



Identifying and Addressing the Issues: A Round Table Report
Woman's Game Conference 2004 - Austin, TX

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Introduction

The Women's Game Conference 2004 was a flagship opportunity for members of the gaming industry and gaming community to identify and address issues which confront women in the game industry and women gamers. These issues were first brainstormed during a panel discussion then focused into seven specific questions by a volunteer team. These seven questions were then addressed in open round table discussions where each table was encouraged to discuss the issues, but to focus on positive solutions. The discussion results documented by this paper hope to serve as an example to the gaming community of the power of staying positive in the face of adversity while showcasing what that power can accomplish in the future.

The topics covered in the round tables (and thusly the focus of this paper) include:

- How can we improve our perceptions of ourselves and how others perceive us in the workplace?
- How can we encourage more young women to pursue careers in the industry?
- How can we communicate effectively with the creators of marketing and advertising for games and game-related products about the message we would like for them to send about women who buy and use their products.
- Are we making a mountain out of a molehill? How do we reconcile the diverse issues women face in the industry (if they exist)?
- Do women bring something unique to the team? If so, what is it and how do we promote its benefit?
- How can we work with educators to raise enrollment and increase retention of women in game-related course work?
- Brainstorm about some concepts that haven't been seen in games that might appeal to women.

Although this conference and this paper focus on women's issues, future endeavors could easily springboard from this event to cover issues encountered by other minority groups as well.

Note to the reader

This paper contains a collection of opinions and ideas presented by attendees of the Women's Game Conference 2004. Although some statements documented may not be factually sound, the ideas and opinions presented in this paper attempt to show the gaming community what the attendees of this conference think of the topics covered at the conference round tables. It is the author's belief that how people view themselves and these issues are equally valuable as the facts themselves. In fact, the notes are presented in their original bulleted form in hopes of preserving the original intent.

About the Women's Game Conference

The Game Initiative's Women's Game Conference focuses on women in the computer and video game industry. The conference focuses on a variety of women's topics in the computer and video game industry including examining career paths for women in the industry and issues related to working in the industry as women as well as how women are portrayed in games and women and girls as consumers of games. The WGC is guided by a Steering Committee of leading women in the game industry and attendees range from leading women in the industry to anyone interested in games. See <http://www.womensgameconference.com> for information concerning past and future conferences.

About the author and acknowledgements

This paper was compiled by Rebekah Tran based upon data she and other volunteers gathered during the Women's Game Conference 2004. The white paper and conference would not have been possible without the determination and vision of the participants, volunteers and attendees of the conference. In particular, the following is a list of conference organizers as well as volunteers who contributed directly to this paper by forming questions, moderating discussions and documenting discussions for the round table events:

Conference directors

- Chris Sherman
- Steve Farrer

Steering committee

- Sheri Graner Ray
- Ellen Guon Beeman
- Mia Consalvo
- Laura Fryer
- Kathy Schoback

Women's conference volunteer coordinator

- Ariel Comstock

Round table question team

These individuals combed through the ideas presented during the brainstorming session and consolidated it into seven topics for the round table discussions.

- Ariel Comstock
- Heather Kelley
- Valerie Massey
- Sheri Graner Ray
- Rebekah Tran

Round table moderators and scribes

These individuals moderated, took notes and drove the debate for one of the seven round tables:

- Silona Bonewald
- Jim Brazell
- Sheryl Chen
- Kristine Coco
- Lindsay Collier
- Ariel Comstock
- Ellen Hobbs
- Heather Kelley
- Sam Lewis
- Linda Licon
- Sheri Pocilujko
- Valerie Massey
- Tatiana Miller
- Rebekah Tran

Identifying the issues

Some people see things as they are and say "Why." I dream of things that never were and say "Why not." -George Bernard Shaw

The conference opened with a panel of speakers covering issues which they felt faced women in the game industry as well as women gamers. Speakers highlighted that letting the industry stagnate by ignoring the potential of untapped or barely tapped markets is dangerous. The issue, according to the speakers, is that in order for the gaming industry to grow, focusing on good design and marketing practices will help attract the elusive market of female players without falling into the pitfall of making games simply for girls. After the panel ended, the floor was opened to attendees to define what they believe are the issues that confront both women in the game industry as well as women as a game market. Both women and men in attendance were encouraged to record their ideas in order to identify issues for the round table discussions.

The raw issues identified during the panel discussion were:

- What are girl games?
- What are the demographic of Girl gamers?
- Why do we want women to play games?
- Marketing towards women – can we do it?
- What are psychological and sociological issues for students? Does the mean girl/queen bee phenomenon exist?
- What can we do at the university level to prevent steering women away from technical/art tracks?
- How do we get more women into the industry (or into computer science)?
- Can we make a business case for hiring women?
- What books from other industries can we use as resources or get insight from?
- Solving management issues?
- How can we get women into positions of power themselves (and do we want to)?
- Where do game designers emerge?
- What is the future, where are we going?
- Getting into the industry – what can we do in the industry to bring women in?
- How do we mentor women who are new to the industry?
- Do we know what women want in games (as players)?
- Women as managers – what special skills do they bring to the team?
- In marketing – how do we address the idea of common traits which include women?
- How does the lack of women in management effect:
 - Product choice?
 - Market direction?
 - Hiring?
- Fan recognition – people in the industry and consumers don't perceive women as being the ones who make/play games?
- Do you have to be a bitch to be a successful female game industry professional?

The final seven questions chosen for the round table discussions were formed by identifying the recurring themes from the above issues. The themes seen by the round table team included education/industry entry, workplace empowerment, marketing, management and production. Making sure to have at least one question which covered each of these themes, the round table team then phrased the questions in an open ended way so that the tables themselves (rather than the question makers) would determine which path the discussion/solutions would take.

The final seven questions selected for the round table discussions were:

- Topic 1 - How can we improve our perceptions of ourselves and how others perceive us in the workplace?
- Topic 2 - How can we encourage more young women to pursue careers in the industry?
- Topic 3 - How can we communicate effectively with the creators of marketing and advertising for games and game-related products about the message we would like for them to send about women who buy and use their products.
- Topic 4 - Are we making a mountain out of a molehill? How do we reconcile the diverse issues women face in the industry (if they exist)?
- Topic 5 - Do women bring something unique to the team? If so, what is it and how do we promote its benefit?
- Topic 6 - How can we work with educators to raise enrollment and increase retention of women in game-related course work?
- Topic 7 - Brainstorm about some concepts that haven't been seen in games that might appeal to women.

Addressing the issues - round table results

Don't dwell on what went wrong. Instead, focus on what to do next. Spend your energies on moving forward toward finding the answer. - Denis Waitley

The round table discussions were set up as seven individual tables in the conference area. Each table consisted of a volunteer moderator, a volunteer scribe and a unique topic from the seven final topics. Prior to the start of the session, the questions and their corresponding table numbers were displayed on a projector so that attendees could have a preview of the issues. Once the session started, round table attendees chose a table based on its topic and stayed for the duration of the discussion. After 30 minutes to an hour of discussion, the table disbanded for a short break before choosing another table. This new group, once again, discussed the topic for 30 minutes to an hour before the conference ended.

Topic 1 - How can we improve our perceptions of ourselves and how others perceive us in the workplace?

This table presented an opportunity for attendees to further discuss Mia Consalvo's presentation during the "Identifying the Issues" panel. One of the examples which sparked discussion was a slide that cited the IGDA Quality of Life white paper's statistic which indicated that 30% of women in the game industry feel they work less than their colleagues as compared to 12% of males. This example and other's presented by Consalvo fed into the discussion for why do women feel this way about themselves and their colleges.

The attendees at this table brainstormed many ways to improve internal and external perceptions of a worker in the workplace. Suggestions or solutions covered include:

- Establishing methods of measuring success
- Soliciting constructive criticism
- Maintaining internal self assessments
- Improving lines of communication with peers
- Dealing with misperception specifically related to sexism
- Mentoring
- Practicing what you preach

Improving perceptions of ourselves

Use the Following Criteria to Measure Success

- Look at the quality of your work and your participation as a team player, not the number of hours you worked on it for (i.e. don't use amount of hours spent in the workplace as barometer for success)
- Make sure you know how you are quantifying your work, such as hours worked vs. managing your time well.
- Do not allow yourself or others to reward bad behavior, (i.e. do not look highly upon the person who stays all night working on something and is unavailable for questions the next day because he or she is sleeping). This can seriously hinder a team and your perception of yourself because you will measure success on flawed technique.
- Do not allow yourself to take on more responsibility than you can handle.
- Hit your deadlines.
- If the work is too hard, then it is probably too hard for others as well.(its not that you are unqualified to do it)
- Know your strong points and weaknesses.

Solicit constructive criticism on your work from co-workers and managers

- Asking for feedback will get you a better sense of how others perceive you (which may be different then how you think they perceive you)
- Compare your work to that done by coworkers, in terms of style and quality.

- Compare differences in techniques, methods and resources in how work is done.
- Find hard facts about improvements that can be made or things you do well. (I.e. – get specifics out of subjective comments)
- Find the right approach for you to move forward (your co-workers workflow may not be right for you)
- Find new techniques to use.
- Know that you are not going to please everyone (so don't be disappointed if someone dislikes your work)
- Have confidence and be assertive when asking and receiving feedback.

Improving co-worker's perception of you

- Ask yourself, how do you see yourself? Ask coworkers how they see you. If there are differences, ask yourself what you can do to change that for the better.
- Clarify your perception of yourself to others. If you think someone is misunderstanding you, then talk to him or her about it instead of just letting it go.
- Defend yourself politely if necessary.
- Bring serious situations to the attention of the manager. The manager does not always know everything that is going on. Example: If you know someone is not hitting her deadlines or if you are pulling someone else's weight let the manager know.
- There is a difference between assertive and aggressive. You can be assertive and confident without being aggressive and bitchy.
- Dealing with misperception specifically related to sexism
 - Do not try to act like a man or differentiate yourself as a woman. Just be yourself.
 - Do not allow men to become jealous if women are better than them. Deal with the situation. (talk to them, point it out)
 - Try not to let yourself or others be coddled in the workplace.
 - Challenge sexism. (Approach it as a learning experience not a confrontation). Remember that something you perceive as sexist may not have been intended that way or that the person doing it didn't realize it at all. Talk to them, point out what they did that made you uncomfortable, giving them the opportunity to change their ways.
 - Ask other women how they deal with situations so you have something to compare to your situation and methods to deal with them.
 - Treat situations with the right amount of seriousness.

Make sure to keep your perceptions of others in check

- Do not allow yourself or others to ignore the intelligence of someone with youth or beauty.
- Reinforce that women **DO** play video games. You're proof of that.
- Make sure you're talking to co-workers about issues (from way they acted in a meeting to an idea they brought forward) instead of letting it go.

Good office practices – solutions for today

Regardless of where you are in your career or what people think of you professionally, there are some things that are just good office practices. These everyday solutions can help build self-esteem as well as team-esteem.

Communicate

- Instant Messaging can be a great icebreaker if you don't want to talk face-to-face.
- Trust others when you ask them for feedback.
- Be able to collaborate with others.
- Give thanks and recognition where appropriate.
- If something is bothering you, address it in whatever way you are most comfortable with.

Ask Questions

- Always ask! If you do not ask questions there could be big problems in the future. Questions are timesavers, prevent miscommunication and false assumptions.
- Do not let your pride get in the way. Others may have the same questions.
- If you have obvious questions ask them anyway. The answer may not be so obvious. (Remember there is no such thing as a stupid question)

Find Mentors

- Male mentorship vs. Female mentorship. (Use both. They can both give you valid feedback from differing points of view.)
- Mentors can help you with decision making in your career path.
- Get involved with local groups to get more experience and work with different groups of people. Consider your experience with outside projects when perceiving how you fit into a work place and what you're good at.
- Create a place where stories of experiences and mentorship can be shared.
- Ask someone to be your mentor if you like her work.
- Access other women for help and advice.

Topic 2 - How can we encourage more young women to pursue careers in the industry?

During the "Addressing the Issues" panel, many statistics were presented which highlighted the small number of women in the game industry. In hopes of staying positive while addressing the issues, this topic was formed to address the issue of low employment levels of women in the gaming industry.

Although there are many ways to encourage women to pursue a game industry career, this table focused on two solutions:

- Introduce girls to games at an early age to familiarize them with gaming as a hobby and educational outlet

- Identify and implement ways to make young women aware of career opportunities in the interactive entertainment field and encourage them to set goals and pursue them

Overcoming the stigma

- Overcoming the stigma associated with being “nerdy” or “boyish” will help empower girls to find their own paradigm. Action can be taken locally as well as through a game company to inspire girls to be themselves and recognize that it is okay to be girly AND a gamer or game maker. Educate parents about the benefits of playing games as an excellent introduction to get comfortable with computers and possibly entering the game industry.
- Create more games that girls can relate to in order to spark their interest in the industry and see it as a viable career path. Use familiar elements but introduce new ideas to expand their interests
 - Barbie Snowboarding or Barbie’s Fashionable Demolition Derby
 - The Sims and Sims 2 (playing house turned digital)
- Have current female game developers speak at elementary, middle and high schools.
 - Don’t “dumb things down” – use the same language when explaining industry-related topics with girls as you would with boys.
 - Start to train and educate girls early – don’t wait until junior high or high school – so that acclimating themselves to new interfaces and game premise ideas comes more easily
- Create or work with existing groups to establish a mentoring program
- Create a highly visible and accessible community for girls and young women
- Have women in the industry be more visible so that young women will not feel intimidated the men-to-women ratio and understand that they will not be the only woman on their development teams.

Highlight game development as a career

- Make people aware of the variety of positions available, that there’s more to it than just programming and art, then help them acquire the knowledge and skills needed to get where they want to be.
- Focus on story aspect of games. Many girls choose “writer” as a career choice. Why shouldn’t writer overlap with fiction writing for games?
- Create or work with existing groups to cultivate a thirst for science and technology in young women.
 - Many universities (such as The University of Texas at Austin) have Women in Science student organizations which attempt to influence high school level girls to join science or math based fields. Including the game industry in events led by groups like this will help make young women identify game programmer/designer/artist as a viable career choice.
- Address the quality of life issue and support industry leaders in their efforts to overcome problems such as equal pay for equal positions, reasonable work hours, support for workers with families, etc.

- Work with educators to make them aware of the value of women in the interactive entertainment industry, opportunities for women there, and what they can do to cultivate those interests and skills in their female students
- Work with the Department of Labor and other statistics providers to redefine and expand their career option listings regarding game-related occupations to increase awareness

Topic 3 - How can we communicate effectively with the creators of marketing and advertising for games and game-related products about the message we would like for them to send about women who buy and use their products.

This topic addresses the marketing issue associated with the gaming industry. During the panel discussion, the idea was presented that current marketing trends focus on males ages 15 – 25. Current marketing issues need to focus not only on the types of games advertise, but also on how they're advertised. There are countless examples of games which not only contain over-sexualized female characters, but prominently display screenshots and artwork of these women in advertising.

Being a very broad issue, this discussion naturally covered a variety of questions followed by possible solutions. The primary questions addressed include:

- How should the industry communicate with the market?
- How can the industry change current business/marketing/design plans?
- What message should be sent?

Questions brought up by the group

- Are there companies (consulting agencies) that try NOT to offend women? We didn't know of any agencies that are specifically focused on the game industry. Several that focus on high-tech but not game specific.
- Would it take sheer numbers and statistics to prove that women are playing? Companies are still resistant, even if presented with statistics.
- A lot of teen magazines: YM, Sugar, etc. do game reviews now. There is a lot of easy access to do ads to further market games to women.
- Do we need to get a great female game to draw the audience?
- Girls traditionally play with one of them playing and the others watching. How can we harness this?
- No other media has this kind of stigma. Is it really a media stigma, or a content stigma? What other kinds of media have this stigma - books and movies don't have this problem.
- Where can we go to play?
 - To girls, playing games is stigmatized – there are no gaming cafes for girls. Possible focuses could be on all girl, mixed company or battle of the sexes LAN parties, or karaoke games.
 - Promote home gaming parties/LAN parties a la Tupperware Parties.
 - Ultimately, there needs to be a safe place for women to socialize and game together

How do we communicate?

- Not only is it important to market to women who like this genre/type of game naturally, but, beyond that, it is important to focus on how not to turn potential players away.
- Change the perspective from: here's how you can make your game more appealing to women to here's how you can expand/broadening your market. (A business perspective)
- Games magazine for women.
- Convincing a women's magazine to cover games.
 - Cover different aspects, lifestyle choices such as in Working Mother magazines.
- Sports and fashion magazines have technologies editors. Someone from the game industry could start contacting the women's magazines. (Go where the women are.)
- The people who are not resistant are the people who already sell to women.
- Possible goal: convince ad buyers to do experimental marketing. How to convince them it is not risky.
- Locations where women don't feel comfortable going to: such as comic stores, video game stores.
- Social networks – word of mouth recommendations
- Cross-marketing/advertising
- Appeal to the fact that guys have wives and girlfriends. Then the guys would purchase them because they could play with them. They want to play with their significant others.
 - The NFL was losing sales, so NFL did market research and learned that women wouldn't watch sports because they didn't understand the rules. Once the NFL started explaining the plays, ticket sales increased.
- Target market changes on age. Different interests at different ages.
- Print marketing – twisting the advertising to the women who are reading.
 - 17 magazine – back to school issue
 - Delias.com; alloy.com
 - BB and Guess, they don't ever have pop-ups on their web sites.
 - Maybe put a short demo on the web site or link to it.
 - Girl Scouts
- Word of mouth works fast with women.
 - Warning – bad news spreads just as fast as good news.
- Who is in our network? Push those people. Do you know of anyone who knows people in the magazine or mass media industry that we can contact?
 - Example: Playboy just did an issue – women gamers in an issue.
- Mobile games may be a big focus point. May be a strong market b/c they're acceptable devices to have. A phone for a girl is almost required. Roll a new "look" out every few months. Be able to change the color like being able to change the colors on cell phones.
 - Gigapetz – like an avatar – gaming system that could do the same thing.
- Making women's buying power visible – news articles

- Magazines – women’s and teens – Parent magazine -technology editors
- Events/environments – coffee shop internet for women
- Marketing to men who want games to play with girlfriends
- Celebrity girl endorsements – Celebrities shown as game players (or who are game players)
- Representing “fun” in a different way
- Role model/socialization of playing games
 - Comparison to old cigarette marketing to break taboo for women. – smoking isn’t cool, smokers are cool – is there are gaming equivalent?
 - Imagery showing girls/women playing together – families playing together
- Focus on handhelds and portables – already installed base + acceptable color/shape fashion changes
- Family co-op MMO or other game – kids or less experience players can have a smaller role.
- Reaching parents to promote games they can play with their kids.
- Game parties a la old Tupperware parties

Changing the business/designers

- Game industry marketing is governed by the people who make the product. This is not the case in other industries. Market research needs to be outsourced
- An attendee co-owns a company that does high-tech. Is looking to outsourcing game market industry research. Game companies can’t find firms to do this – they do this in-house.
- Point of purchase – Have women demo the game.
- At the retail level – training the trainers
- Guys get confused because there are many categories of things that women like.
- Has to be approached from a content aspect first.
 - 32% of women surveyed for the Quality of Life survey wouldn’t work on a game like GTA 3 while 68% didn’t have a personal problem with the game.
- As long as the developers and advertisers don’t see women as a primary target for games, they won’t put effort into developing content.
- One of the first things to work on is that women are a legitimate market.
- Create and promote family servers. This way parents can connect with their children in game and encounter situations that facilitate discussion.

Changing marketing

Marketing must recognize that women buy games. Not only do they play them, but many times mothers are the ones that buy them for their families.

- Appeal to women’s interests
 - Take a chick-flick and make a game out of it. This was a reference to the movie industry in that there is often a game created along with a movie release.
 - Form games magazines for women or have women’s magazines cover games.

- Highlight women who are on the development teams.
- Recycling games from childhood. Familiarity/comfort/sentimentalism. Game content is self-selected for the girl.
- Push content that is in an arena that women are proportionately higher in.
- Focus on Viral marketing.
 - Point of purchase demos performed by girls
 - Make the games look fun. Lots of games don't look like fun to a girl or woman. In fact, many look intimidating and discourage women from trying it in public.
 - Approach Girl Scouts on the National Level. Suggestion: Picture of a girl playing a video game on the Girl Scout cookies box.
 - Make advertisement pop ups games themselves
- Market to early adopter girls – give your games away to them.
- Instead of a product placement, a behavior placement.
- Look at what has been successful - there are women playing. Need to get the message out.

What message do we send?

- We need to recognize that women will buy games and that they generate revenue.
 - How do we communicate women's purchasing power?
- We have evolved; we're in the second phase. Gaming is the second most important high-tech industry.
- Foundation: There are good games to market to women.
- Public Service Awareness Campaign: Digital guy in a string bikini? Not sure of impact, but it communicates the message. Might be able to pull this off with humor.
- Marketing messages specific to women: Escapism – Lawyer by day, warrior by night. Show a woman going through her chores and then making time to play a game. Showing girls playing together. Play with their friends. Idea is that you can improve your circle of friends playing games.
- Show celebrities playing video games.
- The Nancy Drew stories – they did it as a group. As a mother/daughter/sister group. Show bonding through the game as something that occurs.
- Relax, escape, socialize, playing with identity, customize who you are - stressing the fact that you can be unique and accepted.
- Promote these Messages
 - Women /girls who play games aren't geeks
 - Games are not a waste of time. We need to communicate that games should be more integral to their lives, for example training and education.

<p>Topic 4 - Are we making a mountain out of a molehill? How do we reconcile the diverse issues women face in the industry (if they exist)?</p>
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During the conference some people voiced concern that both the conference and the ideas presented would be viewed unfavorably. With all the issues that were presented, the question became – are the issues felt by woman game professionals and gamers isolated

incidents now blown out of proportion or are there larger issues present that are finally being addressed?

This topic served as more of a catch all topic for discussion where attendees could not only identify additional issues, but also positively address criticism to ideas presented. Ideas addressed by attendees of this table include:

- Forced diversity
- Increasing awareness for current and potential women in the industry
- Does the separate conference hurt more than help
- Quality of life issues
- Marketing issues
- What do we change?

Forced diversity

- People want to put more women in the industry. Is it fair if a woman is put into a role even though a man is more qualified?
 - Well this is illegal, so it doesn't happen.
 - Diversity comes from the top. If you are diverse at the highest levels, then it will trickle down.
 - No one sees women applicants. The few women that are there are qualified, but there aren't enough qualified women.
 - The problem here is that women seem to not even consider the game industry as an option.
- Women are more drawn to companies who are run by women. There is a feeling that if you have women in management roles it would be easier to push a women agenda.
- If there are women on the management team women will feel more comfortable. This will effect the environment that people work in.
- Women aren't going into the industry or fields which lead into the industry.
- You can't attribute all of your work experience to being a woman. You are either a good worker or not. It's really dangerous to fall into a victim mentality.
- Yeah, they probably hired me because I was a woman who cares... at least this way you can get your foot in the door and show then what you're made of.

Start increasing awareness now

- Having a positive woman role model helps people who would normally fall on the wayside
 - Groups such as girl scouts outreach, horizons, mentors, girl start are all ways to help battle this mind set.
 - When you hit puberty what people tell you effects how you perceive yourself. So if you aren't pushed early then you won't try for it.
- Encourage girls to make websites, make flash games and make small mods.
 - The games that have mod tools and communities do not appeal to girls. As a result, a majority of girls do not create mods or have any sort of exposure to scripting or programming games.

- Remove roadblocks to entry
 - Younger girls can't play newer games because the controllers are too big.
 - Focus on M rated marketing discourages parents from thinking of games as a good toy option for their children.
 - With the rise of AIM and casual games, it should become easier to get women to embrace technology as opposed to being afraid of it.
 - Anonymity of the web is welcoming for a woman. As a result, the internet is an ideal place to capture the women audience.
- The Orlando Florida gaming community is working with magnet schools to get people more excited about games and more educated and trained with skills that would make women qualified so that they can work in the industry.
- Some women had experiences in which the men they worked for empowered them to be successful. This comes from a team who is aware of the benefits of a diverse team, and act accordingly.

Does the separate conference hurt more than help?

When anyone separates themselves, there is a little bit of trepidation as to the motives of the group. What does the separate conference bring to the table that would not be there as a panel in the Austin Game Conference?

- By having this conference separately we are able to walk away with tools and information that we would not have otherwise. Some women are not comfortable dealing with the current management structure, so this conference gives another opportunity for women to relax and talk with a smaller group.
- Women are looking for new ways to be empowered. This smaller conference is a way for women to form a support group that empowers them to start change.
 - Having a separate identity from the male developers will help us to form a support group that will make us stronger as a whole. Being 1 group as opposed to 150 individual women who are scrambling around trying to have their voices heard.
 - People who feel oppressed can empower themselves by finding a support group that will buoy them forward.
 - When you're at an all girl's school or an all guy's school you are more likely to act out or differently because you're more comfortable. When everyone's on an even level when you start there are fewer expectations so it's easier for the women to jump in.
- Women at this conference don't believe there are negative feelings about us "forming our own club". In fact, they claim that many men wanted to come to this conference, however because it overlapped with the Austin Game Conference, they did not attend in full force. Regardless, if people are making fun of us on the other side of the wall, we have encountered that our whole careers and it will make us stronger.
- By holding a separate event we are able to get press coverage that we would not have gotten otherwise. Unless you are in a position of power you will not be listened to. You start to say "How do I make a difference, I'm just a programmer." This press coverage makes a difference in that it makes sure we're heard.

Quality of life issues

- Men are more comfortable asking for more money which may be why we make less.
- If we are making a mountain out of a molehill, then why are we making \$12000 less than man on average? Lesbians make more than straight women because they are perceived more favorably because they have a smaller chance to have children.
- Women who do work are struggling because there aren't things in place to support people with families. No maternity leave and weird hours. 10 – 6 sucks when you have kids.
- Maybe we're just trying to do too much. The entertainment industry takes a lot of time, so maybe we need a maturing of the industry as opposed to just women in the workplace.
- Men as well hit a certain age and want to stay at home with their kids too. They think that if you had a quality of life panel at GDC men AND women would show up as the industry as a whole is tired.
- Minorities in general need to be targeted not just women. This conference covers topics which are valid to not just women, but to those who are minorities, disabled, poor, etc.
- Women are still fighting for roles so having a smaller group helps.
- Until you have critical mass in the industry getting together just emphasizes the fact that we're here...and through that make positive changes.
- It's an employees market. If a company is progressive it will attract men and women. Put a positive spin on it and everyone win.
- When you give a woman the freedom she needs to have a family and such, you'll have her for life.
- There are crunches in everything so it's unlikely that crunching is why people drop out of the game industry at 35.

Marketing

- Online games and roll playing games are more open for a more diverse market.
- A karaoke game will be easier to make in a company with all women than making a fps.
- We need to see a breakdown of who actually plays games.
- Diversifying the people who use the product is the first step in fixing this problem.

What do we change?

- Perceptions of how women and men treat each other must change.
- Change the content of games: look at what women really want in a game and build a business around that.
- Instead of quoting rumor and feelings, go to producers armed with money projections, facts and figures and you can get anything done.
- Ultimately, the best way to address these issues is to tell the world what we've been talking about and educate people as to what we think.

Topic 5 - Do women bring something unique to the team? If so, what is it and how do we promote its benefit?

It goes without saying that women have different strengths and experiences that they can bring to a team to make it more balanced. This is not to say that women are better than men, but rather that a team with diverse backgrounds will be more likely to understand and find successful solutions to any problem they face. Although this round table discussion includes many statements are blanket stereotypical statements, the fact that women gamers and developers are identifying with and recognizing these behaviors is illuminating. Ultimately, the table focused:

- Women's contribution to a team as team builders.
- Women's ability to bring a difference perspective to a primarily male team.
- Various hurdles that women will have to overcome in regards to hiring practices.
- Solutions to problems addressed in the discussion of the above issues.

Women as team builders

- Women, typically, are more oriented toward relationships. Because a team is a form of a relationship, women often will help nurture and build the team. This may be attributed to the fact that women are typically less threatened by other people's ideas.
- There are occasions when egos flare between company figureheads which prevent positive workflow. It is at this time that the gentle diplomatic touch a female team member could encourage results and deflect the ego barring progress. Many times this can be attributed to the general feeling that many women listen better than men.
- A team dynamic can change drastically when a woman is introduced to an all male team. This includes changes in behavior, maturity, conversation, professionalism and focus. Beyond this, as a result of a female addition to an all male team, team members may increase their display/knowledge of culture and sensibility about the women's market.
- Women are often powerful teachers and can easily relate to others. These skills can help to guide and nurture not only women in the industry, but men in the industry as well.
- Men and women feel more likely to open up to women managers about issues external or internal to the company that are going to affect the employees work.
- Many women feel they have something to prove to the industry which makes them work much harder and have a large personal investment in a project. This commitment and focus can be invaluable to a team. Hurdles are not that different than other creative industries.

A Different Perspective

- Money talks – women make up 51% of the population which means in some cases you can double your revenues if you bring in the same amount of female customers as male customers. If you have females on your team you can get a better grasp of what that 51% may want. Sims, with lots of female voices present

to the lead Will Wright, is proof that a game built well with the help of many high-ranking females can attract a mass of female players.

- Given that the current market is primarily men ages 15 – 25, women are able to provide insight into this untapped market. Beyond this, women are more likely to identify potential sensitive issues that an all-male team may miss. This difference of voice will help market a game, design a game, etc. that appeals to a larger market.
- Increasing the target market by removing inherent barriers to women gamers present in game design which may be oblivious to male developers. Although the female market is very broad, having at least one woman on a team will provide insight into what she, as a gaming audience, sees as a barrier into the game being developed. Beyond that, a female team member can also provide feedback based on her experiences with other women gamers.
- The gaming market is getting saturated; therefore the female gamer is the key to increased growth and revenue for the industry. By having female developers on a team, the team will have a better “touchstone” for creating female-friendly games.
- Women with kids are able to understand the children’s games market and what kids want/need better than men with kids. This is most likely related to the fact that women most often buy games for their children.
- The new perspective women can bring to an all male team could bring drastic changes in the way the game looks, plays, and serve as a bit of fresh air. This ability to look at a problem from different points of view can aid a team in building games in such a way as to give both genders what they want. After all, women have a lot more experience attracting men than men have attracting men.

Hurdles to Overcome

- There is a huge gray area when it comes to hiring and a fear may be that women won’t fit into their culture. Human resources and managers need to get past seeing things like taking time off for family and the like as non-hiring detriments.
- Women are in the minority in the industry so what they are doing (good or bad) is more easily noticed by management.
- Women primarily fill art and human resource positions in game companies. However, employers want women in the engineering, design and production disciplines.
- Companies that hire women are seen as progressive. As a result, companies want women employees. The down side is that the hired women may have to prove that they weren’t hired to fill a quota.

Solutions

- Create gender inclusive games, not just “girl games”. Understand what women want in games and find the balance between male and female gamers.
- Know what women want:
 - Intuitive and amazing user interfaces
 - In depth storylines
- Show success stories of how women affected the revenue in a positive way by being added to the development team and that bringing in more women to your

- company can add that. An example is how the international market is growing because they have so many female players.
- Encourage human resources and management to accept that women can have a personal life and keep up with the fast pace of the game industry.
 - Focus on investing in people for the long term, not short term.
 - Given how mobile technology is today, working primarily from the home meets the needs of mothers and their companies.
 - Increase the visibility of female developers that work on a game. This could translate into increased sales to females.

Topic 6 - How can we work with educators to raise enrollment and increase retention of women in game-related course work?

This topic was a very straightforward brainstorming session in which current students, past students and professors all recognized that there is a problem with women enrolling in science and math related fields which are key to the game industry. Beyond this, the game industry has such a broad range of professions within it that people majoring in Art, Architecture, English as well as computer science should be encouraged to consider the game industry as a potential field. In the discussion, the table focused on two primary issues:

- Raising Enrollment
- Increasing Retention

Raising enrollment

- With the burst of the Dot.com bubble, computer related degrees have dropped in enrollment. As a result, any efforts put forth to encourage women in computer science should also involve game industry professionals.
 - Game companies should work with student organizations such as the Women in Science and the Electronic Game Developer Society (EGaDS!), groups at The University of Texas, in order to encourage and raise awareness of women in the game industry.
- Computer science is just a tool, so it should connect with more social applications
- Due to the recent focus on specializing computer science degrees, having separate game programming, graphics programming and game design degree plans would help prepare students for a career in the game industry.
- Advertise that gaming is not exclusively programming. Even game programming is not all graphics and server programming. Promote awareness in English, radio, television and film, architecture, music and art degree programs for possible candidates.
- Society of Women Engineers, Women in Science, EGaDS!
 - Mentoring and tutoring programs would help provide struggling students with a support group.
 - Provide a women’s gaming environment – all girl LAN parties, clans and social game competitions
 - Hold collegiate gaming conferences, collegiate game competitions and have more game industry professional development conference occur near

major college campuses. Then give women game groups the opportunity to win free tickets or discounted tickets to attend the events.

Increasing retention

- Create special side programs for new and current employees
 - Mentoring for new hires.
 - Creation of special committees to address quality of life issues.
 - Having a designated person on a team who will listen to grievances without intimidation that goes with talking to your boss.
- Recognize that women (and men) don't "eat sleep and drink computers".
- Currently the game industry is a meat grinder. Address quality of life issues in hopes of retaining employees.
- Encourage the rewarding of new behaviors and ideas instead of focusing on the narrow safe approach.

Topic 7 - Brainstorm about some concepts that haven't been seen in games that might appeal to women.

The market segment of "women gamers" refers to a very large group, all of which have different likes/dislikes and lifestyles. Despite this, this topic is important because it focuses on solutions for game developers to remember when designing games who wish to target women. Participants at this table brainstormed not only about what design ideas could attract a larger women audience in the future, but also what has worked to do so in the past. Ideas discussed at this round table discussion primarily included:

- Design Ideas that have worked such as gender inclusive design, including emotionally involving storylines, including strong female protagonists as well as allowing for multiple game play styles.
- Preferred elements for future games from a parent's perspective.
- Preferred elements for future games from a gamer's perspective.

Design ideas that have worked

- Gender Inclusive Design
Many games that involve music are gender inclusive and, as a result, appeal to a very wide audience. Examples include:
 - Dance Dance Revolution
 - Frequency
 - Karaoke Revolution
 - Donkey Konga
- Emphasize Emotional Involvement
The female market is drawn to games with in-depth storytelling where active participation helps determine the story outcome while drawing the player in emotionally. This includes games which involve discovery, puzzle solving, and are have non-linear paths/storylines. Examples include:
 - Myst - The role-playing strategy game in its various incarnations is long on adventure and problem-solving and short on violence.

- Zork series – Started as a text based adventure that went graphics in the 1990s. This series not only has an in depth history, but uses humor and puzzles to push its storyline.
- Morrowind – Roll playing game without a linear storyline. The player is allowed to complete the game at their own pace - in their own way.
- Introduce a Strong Female Protagonist
 - Beyond Good and Evil – Protagonist is a female reporter is lively, strong and sassy and yet still feminine.
 - The Nancy Drew series of mystery games – Although it is aimed at a younger audience, it also holds a lot of nostalgic appeal for older women. Beyond that, it includes a female as the protagonist.
 - The Longest Journey – An adventure game which features another strong female character who uses her mind to solve problems in her world(s).
- Allow for Multiple Game Play styles
 - Massively Multiplayer Online games appeal to women because they contain multiple styles of play. Players can engage in violence, create things (craft), take on leadership roles (guild leader) or just socialize (chat).
 - Fast paced and quick parlor or puzzle games for women with time constraints
 - Bejeweled
 - Games on Shockwave.com, Popcap.com and Zone.com
 - Nostalgia games (particularly on the Gameboy) which allow for playing games on the go with low time commitments
 - Namco Museum (ms. Pac Man, Pole Position, Dig Dug, etc)
 - Re-release of Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda and Metroid games
 - Games which promote indirect competition
 - Puzzle Pirates – online game which encourages players to collaborate in teams as they battle at sea. Among other things, characters must acquire clothes as play proceeds.
 - Tetris – Goal is to obtain the highest score.

Preferred elements for future games

- Elements Preferred as a Parent:
 - Education games on cell phones since children are using them a lot.
 - Virtual careers on a game more realistic as opposed to a childish view of a career.
 - More emphasis on social interactions. Women enjoy grouping together with other players to play the game more than gaming alone.
 - Place where you can select characters and manipulate story lines. Sort of like a soap Opera or a Pseudo Story/Novel.

- Mini Fizz is a European game where you choose social interactions.
- Games for older age groups that educate: Algebra, Calculus etc.
 - A company called Serious Games is working on this idea in California.

Preferred elements for an adult woman gamer:

- Games need to incorporate deeper storylines which warrant more personal investment in the player's character. Make the player care about the character or game, and watch the character grow within the game/game plot. The personal and emotional involvement makes the player more likely to continue playing.
 - The Sims is a perfect example of this.
 - Beyond this, women enjoy ongoing games that don't have an ending point.
- Time is precious so games need to appeal more to a casual time scale. This could be done by either making a wider range of casual gaming or by breaking games into smaller chunks that you can easily pick up and put down
 - Many games only allow for players to save at a certain point or continue for a set amount of time. When family obligations are taken into account, this is a big turn off to female players.
 - Casual games (online and cell phone games) Can quickly start and stop as you have time. This may be why many women play casual games.
 - Kingdom of Loathing is a mainly text based, turn based humorous adventure game which claims to have 60% a female player base. Arguments have been made that this is due to the fact that this game is a) free and b) is broken into 60 turns per day which is a minor time investment.
- Include multiple game play types
 - More emphasis on puzzle solving in games.
 - Focus on helping someone or something rather than the Hero killing something or someone.
 - It's refreshing to have a way to solve a problem other than fighting. When fighting is required, aggression needs to have a purpose and move the storyline. Make sure the story supports game play and not mindless play which only involves shooting something.
 - More emphasis on social interactions and choices with a storyline.
 - Have multiple ways to solve a problem
 - Create socialization in a first person shooter with vocalization during the game. This will differ from the Sims in which your whole goal is interaction.

- Convert novels with female protagonists into games. These games, like the novels, should be able to be enjoyed by the whole family.
 - Nancy Drew, Jane Austin, etc
 - As a result, young women will get into these games because of someone else that is playing the game.
 - Create a game that is as fun to watch someone play as it is to play.
- Remove blocking elements
 - The biggest boundaries in games for someone to overcome are penalties (in game death in particular). To avoid losing gamers to frustration, focus on designs which provide methods for mistakes to be corrected including minimal penalization for dying.
 - A game can be challenging without being difficult to understand. Systems should be designed with this in mind.

What is the future, where are we going?

As members of the industry [we] have a responsibility to help relieve the pressure on our industry to make it all it can be. ...[T]here are practical things you can do on many fronts that will help shape the future of this industry” – Patricia Vance during the second keynote speech of WGC 2004.

Now that the conference doors have closed and closing remarks are done, what matters is what happens next; talking about a problem does not solve the problem. Not only can attendees attend the next Woman’s Game Conference on October 26 - 27, 2005 armed with new ideas, but there are things that can be done today to start making a difference.

Start in the home by taking an interest in what your friends and family are playing. Beyond that, start a family game night or suggest titles that emphasize that games for women doesn’t have to mean games are simply packaged in a pink box. Although more time consuming, another idea is to form a local group of women game developers or women gamers; then, as a group, become more active and pursue outreach projects such as mentoring or educating parents about the ESRB rating systems. On the work front, game developers could ask questions and challenge design or marketing ideas which may discourage potential markets. Another idea is to encourage companies to begin internship programs and show college students that the game industry is, in fact, a viable career path. Finally, find people within the workplace or friends’ circle who are willing to start community outreach and awareness programs or volunteer to speak at local schools to encourage students and show them that the industry does, in fact, include women. These examples are just a small selection of applications of ideas presented in the round table discussions that can be started by anyone.

Ultimately, the future is up to the individual. Whether a developer or customer, you must raise your voice to shape the future of this industry and this market. We are women, we are gamers and we will be heard.