Chapter 5
The Experiences of Women Working in the Computer Games Industry:
An In-Depth Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a unique understanding of women working in the computer games industry. In depth interviews were undertaken with seven female game workers based in the UK. The women were interviewed as part of a larger study focusing on women in this male dominated industry. The issues detailed in this chapter focus on the industry as a viable career for women, the experience of being a woman working in games and the working environment; including work life balance issues, experiences of discrimination and experiences of sexism. The research discussed is related to attracting and retaining women in games development. The issues are of relevance to employers, professional bodies, policy makers and researchers of the games industry and the wider ICT and SET industries. Recommendations from the findings and future research directions are provided.

INTRODUCTION

I think generally because games are played in the most part by men it is probably perceive that they are mainly made by men which I suppose to a certain degree they are (Interview 7).

The games industry has a pervasive impact upon popular culture, which is influenced by, and influences other media and popular culture including TV, books and films. The industry is an important and growing industry with connections with other cultural sectors such as music and film as

we have previously highlighted in chapter two. The games industry has accelerated from small firms and individuals programming in their bedrooms to an industry dominated by multinational hardware producers such as Sony and Microsoft (Johns, 2006).

It is well recognised that the computer games industry like other technology based careers, is a male dominated industry. This is a global issue (USA-Gourdin, 2005; UK-Skillset, 2009; Canada-Dyer-Witheford & Sharman, 2005; Australia-Genieve, 2012). With the increasing rise in the popularity of computer games as a leisure pursuit to both male and female audiences, it is a concern of many that this gender disparity exists in such a culturally influential industry. It is important for women to have a voice in all areas of the economy and the cultural landscape. The games industry is a particularly important industry as highlighted by Prescott & Bogg (2013).

There have been a number of reasons put forward for the under representation of women in the computer games industry. Including the long hour's culture, the lack of flexible working practices, the image of the industry and computer games generally being targeted for males, the lack of games that appeal to females, as well as the sexual representation of females within the games themselves. Many of these issues arouse in the current study and so it is deemed important to briefly discuss some of these issues to give readers a brief background.

BACKGROUND

Gendered Occupational Segregation

Not only are women under represented within the industry but previous research has found that women that do tend to work in the industry tend to be concentrated into certain roles. These roles tend to be in non-developmental roles such as hu-

man resources and administration rather than core developmental roles needing technical ability and roles which influence the game making process such as programming, design and production (MCV, 2008; Gourdain, 2005; Dyer-Witheford & Sharman, 2005; Haines, 2004). Gendered occupational segregation refers to the representation that some jobs are viewed as male and traditionally undertaken by men and other jobs are viewed as female jobs and therefore traditionally done by women. Gender occupational segregation has been found to persist in the information and communication technology (ICT) and the wider science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sectors including in the UK, USA and across Europe (Prescott & Bogg, 2012).

Computer games may be a good way to encourage and attract girls to the industry since gaming can enable the development of IT skills as well as help develop an interest in computers. Fullerton et al (2008) argue that more women would be interested in games if more games existed that girls and women liked to play and if work environments could be found that were more supportive of their values and work styles. The authors refer to this as the 'virtuous cycle' "*making games that appeal to women and girls attracts more women to work on games, resulting in the creation of more games that appeal to women and girls*" (Fullerton et al, 2008, p.141).

The Male Dominated Working Environment

Practices inherent to male dominated industries and occupations including the computer games industry include the long hour's culture, the potential need to relocate and the lack of flexible working practices (Prescott & Bogg, 2010). One strategy for increasing the diversity of games is to increase the diversity of those involved in all aspects of game design and production. The organisational structure has been highlighted as in

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