



# Gender-Based Title Creation

by Jocelyn Cohen and Pat Roberts

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For the past two and a half years Convivial Design focused all of its efforts on the design and production of multimedia experiences targeted exclusively for girls seven to twelve years old. Working with Interval Research Corporation and its spin-off publishing company, Purple Moon Media, Convivial co-created, co-designed and co-produced the media elements for three CD-ROM titles in the two product lines, "Secret Paths" and "Rockett's New School," published under the Purple Moon Media imprint. Purple Moon created a new niche in girls entertainment software, friendship adventures for girls. A creative mix of over forty talented persons participated in this exciting endeavor at the Convivial studios.

When Brenda Laurel, then a researcher at Interval Research Corporation, came to Convivial in October 1994, looking for a design and production studio with whom to partner in creating CD-ROM titles for girls, it was clearly a perfect match. Patricia Roberts, founder and Creative Director of Convivial has been designing in the multimedia industry since 1987 and working with kids and multimedia since the first Atari's appeared. Her background in developmental psychology and cultural anthropology, with a focus on diverse learning environments and how children, specifically girls' play, prepared her for the task at hand. Jocelyn Cohen, on the other hand, was prepared given her role as part of a small handful of women who were part of the Feminist Art Program at California Institute of Art and studied with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. She later went on to found a feminist press, publishing materials on women's history. As Art Director for the project Cohen brought her own female sensibility to the visual style of these gender-based titles; always asking, "So what is a visual style for girls?" Jocelyn lead a team of artists in the preparation of visual materials from concept to testing to design to final production of two very different looking art styles for two very different product series, all with the help of feedback from girls.



Close-up of Fairy in "Secret Paths "



Cafeteria scene in "Rockett's First Day"

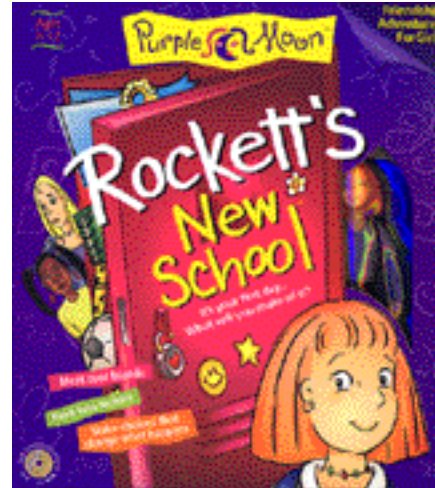
### **Games for Girls are not Games for Boys**

Convivial is about to take you on a time travel journey, a journey describing what it was like to design exclusively for girls and what Convivial learned on

this early trek in the industry. Let's step back in time first, to 1694. It was then that an early educator, Mary Astell, published her theory and ideas proposing that females needed a place in which to learn and develop on their own, and not have to rely on custom or have ideas and behaviors imposed upon them by husbands and fathers. Designing for girls in the CD-ROM and online industry is a relatively new realized idea with a huge unrealized market potential. Publishers such as Broderbund, Creative Wonders, CUC Software, Girl Games, Girl Tech, Her Interactive, IBM, The Learning Company, Mattel Media, Pleasant Company, PrintPaks, Purple Moon and Rhinestone Publishing are all entering this market. Whether these new and established publishers, with an eye on the girl's market, develop a body of work that reflects the complex composition of girls, is yet to be seen. Moving back in time again, designing for women and the notion that there is a female sensibility came out of the feminist art movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Furthermore, the notion that girls play different than boys has been a concern and study in the field of developmental psychology for many more years, and received a boost of acknowledgment and energy from the women's movement, as well.

### **Gender-based Title Examples**

Convivial co-designed and co-produced, with Interval Research and then Purple Moon, two very different product series with an overlapping focus on girl's friendships realized in their public and private lives. In the first, Secret Paths series of products, including "Secret Paths in the Forest," the more private, reflective side of girls is emphasized. The game begins in a tree house of friends and plays out in a magical landscape. Convivial created lush, illustrative environments reflecting different kinds of places, like deserts, mountains, gardens and meadows. During focus group feedback, girls were not in a rush to complete an experience, they seemed easily startled, they needed to feel safe, they wanted to solve difficult puzzles, they liked surprises, and they could look at a scene and project infinite number of scenarios about what was happening. They liked to make a place their own and even though they liked scenes and places different than their imaginings, they wanted a safe, familiar place to go out from and in which to return.



The Rockett series of products, including "Rockett's New School," focuses more on the public side of girls' lives. Unlike the magical setting of "Secret Paths," this game is set in the contemporary Whistling Pines Junior High School. The challenges of this product were in regards to scale. Convivial invented production methodologies such as digital storyboarding with sync sound to edit together graphics and animation to over two and a half hours of recorded narrative. (See Convivial's October 1997 issue of "Digital Storyboarding Survival Guide" for more information.) The result is a lively, colorful and auditorial rich experience where the girl player navigates through Rockett's first day at a new school. The branching architecture of the game allows her to choose which friends to hang out with, how to respond to situations, peer pressure etc. This choice of plot navigation is based on feeling, mood and emotion. The design was also planned in response to focus group feedback. The Rockett series focuses on friendships and issues of inclusion/exclusion, reflection/projection, talk/gossip and individuality/social roles.

Recent online reviews of "Secret Paths in the Forest" and "Rockett's New School" CD-ROM products Convivial co-designed for girl's publisher, Purple Moon are found in the following URL's:

<http://www.intel.com/intel/educate/Pcdads/secret.htm>

<http://www5.zdnet.com/zdnn/special/examples.html>

<http://www.thereviewzone.com/secretpathsforest.html>

<http://www.thereviewzone.com/rockettsnewschool.html>

<http://www.tikkabik.com/reviews/edutain/secret/secret.html>

<http://www.tikkabik.com/reviews/edutain/school/school.html>

<http://www.gamesdomain.co.uk/gdreview/zones/reviews/pc/sep97/secpa.html>.

### **Girl-Centric Topics & Play**

What are the topics that interest girls? A review of CD-ROM products and web sites reveals a consistent set of girl-centric topics including: friendship, image, socializing, communication, voice and self expression, interest in boys, self-esteem issues, sports participation, popular culture references and rites of passage unique to the everyday lives of girls. Though none of these topics are surprising, new media products for girls target a small constellation of these.

Girl's learning and playing styles include a wide range of diversity from free play to competitive play. Girls play for competence and fun, and use play to build relations with other girls, as an expression for their emotions, and as a chance to explore and role play in aspirational dramatic scenarios. Girls identification with characters includes a broad range of well crafted, recognizable roles, as well as imaginary, magical roles. Girls incorporate secret and invented languages in their everyday play. Girls' objects of play include girl-identified toys like dolls, animals and make-up, as well as less gender identified objects such as sports accessories. We can only project that by incorporating girl centric topics and playing styles into our brand designs, that we will create successful products for girls.

### **Critical Girl Game Components**

So what are the critical components necessary for the design and production of a successful girl's game? First, consider game feedback for girls. Yes, girls want feedback too. Feedback for girls is not realized by twitches and switches, but instead by clear, responsive triggers such as sound triggers, or by interactive containers like lockers in which the contents change according to plot scenarios. Second, consider sensory feedback, such as lush, ambient driven sound environments, light changes or character shadows moving across the screen. Third, consider cinematic moves. Girls' visual range stretches designers to carefully mix playful, yet sophisticated graphic elements with camera moves. Long shots, close-ups and surprising shots of a characters hands or feet in a frame, edited together in an unusual manner capture and sustain girls' attention. And finally, emotional feedback is probably one of the most unique features of a girl's critical game component. This last feature is not to be underestimated. Playing a game according to emotional choice points, creating a labyrinth of social-emotional interrelations among two or more data points, charts a game play graph off the map in a boy's game.



Secret Paths in the Forest

As seen in the following a review of CD-ROM gender-based titles and websites for girls, each incorporates one or "both sides" of a girl. A "gender-based" product approach for girls includes topics and issues such as the following: friendship/desire for friendship, challenges/solutions, current status/aspirational status, dreaming/thinking, family/individuality and reality/fantasy. Again, the issues discussed here have been studied and discussed by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and girls themselves for quite some time. Yet, it's only most recently that these "sides of a girl" are acknowledged as special, and that the game and entertainment industry is focusing on them for the market place.

### **Conclusion**

Perhaps after 300 years, Mary Astell's proposal to give females the space and opportunity to develop according to their own ideals, instead of relying on custom, or having ideas and behaviors imposed by fathers and husbands, will be realized. Ironically, not because of 300 years of pleas for female independence and equality, or the progress from the suffrage movement granting female emancipation, or because girls and women have petitioned, appealed, philosophized and politicized for recognition about our differences from men and boys, but rather because corporations have found that designing for girls is very profitable in the marketplace.

### **Resources: CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

#### **Broderbund CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.broderbund.com>

<http://www.carmensandiego.com>

This Broderbund series stars the infamous female international thief, Carmen Sandiego.

*Carmen Sandiego Junior Detective Edition*

*Carmen Sandiego Word Detective*

*Where In Time Is Carmen Sandiego?*



*Where in the USA is Carmen Sandiego?*

*Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?*

*Sheila Rae, the Brave* - Aimed at young girls who identify with Sheila Rae who was not afraid of anything: not spiders, not the dark, not even monsters in the closet! Then one day she decided to walk home a different way and got hopelessly lost. Sheila Rae as she faces her fears and gains a new respect for her little sister and herself!

### **Creative Wonders CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.cwonders.com>

Creative Wonders and Scholastic Products present the Babysitters Club series includes the famous book characters as well as a membership kit, stationary & print kit, communication station, planner and games for girls ages seven to twelve. Madeline's passport to adventure series features the enchanting heroine of storybook fame capturing the imagination of and setting a positive example as the role model for little girls.

*The Babysitters Club Friendship Kit*

*The Babysitters Club : Clubhouse Activity Center*

*Madeline European Adventures*

*Madeline and the Magnificent Puppet Show*

*Madeline Thinking Games*

*Madeline Classroom Companion: Preschool & Kindergarten*

*Madeline Classroom Companion: 1st & 2nd Grade*

### **CUC Software CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.adventure.com>

*Fairy Tale: A True Story - Activity Center*, Based on Paramount's movie "Fairy Tale A True Story" this is a charming title for girls ages seven to eleven. The magical imagery comes to life as girls experience the movie's enchanting world of fairies and fantasy. Set against beautiful backgrounds and spectacular images, this program is filled with fairy trivia, word games, a secret journal and numerous magical activities.

### **Eidos Interactive CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.eidosinteractive.com>

*Tomb Raider*, Lara Croft is posed as a girl's ticket to a world of adventure. This protagonist encounters bears and many other animals, has an underwater adventure and is indeed an extraordinary woman under the pressure. The game is rendered in a 3D atmosphere, tests reflexes, as most boys games do, yet adds problem solving takes to appeal to girls.

### **Electronic Arts CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.ea.com>

*NCAA March Madness '98*, include eight women's teams and "Jane's Combat Simulation" both in EA style.

### **Girl Game/CUC CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.girlgames.com>

<http://www.aboutme.com>

The "Let's Talk about Me series" is created by Girl Games an interactive entertainment company for preteen and teen girls, and creates, develops, designs, and produces products that promote girls' self-expression and communication.

*Let's Talk about Me*, the Girl's Interactive Handbook for the 21st Century is the must-have lifestyle CD-ROM for pre-teen and teenage girls. Built with the magazine format that girls love, it focuses on the issues closest to girls' hearts - nutrition, fashion, relationships, personality, travel and careers.

*Let's Talk about Me Some More*, This 2 CD-ROM set provides everything from cool, fashion fun to profiles of inspiring women. Also, included are quizzes, a password-protected diary, and a girl can even scan her own face into the Hairmaster Deluxe and check out a funky new "do."

### **Girl Tech CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.girltech.com>

*Tech Girl's Internet Adventures*, This book and accompanying CD-ROM bring girls into the world of technology with a sense of fun and adventure! Descriptions and addresses of over 200 of the best Web sites for girls.

Interviews with professional women and girls who love using technology.

Step by step activities help girls learn and use the Internet.

*Tech Girl's Activity Book*, (1998) In this book and accompanying CD-ROM Girls learn technology through fun, educational activities including: the Internet, computer software, mechanics, mathematics, electricity, invention  
*Desktop Tool Kit CD-ROM* is designed just for girls! (1998) Includes: My Home Page, custom home page builder and electronic calendar.

### **Her Interactive CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.herinteractive.com>

*McKenzie & Co.* is the fictitious Madison High where girls interact with cool friends and, along the way, make important decisions relating to their social lives. They also learn to find the balance between school work and family.

*The Vampire Diaries* is a mystery adventure game that places Elena, a popular high school student-turned-sleuth, in an intriguing, eerie and romantic story line. When children start falling ill and disappearing in the sleepy town of Fells Church, the mystery is simply too dangerous and intriguing to ignore. With the help of her friends, Elena must unravel the puzzle of what's happening to the children, navigating through such locations as the town library, the graveyard, a new art gallery and the town's old church. While doing so, she interacts with live-action video characters.

### **IBM CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

[http://www.pc.ibm.com /us/multimedia](http://www.pc.ibm.com/us/multimedia)



*IBM Brings You Crayola Magic Wardrobe*, is girls software that "educates and entertains." It is a time travel to twelve exotic historical periods with dress up activities with fabulous historical clothes, paper dolls outfits and other creativity fun stuff.

### **The Learning Company CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.learningco.com>

*The American Girls Premiere*, for ages 7 to 12, featuring Felicity, Kirsten, Addy, Samantha, and Molly. This is the first CD-ROM to bring to life the highly popular characters and books of the American Girls Collection. Girls can choose their favorite character from the American Girls Collection, make her move and talk, change her costume and select her props. They can create conversations between a character and her friends in scenes based directly on the American Girls Collection books. They can actually create their own plays, complete with talking, action, and props – all appropriate to the time period of the American Girl selected.

### **Mattel Media CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.mattelmedia.com>

Mattel Media's Barbie for girls software focuses on creativity and imagination sets for girls.

*Adventures with Barbie*  
*Barbie Fashion Designer*  
*Barbie & Her Magical House*  
*Barbie Magic Hair Styler*  
*Barbie Ocean Discovery*  
*Barbie Print 'n Play*  
*Barbie Storymaker*

*Clueless*, for girls ages eight and older, this title by Girl Games, tests girls "Clueless" capacity with makeover, dream dates and a virtual clothes closet.

### **Pleasant Company CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.americangirl.com>

Pleasant Company creates the American Girls Collection of books, dolls and magazine. *The American Girls Premiere*, is their first CD-ROM title.

### **PrintPaks CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.printpaks.com>

PrintPaks is a multimedia crafts software. These products create a unique combination of multimedia computing with traditional hands-on crafts. *Super Jewelry Kit!*, Lets girls create, print, and bake your own designs!

### **Purple Moon CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.purple-moon.com>

Purple Moon's "Friendship Adventures for Girls" are gender-based titles exclusively for girls. Purple Moon defines "adventures" as shared experiences

that involve meeting new friends, developing relationships and enjoying new things together. The products focus on girl's deep friendships, love of nature, the confidence to be cool and their courage to dream.

*Secret Paths in the Forest*, is designed especially for girls at heart. The game begins in a secret, girls-only tree house. After helping the characters with their important life questions, girls travel through a graphically rich, magical wilderness while solving girl-centered puzzles filled with surprises, clues, prizes, and secret stones. After collecting enough secret stones in their virtual pouches, a garland necklace appears. Once the necklace is placed on the selected girl character, a beautiful garland story plays. Secret Paths Stones and Adventure Cards are included in every CD-ROM box.

*Rockett's New School*, in this much anticipated new product series, eighth grader Rockett Mavado starts her first day of school. Girls play the game by navigating through a series of "mood decision choices" swinging through the branching narrative story line, while girl protagonist Rockett progresses through her day making new friends, twenty characters in all, and checking out her new school, "Whistling Pines Junior High." Adventure Friend and Adventure Cards inside every CD-ROM box.

*Rockett's Tricky Decision* - In the second Rockett series CD-ROM (Spring 1998), continues the story of Rockett and her classmates at Whistling Pines Jr. High. In this episode Rockett faces the decision of which Halloween party to attend.

### **Renaissance Interactive Studios CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.ri-studios.com>

*Anne Of Green Gables*, with this title girls discover the internationally, treasured literary classic of a little freckled, red-haired orphan girl who comes to live and grow on beautiful Prince Edward Island, Canada.

### **Rhinestone Publishing CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.rhinestonepublishing.com>

Rhinestone Publishing's titles are smart and sassy games, aimed at girls ages seven to twelve.

*Zero Zero*, is a fairy tale for the future. It is a magical, literary adventure that follows tomboy and firewood vendor Pinkée LeBrun across turn-of-the-century Paris rooftops. It's New Year's Eve in Paris, 1899 and firewood vendor Pinkée LeBrun is brimming with curiosity about the new century.

*Smarty*, is the adventures of sassy Mimi Smartypants, her artistic aunt Olive, and the sophisticated dog Beastie all in a dream-like Detroit landscape. Smarty digs for buried treasure in Sandbox Archaeology, uncovers genies' lamps, spies on the solar system with an outer space telescope, matches math skills with the Flaky Sno-Kone man and so much more.

*Chop Suey*, is an enchanting imaginative escapade for girls published under the Magnet Interactive imprint in 1995. The core creative group members of the team that designed *Chop Suey* are now at Rhinestone Publishing.

### **SegaSoft CD-ROM Titles for Girls**

<http://www.segasoft.com>

*Virtual Makeover 98*, a collaboration between Sega and Cosmopolitan magazine. The title features a new way for girls and women to experiment with your their looks. Step by step, it's easy to use, with one click you're a redhead or brunette, experiment with hairstyle, lips, brows or eye color.

### **About the Authors**

Convivial Design is a sound and time-based studio focusing on advanced research, interface design, user-feedback, sound and music, time-based media, digital storyboarding, graphics, and storytelling for film, video, CD-ROM, DV-ROM, DVD and the web. As a design and production company Convivial creates compelling experiences and products.

#### **Jocelyn Cohen**

Art Director of Convivial Design, Inc.

As a visual artist and interactive designer, Cohen brings a diverse background to her work and art directing style. Her formal education is in painting, folklore and graphic design, yet she went on to be an independent publisher, paper maker and fine letterpress printer. As a popular historian, her specialties range from women's history to Chinese folk religion. When trying to solve difficult challenges, she often goes on long hikes - and it was here - along a path that she created the experience for the private side of girls for "Secret Paths" with story stones.

#### **Pat Roberts**

Creative Director and founder of Convivial Design, Inc.

As a designer and producer of interactive digital media experiences, she is adept at putting together creative teams and facilitating collaborative efforts between story, content, media elements and technology. In her role as Creative Director she thrives in applying conceptual designs to products, invents breakset production methodologies and encourages individuals to grow and flourish.