Chapter 1

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

ABSTRACT

We live in a technological world and any divide on gendered or other terms is detrimental. The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with an introduction to the gendered digital divide and the gendered digital divide in relation to computer games specifically. In general, technology is viewed as masculine, and there are gender distinctions in relation to access to technologies and how technologies are used. In addition, there is a gender divide in terms of who is involved in the design and production of technology. This chapter also considers “otherness” aside from a gendered divide to include non-White representations, older gamers, and gay gamers. The chapter also considers the arguments as to whether games are good or bad, including a discussion on pro social games.

INTRODUCTION

This book explores gender within computer games, computer games culture and the computer games industry. We will present literature from a predominantly social and organizational psychology perspective as well as include research from other disciplines including game theory, media and cultural studies, and sociology to present a rich and varied picture of the complex interwoven issues surrounding gender within computer games. Our guiding message throughout is that computer games are gendered in a num-

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ber of ways from consumption of the games through to the design of the games. We wish to reiterate that our book is written through the lens of an organisational/social/management psychology perspective. Our writing style is as psychologists and the content is reflective of this professional standpoint. This unique cognitive perspective invites the reader to consider the rich and varied internal and external factors, which encompass occupational gendered segregation.

Technology is often viewed as being masculine (i.e. Wajcman, 2007; Wilson, 2003) with gender distinctions applied to the access to technologies (Ulicsak, et al, 2009), and how technologies are used (Kelan, 2007). There is also gender divide in terms of who is involved in the design and production of technology; where there is a male dominance in who decide what technologies are made and for whom (Valenduc et al, 2004). The male dominance of the ICT workforce is a global issue and predominant in the UK and the USA. For instance in the USA in 2006 females represented just 16% of employed computer and information scientists educated to doctorate degree (National Science Foundation, 2011). Similarly in 2008 the number of employed female ICT professionals in the UK was 66,076, just 14.4% of employed ICT professionals (UKRC, 2008). In the USA the number of females that received bachelor’s degree in the computer sciences decreased by 10% from 28% in 2000 to 18% in 2008 (National Science Foundation, 2011). Recent statistics in the UK shows that females represented just 13% of all undergraduate degree acceptances in computer science in 2011 (UCAS, 2012).

Technology is increasing influencing our daily lives, making the ability to access and use technology increasingly more important. The development of Web 2.0 and associated technology has helped the increased usage of technology in the daily lives of many children and adults, of both genders, globally. Two recent reports in the UK by Ofcom, suggest that the frequency of Internet use has increased from 2004 to 2009, for both adults and children (Ofcom, 2011a, 2011b). According to the Ofcom report on children’s digital literacy, 67% of 5-7 year olds, 82% of 8-11 year olds, and 90% of 12-15 year olds access the Internet at home. The number of hours children spend online varies by age, with 12-15 year olds spending the most hours at 15.6 hours per week. Research has found that males spend more time online and have higher Internet skills than females (Hargittai & Shafer, 2006; Ono & Zavodny, 2003).

Of particular relevance for this book, are the findings by Ofcom that the use of games consoles by 12-15 year olds to access the Internet has increased from 18% in 2009, to 23% in 2010 (Ofcom, 2011a). Suggesting the increasing usage of computer games and gaming devices have on children today. Furthermore, the social networking activity of children is continually increasing, notably an increase in the social networking activity of 5-7 year olds. The report also found that 34% of 8-12 year olds and 47% of 10-12 year
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