Chapter 2
The Computer Game Industry, Market, and Culture

ABSTRACT
Games have become an important leisure activity for children and adults, and they are becoming an increasingly important part of our culture as a whole. This chapter gives readers an insight into the impact of computer games both culturally and economically. The chapter also considers the technical impact of computer games and how this might impact the gendered digital divide. For instance, it is often noted that playing computer games can be a gateway to computing careers due to increasing confidence and skills in computing as well as developing an interest in computers due to familiarity. Indeed, computer games and gaming might be an initial introduction for children to digital technologies generally. In turn, developing their confidence and skills in their usage of technology, leading to an increased utilisation and interest in a career in computer science and information technology. All issues are important when considering the gender divide in computer games.

INTRODUCTION
The computer games industry is the most established of all the sectors of the emergent new media landscape. (Dovey & Kennedy’s, 2006, p2)

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Although the computer games industry forms part of the wider ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and SET (Science, Engineering and Technology) sector, and despite being a relatively new industry of approximately four decades, it is becom-
The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the pervasive impact of computer games in today’s society in order to enable the reader to comprehend the significance of the gender divide within both the production and consumption of games. In order to do this, this chapter is divided into a number of subsections looking at the cultural, economic and technical impact of computer games.

In order to understand the gender divide it is important to consider the history of the industry and how it has developed. Games are a growing part of Western and Asian cultures with a number of related activities including computer games magazines and Internet communities having emerged. Games are sneaking into all aspects of our lives including the workplace, with research suggesting that 61% of CEO’s and other senior executives say they take daily game breaks at work (Reinecke, 2009) again emphasising the popularity of games and their significance today. The popularity of computer games has also been increasing with advances in technology in particular the increasing use of mobile phones, especially smart phones. According to the ESA mobile phone games are viewed as an important contribution to game sales and there were 4.6 billion mobile phone subscribers worldwide in 2009, compared with one billion in 2002 (ESA, 2011b). From a psychological and social science perspective computer games have been linked to addiction, skill development, health promotion and learning as will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this book. Many have questioned whether this increasingly popular leisure activity is harmful or beneficial. In

Economic, technical and cultural impacts all need to be taken into consideration when trying to understand the forces which determine the production of mainstream console games. (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006, p43).

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