

Preface

This preface describes both the need for, and purpose of this book – an interdisciplinary literature review of the multiple issues related to gender and computer games for women as both producers and consumers of computer games. The book’s guiding message comes from the perspective that there is a need for women to be involved in the production of computer games and all forms of technology development at all levels. We will explore the issues women face working in this relatively new industry and present some of our UK based research. In general, the guiding message of our book is that computer games/games can be beneficial and women/girls should be involved in all aspects of the industry from consumer to developer. Throughout this book, computer games will refer to both computer games and game interchangeably.

INTRODUCTION

Women and men are segregated within the workforce, and although women are increasing in the workforce, they are segregated into certain jobs (horizontal segregation) and at lower levels (vertical segregation) within sectors and organisations. The underrepresentation of women in computing careers and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industries and the wider Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET) sectors generally forms the starting point and main impetus for this book. There are many internal and external factors as to why women are underrepresented in certain disciplines and occupations (see Prescott & Bogg, 2012, for an over view of the issues related to the issues of gendered occupational segregation in SET). Women have become increasingly more visible in games culture especially as gamers in recent years. However, the issue of gender and computer games is still very relevant (Kafai, et al., 2008). The relatively new industry (approximately four decades) of computer games development is interesting to explore, as it is a relatively new industry and part of the wider ICT and STEM/SET sectors, with recent figures suggesting that women represent just 4% of the UK’s game industries workforce (Skillset, 2009). This is a decrease from 12% reported in 2006 (Skillset, 2006). Similar figures have also been reported in America (Gourdin, 2005) and Canada (Dyer-Whitford & Sharman, 2005). The industry would benefit from attracting a more diverse workforce.

To illustrate the magnitude of the industry, in 2009, games were one of the biggest forms of entertainment in Britain, outselling films (including going to the cinema and DVD sales; Wallop, 2009). Highlighting the significance of the games industry to today's culture, Gillespie (2000) notes that: "This \$9 billion market is art and is significant in today's culture in the same way that books, film, radio, television, and rock-and-roll were the significant media of the past" (Flanagan, 2003, p 361). The importance of the games industry towards the economic and culture landscape is highlighted and empathised in more detail in chapter one. Research shows women are active gamers, especially with more casual than hard-core games. However, the gendering of computer games may be changing. For instance, Braithwaite (2010) views the social network site Facebook, as a catalyst in which women are increasingly becoming more hard-core gamers. The image of the games industry, like the wider ICT and SET industries, is still very much "boys work." However, this image could change with a more diverse workforce and an increasing number of female gamers. The industry may begin to lose its "for boys only" masculine image. There is a general need for the industry to find ways to make computer games female friendly and remove male domination in game culture. This book will consider the position of females throughout the digital age and consider the digital divide from a gendered perspective, across other Web 2.0 applications, including, social media, the Internet, and computers more generally.

We will look at the computer games industry from a gendered perspective and provide a timely overview of gender and computer games. The book will provide a comprehensive overview on the issue of gender, computer games, and the ICT sector, taking into account the literature on interrelated issues associated with the gendering of computer games, from childhood through to adulthood (play and interests through to careers). The book considers whether this new industry could provide solutions for other male-dominated industries, due to the supposedly less bureaucratic working practices and potential new styles of working, or are the same old issues and stereotypes perpetuated, as previous research findings from the wider ICT/SET sectors suggest. We will discuss the issues using a range of relevant literature, from social psychology, organisational psychology, computer science, cultural studies, and sociology disciplines, and we use both qualitative and quantitative research to discuss the issues. Therefore, the book is of relevance to both academics and students in the social and behavioral science disciplines and groups interested in workforce issues in the ICT/SET industries. A number of the chapters will draw from our own relevant employment data, with both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This was extracted from our United Kingdom, Breaking Barriers project (Jan Bogg, Director, and Julie Prescott, senior researcher) and Julie Prescott's recent doctoral research, which focused specifically on women game developers (Jan Bogg was the PhD supervisor).

AIMS OF THIS BOOK

Computer games are gendered, and this book aims to give a comprehensive overview of the issues and discuss why women are underrepresented throughout the games industry and gaming culture generally. Computer games are important to today's society, significant both economically and culturally. Importantly, the computer game industry has a massive impact on culture, technology, and the media landscape today. The industry could widen its appeal through an increased awareness of the variety of roles and skills within the industry and through highlighting the benefits and rewards of working in such a creative, competitive, and growing industry. Findings from the research discussed at length within this book will highlight issues that could enable the games industry to review its policies and working practices in order to facilitate women and other minority groups in the working environment. Instead of women "fitting in or getting out," more can be done to eradicate career barriers and discriminatory work practices in all aspects of the games industry, as well as related game industry occupations such as game journalism.

The book is Western-international in scope, in that we utilize literature and examples from a variety of countries, most predominantly from the UK and USA. Statistics used to illustrate the underrepresentation of women in the computer games industry are, in the main, from the UK and the USA, with some acknowledgement, where possible, of the situation in Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world. The issues discussed are of relevance to Anglophone and Western European countries, although variations between these (and, of course, variations within countries) should be borne in mind.

ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

In writing this book, we aim to cover a number of issues deemed important to the gendering of computer games, the computer games industry and digital technology more generally. In order to give the book structure, we present the text in two sections. The first section considers the literature and previous research on a number of issues related to gender and computer games to provide readers with a thorough understanding of the gender divide and computer games. The second section illustrates the career factors that influence the careers of women working in the games industry and highlights the issues women who currently work in the industry face.

Within each chapter, we have provided chapter aims to signpost what readers will gain from reading each chapter and included a useful key issues table. Throughout the chapters, we hope to highlight the range of ways in which women remain underrepresented with computer games, the wider gaming culture and the computer games industry.

Section 1

Chapter 1: Introduction – Why the Gender Divide in Computer Games is an Important and Timely Issue

This introductory chapter provides an overview of some of the reasons and issues for why the authors feel the computer games industry is an important industry and considers the gender digital divide in computer games. In particular, the chapter focuses on the transferable skills and the technical ability computer games can potentially provide to gamers, as well as considers how games can be beneficial to wider society through a look at the research in the new area of pro-social games and gaming. Although this book has a gendered focus, the authors do recognize that computer games and the computer games industry has other minority and underrepresented groups. Within this chapter, they will also consider other underrepresented groups including those from non-white backgrounds, non-Western culture, and considerations for gamers who are older, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

Chapter 2: The Computer Games Industry, Market, and Culture

This chapter considers the computer game industry's current climate, in particular the importance of the industry in terms of its economic and cultural impact. This is a relatively new industry, part of the wider SET and ICT sector, yet it is an important and increasingly influential industry. The aim of this chapter is to highlight and emphasize to the reader how the computer games industry impacts society, culture, and is a prominent force in the media landscape today. The chapter also discusses the issue of how games are mediated to provide readers with an indication of how attitudes and parenting style can influence what is played and by whom.

Chapter 3: Games and Society – Can Games Make a Better World?

This chapter explores the literature on serious games. In particular, this chapter reviews computer game use in the learning environment and games for learning with a look at the argument for and against their use. The chapter discusses how the younger generation (Net Generation), who have not known a world without technology, computers, and computer games, view technology as a learning tool. In keeping with the gendered digital divide, how the young generation views and uses technology from a gendered perspective is considered.

Chapter 4: Play, Preferences, and the Gendering of Gaming

This chapter explores the differences between the genders with regard to how games are played, what is played, and what motivates people to play. In discussing the issues, the authors focus on Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMROPGs) as a specific game genre with an interesting gender divide. Also considered within the chapter is the gendering of space and the issue of access to and usage of computer games for girls/women.

Section 2

Chapter 5: Representation, Image, and Identity

This chapter emphasises that the underrepresentation of females is not restricted to the games themselves but extends to other aspects of the wider gaming culture. Females are under-represented within computer games, and when they feature in games, they are often hyper-sexualised, such as being scantily dressed, with small hips and large busts. The authors consider the impact that these images can have on both men and women. This chapter also considers avatars and their influence on identity especially for the identity of female gamers.

Chapter 6: Game Workers and the Gender Divide in the Production of Computer Games

This chapter will discuss the game workers who develop computer games and how and why the gender composition of the computer game workforce is an important consideration when discussing the gendering of computer games. In particular, the authors will focus on the issues of flexible working and work life balance.

Chapter 7: The Experience of Women Game Developers

Career motivation, person-environment fit, self-efficacy, self-esteem, work satisfaction, career factors, and life issues are all important constructs when looking at the career and career development of women. This chapter will discuss these constructs and the implications for women working in the games industry. This chapter includes findings from research with women games developers.

Chapter 8: Issues Career Women Face

This chapter focuses on the barriers women encounter in the workplace. There are a number of barriers, which prevent women entering certain occupations and progressing to senior roles. In particular, the chapter will address the issues of career progression, promotion and aspirations, career barriers, women in leadership/senior roles, and the characteristics of what makes a good leader.

Chapter 9: Reflections for the Future

Gendered occupational segregation has a detrimental effect on many aspects of women's careers, most specifically pay, promotion, and career opportunities. It is apparent that men and women experience the workplace differently. This chapter will consider the multifaceted issues in relation to careers of women.

Chapter 10: Final Thoughts and Concluding Comments

In the final chapter, the authors consider the findings, summarise key points, and guidepost further research. They provide useful international Internet resources for reading and networking opportunities. This chapter is a good starting point for research and resources in the area. Further research into the experiences of women working in the computer game industry and other male dominated sectors will enable those industries to alter working practices, which may not only attract but also retain a more diverse workforce.

A COMMON GROUND

In writing this book, we have focused on a psychosocial perspective and a multi-disciplinary viewpoint of gendered occupational segregation to explore the underrepresentation of women in all aspects of computer game culture. This book is our story of the gendering of computer games and the gendered digital divide; we hope it stimulates both reflection and action.

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