

Chapter 3

The Only Girl in the Class!

Female Students' Experiences of Gaming Courses and Views of the Industry

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ABSTRACT

Four female students studying a games course at one UK University took part in a qualitative study of face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Although a small sample, the study provided an interesting insight into the experiences of the females on the course as well as their views of entering (or at least potentially entering) the male dominated computer games industry. The findings related by the chapter reveal that females choose to study games because they enjoyed playing games. Despite all participants experiencing the course positively, there was some apprehension about going into the industry. Interestingly, the study suggests the male dominated working environment may be off-putting to women, even to women studying and interested in going into that area of work. The main themes that emerged in regard to the negativity associated with the industry were the long hours culture and potential sexism within the industry.

INTRODUCTION

There have been a number of studies looking at the female presence in the gaming industry, or lack of, much of which explains that the male dominated environment and work conditions puts many women off going into industry. This is mainly due to the long hours culture associated with the industry and the lack of flexible working practices available. The fact that females are

greatly outnumbered in this sector should be taken seriously, as well as the lack of females studying games courses at university level which has been hugely overlooked. There are now a number of game courses available which prepare people for a career in games, giving these students the option of entering the industry through the pathway of higher education. However, despite an educational route into the games industry, there is a distinct lack of females on these courses. For instance,

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according to 2012/13 UCAS (University and College Admissions Service) data, of all students who applied to university via UCAS, one gaming course offered nationwide had 241 males accepted to study compared to only 25 females. These statistics are similar of all gaming courses offered in the United Kingdom (UCAS, 2013). This is clearly an issue as the gender difference in higher education will have a knock on effect into the industry, increasing the male dominance within the gaming sector.

It is important, then, to ask what the experiences of the females currently on these courses are and if there is anything that could be done to improve the recruitment of female students into gaming courses and their retention when they are there. This chapter aims to explore these issues through a qualitative study of female students currently studying a games course at university in order to investigate the experiences of female gaming students.

BACKGROUND

Male-Dominated Workforce

The games industry is a male dominated environment, the few females that are employed in this workplace are typically working in non-developmental roles such as administration rather than a role which needs technical ability and a higher level of skill such as developmental roles e.g. programming, design or production (MCV, 2008; Gourdin, 2005; Dyer-Witthford & Sharman, 2005; Haines, 2004). Gender occupational segregation suggests that due to gendered stereotypes there are male and female jobs/roles and as such males and females traditionally prefer to work in what are considered gender congruent roles. Prescott and Bogg (2012) (amongst others) suggest that gender occupational segregation exists across the information and communication technology (ICT) sector and across the wider STEM (Science,

Technology, Engineering and Technology) sector. They also state that this issue is not geographically exclusive; these sectors were found to have gender occupational segregation across the UK, Europe and USA. This gendered occupational segregation has also been found to exist within the computer games industry with women concentrated in non-developmental roles as opposed to developmental roles (Prescott & Bogg, 2011).

Nature of the Industry

It is argued that females are not entering the computer games industry because the nature of the industry is particularly restrictive to females. The long-hours culture appears to be a key element of the games industry (Prescott & Bogg, 2010) and also seems to be the main deterrent too. Consalvo (2008) argued that the long hour's culture and crunch time within the industry are the biggest challenges to women in the games industry, especially women with children. However, this is also prominent in other industries for example the ICT sector, which we have already mentioned, is segregated, and renowned for its long hour's culture (Valenduc et al., 2004). The long hours culture leads to another key issue that of work-family conflict which research suggests affects women more than men (Innstrand et al., 2009). It has been noted that among the lack of females in the industry, there is a greater lack of women with children. This is also true of the wider ICT and STEM sector (Deuze et al., 2004; Haines, 2004; Krotoski, 2004; Gourdin, 2005; Consalvo, 2008; Prescott & Bogg, 2010). It could be speculated that the occupational structure of the industry including the long hours, potential need to relocate and the lack of flexible working practices is a key reason for the lack of women with children or women delaying having children, and as such should be targeted as a need of change in order for the industry to maintain and appeal to a more diverse workforce (Consalvo, 2008; Prescott & Bogg, 2010).

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