Chapter 3
The Computer Games Industry:
New Industry, Same Old Issues

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to: provide the reader with an in-depth look at the persistence of gendered occupational segregation, through a discussion of the relatively new industry of computer games; highlight how important this new sector is in terms of cultural and economic impact in countries throughout the world, including the UK and USA; and provide an overview of the situation of women working in this industry and reasons given for their low representation in the industries workforce.

INTRODUCTION

As chapter two has highlighted, it is important for girls and women to be encouraged to engage in computers and technology as both consumers and producers. The computer games industry is an important industry in terms of developing this interest and increasing the attraction of not just computer games, but technology more generally to females. The aim of this chapter is to look at the position of women working in this relatively new male dominated industry. Again, the main data with regard to the computer games industry will be from the UK and USA. The UK and USA are viewed as leading forces of the computer games industry. However, the UK has recently been criticized for losing its innovative edge in the area of ICT and computer games development. According to a 2008 report by Oxford Economic, the UK's games industry is losing its talented, skilled workforce to newer game producing countries, such as Canada (Oxford Economic, 2008). Before considering the position of women in this industry, it is important to provide readers some background to this industry. This will illustrate how pervasive the industry is, in today's society and why it is important to increase women's representation, in the development of this industry.

Research on women working in the games industry represents a new and varied area of research for investigating women's career development in new industries and male dominated organizations. Research on women working in the games industry is sparse. There is also a paucity of research on women's careers in new industries such as new media, of which the games industry is part. Research looking at women in the games industry which is both a new industry and a male dominated industry; under the umbrella of the wider ICT and SET sectors, was deemed as important in gaining a further understanding of occupational segregation as well as identifying possible ways of increasing women's participation in male dominated industries. The industry forms part of the creative industries sector as well as the wider ICT and SET sectors, viewed as a "young and rapidly changing technologically driven subsector of the creative industries with significant interactions with the design and software subsectors" (Camicero et al., 2008, p37).

IMPACT OF THE (COMPUTER) GAMES INDUSTRY TODAY

The computer games industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the 21st century. In 2004, the industries worldwide worth stood at 20b Euros for software and hardware (ISFE, 2004, see Krotoski, 2004). More digital games are sold in the US and UK than books (Bryce and Rutter, 2003). The estimated turnover of the UK computer games industry in 2008 was £625 million, with a direct contribution to UK GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of approximately £400 million (Oxford Economics, 2008). A staggering 273.5 million computer games were sold in the USA in 2009 (ESA, 2011). The increasing dominance of computer games as a mainstream leisure activity is illustrated by the ESA who reported that in 1996 the American entertainment and software industry sold about $2.6 billion in sales revenue, in 2009 sales had increased to £20 billion (ESA, 2011). Computer games are a growing part of our culture, with a number of related activities including magazines, internet communities, and blogging. The games industry has also been recognized for influencing sales in other industries, such a as increasing the demand for high definition television (ESA, 2011).

There is a persistent view that computer games are for boys; however, women are increasingly becoming part of the gaming player base. Of the 26.5 million UK computer games players, 48% are female (Oxford Economics, 2008). Women are the fastest growing group of computer game consumers, making up an estimated 38% of USA players (IBIS World, 2008). More recent figures suggest the UK's industry has sales of over £2 billion and the sector is bigger that either the UK's film or music industries (Livingstone and Hope, 2011). Due to the significance of this relatively new industry, as cultural media, it is appropriate to consider women's representation within the industry, in a separate chapter. According to the Entertainment Software Association, in 2008, 65% of American heads of households played computer games, with 75% aged 18 and over, the average age being 35. In America, 62% of males and 38% of females play computer games; 42% of online gamers are female. In America, the gender time gap spent on game play is narrowing with men averaging 7.6 hours of play per week and women 7.4 hours (ESA, 2008). According to an Entertainment Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA) white paper (Krotoski, 2004), in 2004, 27.2% of all active gamers in the UK were women, which has increased in 2008 (Oxford Economic, 2008). These female gamers have an average age of 30-35 years old, playing on average 7.2 hours per week. Internationally, women in the UK represent a slightly lower proportion of gamers (27.2%) compared to women gamers in America (38%), Japan (36.8%) and Korea (65.9%).

Computer games have an interesting history, and are also referred to as video games or console

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