex symbol in animation. The costume and the character can be compared in Appendix F, in figures 25 and 26.
7.2 Possible Effects

The analysis and categorization showed that the costumes of the *LittleBigPlanet* franchise are pretty diversified between feminine, masculine and neutral costumes.

Some feminine clothing changed the shape of the sack person’s body making the waist thinner and some featured enlarged breasts. The three games have a PEGI 7 age rating, which means that the games are considered suitable for the age groups from 7 and up, and they are also rated as suitable for everyone by ESRB.

Between the ages of six and seven years, children begin to develop attitudes toward body types, and these attitudes become stronger as they get older (Downs & Smith, 2009). Studies have also shown that media exposure can affect 7 to 12-year-old girls’ current and future body ideals, and also cause eating disorders in order to achieve those body ideals (Harrison & Hefner, 2006). Daniel McDonald and Hyeok Kim state that children identify closely with electronic characters, and that these identifications have implications for children’s emotional wellbeing as well as the development of their personality (McDonald & Kim, 2001). By exposing their players to hypersexualized costumes, games could leave an impact on how players view different body types, both on themselves and others.

7.3 Personal Thoughts

Following are some of the author’s in depth thoughts on the subject, which could be perceived as subjective.

Beasley and Standley (2002) argue that games are one of many sources for information about what is masculine or feminine of which players can learn from. Children and other players could therefore be affected by *LittleBigPlanet*’s costumes, especially since some feminine costumes have different silhouettes than the original Sackboy body. As there are not many body types presented in the costumes, it is disturbing that the one differentiating body type the series have featured is of the feminine body ideal with thin waists and sometimes enlarged breasts. 80% of the feminine costume sets also featured eyes with long eyelashes, which is a trait that can sometimes be seen when portraying female characters, and is a beauty ideal regarding females wearing make-up.

This is especially disappointing since the games are considered suitable for children from the age of seven and up by the PEGI ratings, or for everyone according to the ESRB ratings. Children are more easily affected by media exposure, and these games use body ideals and even have a costume referencing to a well-known sex symbol.

On the other hand, the games could have made separate and different gendered playable characters, but instead the player is able to mix items from different costumes freely. There are even some more items than those analyzed in this study, which were not part of any costume set in the games. This allows players to be creative and not stick completely to gender stereotypes. They have also refrained from using sliders to customize the playable
character, which could have complicated the game further and make it less easily playable by younger children.

Some items even allow color changing through switching one’s menu color, which was one of the reasons why many costumes did not meet the third criteria of the feminine or masculine categories. The failure of meeting the criteria regarding colors could be perceived as an argument that the items and costumes of the LittleBigPlanet franchise are not completely designed to withhold stereotypical standards. The third criteria should however have been better explained and more specific.

This game series has many features of a sandbox game, where players often have minimal limitations. One could find it disappointing that the game has to use any gendered themes, but as the game is targeted to everyone (Minkley, 2008), this is not surprising, since there are players who want the possibility of dressing their character according to gendered clothing.

It is a little disappointing that most of the neutral costumes are either portraying animals or electrical machines. One reason is because there are people with identities outside the gender binary, and the games are claimed to be targeted towards everyone. As already mentioned, the game share some features of a sandbox game, and therefore it can be seen as disappointing for the games to be stuck in a Western gender spectrum.

One interesting thought which could be noteworthy for further analysis of the LittleBigPlanet series’ costumes are the portrayal of different cultural clothing, mostly featured in the first game. This might be especially interesting since the two game development studios Media Molecule and Sumo Digital are both based in the United Kingdom.
8. Conclusion

This study investigated how the *LittleBigPlanet* series have represented diversity of different genders through the available costumes to a seemingly gender neutral character in the *LittleBigPlanet* franchise. This was done through content analysis, by analyzing and categorizing costumes according to the different criteria. A total of ninety costumes were analyzed and categorized as feminine, masculine or neutral, and the results showed that there was only a small difference between the different categories. The study also showed some reoccurring attributes which were not part of the criteria. There were some difficulties whilst analyzing the costumes, but these were all resolved and then explained in the analysis section. When the feminine costumes were analyzed further, it was shown that some change the silhouette and shape of the default body to a thinner waist and sometimes larger breasts. In the discussion, it was stated that the games’ costumes are generally diverse, especially since the players can freely mix items from any costumes. It is however disappointing that some of their costumes portray stereotypical body ideals, especially since the games are considered suitable for children from the age of seven and up.
References


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Appendix A

LittleBigPlanet 1

- Army Sackgirl
- Arr! Pirate
- Bunny
- Caesar Roman Soldier
- Chicken
- Cowboy
- Devil
- Dinosaur
- Elizabethan Costume
- Elizabethan Dame
- Marvin Disco Dancer
- Ringmaster
- Robot
- Sack Bride
- Sack Diva
- Sack Dude
- Sack Geisha
- Sack Groom
- Sack Lion
- Sack Maharaja
- Sack Maharani
- Sack Ninja
- Sack Poncho
- Sack Señorita
- Yuri Army Sackboy
- Zebra

LittleBigPlanet 2

- Alvin
- Andreas Costume
- Angelica Fairy
- Astrid Costume
- Astro Costume
- Aviatress costume
- Babyface Costume
- Bellydancer
- Berrie
- Boxer
• Burlesque
• Cecilia Costume
• Chef
• Cog Princess
• Computerhead
• Console Kitty costume
• Cordlass
• Cupcake Costume
• Cynthia
• Dean Costume
• Disco sack
• DJ Rewind costume
• Flaskboy costume
• Flyboy
• Globetrotter
• Happie
• Hula
• Lightbulb
• Maria
• Meryl Costume
• Mr. Moon
• Mrs. Sun
• Nursie
• Panda
• Plectra
• Quina
• Robert Costume
• Sackabillie
• Sack-in-a-Clock
• Sackretary
• Scarlett
• Sebastian
• Sofie
• Steam Sack
• Vincent
• Viola
• Wooden Knight
LittleBigPlanet 3

- Alice Hathead
- Bartholomew Wicket
- Carved Grumpy Bear
- Coach Rock Costume
- Dr. Livingsack Costume
- Henrik
- Japanese Warrior Costume
- Magpie Costume
- Marina Costume
- Melanie Pindrop Costume
- Natty Sharp Costume
- Norris Emptynet
- Paul of Jarvington
- Red Riding Hood Costume
- Regal Wolf
- Terence Costume
- Tiki Boy Costume
Appendix B

Fig 11. The Boxer costume when using a white menu color.

Fig 12. The Boxer costume when using a red menu color.

Fig 13. The default costume for the playable character Sackboy. (LittleBigPlanet Wiki, 2016)

Fig 14. A character wearing three items, one of which is the Long Lash Eyes. (LittleBigPlanet Wiki, 2016)
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E

Fig 15. The Magpie costume.

Fig 16. The Bunny costume.

Fig 17. The Dinosaur costume. (BoomsLittleBigSite, 2016).

Fig 18. The Sack Lion costume. (LittleBigPlanet Wiki, 2016)
Appendix F

Fig 19. The Regal Wolf Costume.

Fig 20. A photo showing a uniform of Her Majesty's Bodyguard of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms. (Permanent Style, 2011)

Fig 21. The Marina costume.

Fig 22. The Norris Emptynet costume.
Fig 23. The Console Kitty costume. (rebornl, 2011).

Fig 24. The Coach Rock costume. (LittleBigPlanet Wiki, 2016)

Fig 25. The Scarlett costume. (ThePassionOfGaming, 2014).