Chapter 7
Women's Participation in the Australian Digital Content Industry

Anitza Geneve
Southbank Institute of Technology, Australia

ABSTRACT

There is a need to understand the phenomenon of women's under-representation in the Australian Digital Content Industry (DCI) workforce. This chapter presents the findings from an Australian case study where both women working in the industry and industry stakeholders were interviewed for their insight into the influences on women's participation. The rich empirical data and findings from the case study are interpreted using the Acts of Agency theory—an original theory by the author of this chapter. As the chapter reveals there are five 'Acts of Agency' (containing 10 agent-driven mechanisms) identified as influencing women's participation. Agent-driven mechanisms recognise the causal effect of people themselves; that is, the role individuals play in their participation.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses women's participation in the Australian Digital Content Industry. As the brief background highlights, women are under-represented in the DCI. There are a broad and complex range of influences on women's participation. The author presents a new and original theoretical approach, titled the *Acts of Agency* theory, as a way to understand these influences. The remainder of the chapter uses the *Acts of Agency* theory to discuss the rich empirical data and findings from a case study examining women's

experiences of working in the Australian Digital Content Industry.

BACKGROUND

In 2013, women remain under-represented in the workforce of a number of Australian industries; including those that have been traditionally male-dominated such as mining, construction and utilities (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013). In industries where women's numbers are more equitable, such as in health care, education and training and retail trade roles, there exists a

"stratification" in the number of women in different roles with notably fewer women in management (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013, p.6). There are at least three reasons why society should foster women's equitable participation. First, there is a national economic benefit. The Grattan Institute reports that if Australia increased female labour force participation to a rate on par with Canada (62.4%) that this would increase Australia's economic growth in the next decade by $25 billion (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013). Second, organisational innovation is improved with a diverse workforce. Third, there is both a legal and a moral imperative to foster equitable opportunities for individuals regardless of their gender. Equitable participation by women has national, organisational and individual benefits.

Women also remain under-represented in emerging industries. These industries include Information Communication and Technology (ICT), which provides IT services and products such as programming and the Digital Content Industry (DCI) which provides games, website, app and mobile content development. In 2007, women's participation in the Australian games production industry was approximately 10.7% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). This figure is not dissimilar to international figures reported in 2005 by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) survey, which surveyed nearly 6500 international games developers and found women's participation rates were approximately 11.5% (Gourdin, 2005). Women are not only under-represented in the DCI workforce, they also face horizontal and vertical occupational segregation with few women involved in technical roles. As Roan & Whitehouse (2007) found, although there were "relatively high numbers of women in 'web/multimedia' jobs" in the Australian DCI, many of these appeared to be "primarily clerical jobs", and "women were rarely found in the more directly technical roles of computer games

design" (p. 31). Haines (2004) identified a similar segregation exists for women working in the UK games industry, where women comprised only 2% of programmers, 3% of audio, 5% of games designers, 8% of production staff, and 9% of artists. More research is needed to understand the under-representation of women in the DCI and the role segregation they experience.

There is a significant body of previous research which has identified a plethora of influences on women's participation in the ICT industry; the ICT industry has many commonalities with the DCI. The influences include culture, which encompasses: general attitudes or values regarding women (Trauth, Quesenberry, & Yeo, 2005); a woman's cultural background (Trauth, Quesenberry, & Huang, 2008); and the organisational culture in which a woman finds herself (Webb & Young, 2005). Organisational culture characteristics, such as the dominant male culture in IT organisations (von Hellens, Nielsen, & Trauth, 2001) and masculinised workplaces (Griffiths, Moore, & Richardson, 2007), can leave women feeling as though they are in the gendered minority. However, identifying and understanding these influences presents a complex challenge for researchers. Indeed, McGrath-Cohoon and Aspray (2006) recognise that the issue of women's equitable participation in Information Technology (IT) is so "complex" that it makes "it difficult to know how to go about reaching a gender balance" (p.viii).

In contrast to the ICT context, there are few empirical studies specifically investigating women's participation in the DCI. In the United Kingdom there are two notable studies; Gill (2002) who focused on new media and Prescott and Bogg (2010) who focused on games development. In Australia, key research papers include Swanson and Wise's (1996) findings (from a national survey of the patterns of training, skills, income and employment of women working in the multimedia industries),

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