

# “Women in Free Software”

## Findings from FLOSSPOLS

Anne Østergaard

aoe@gnome.org

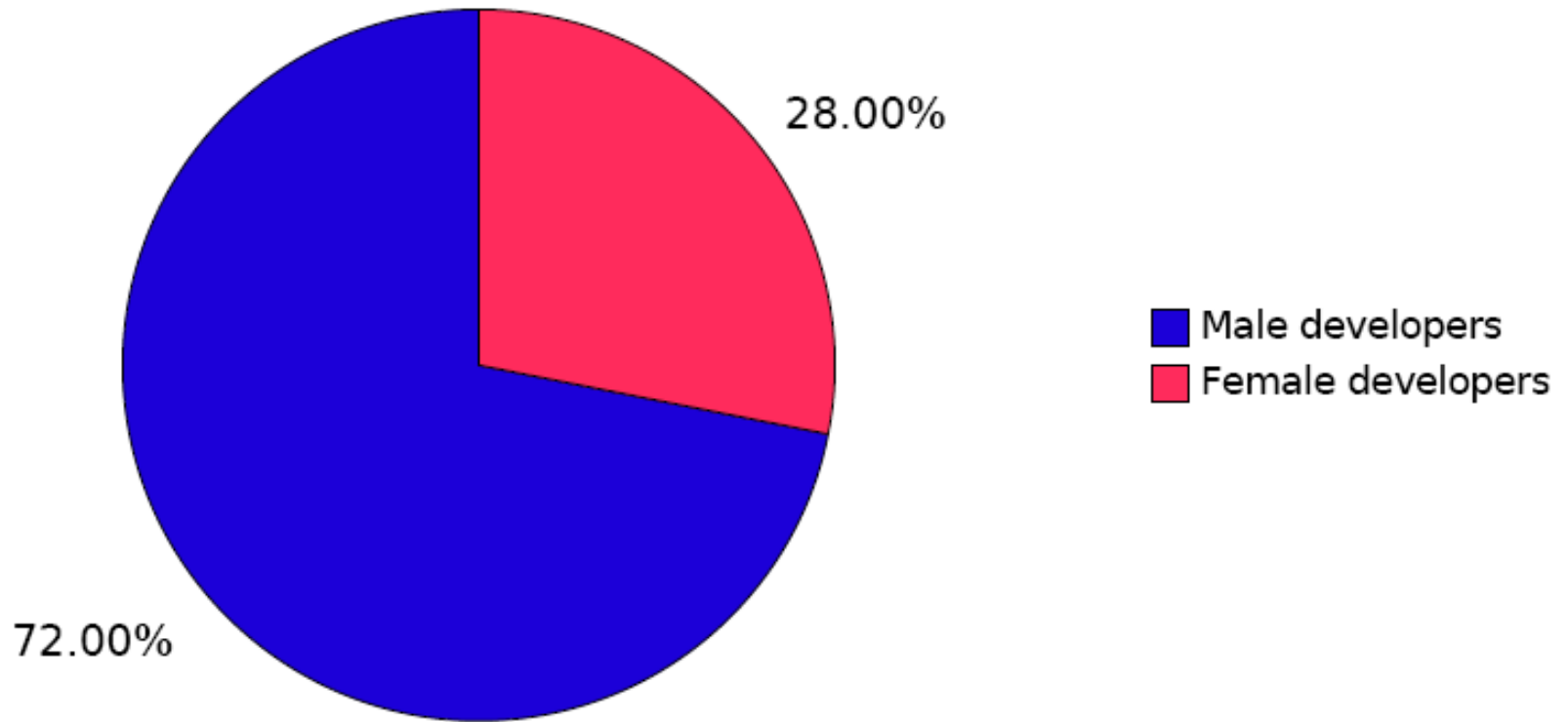
Member of

The GNOME Foundation Board

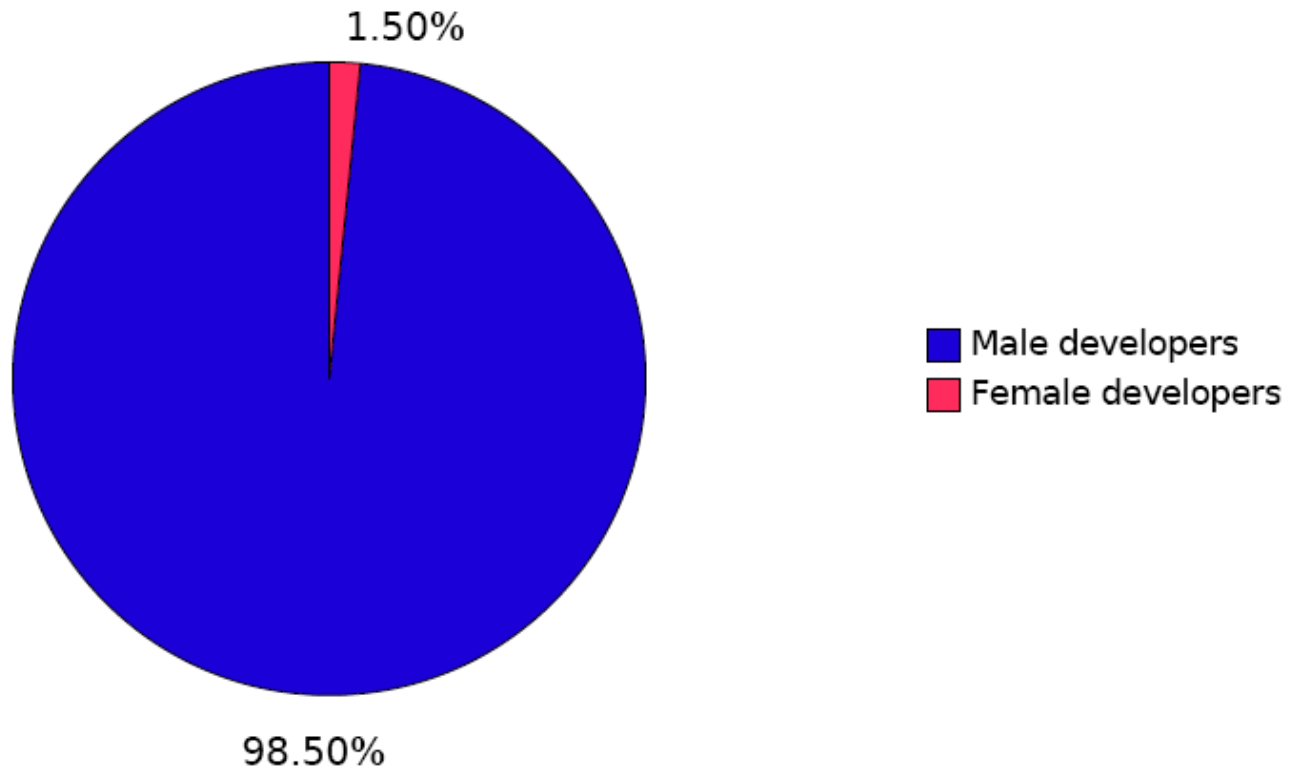
At aKademy 2006, Trinity, Dublin

Are women in FLOSS considered as bugs, babes, groupies, or equal partners in their fields?

# Proprietary Software



# Free Software



Why is it so?

# FLOSSPOLs project

- Studies on Free/Libre Open Source Software
- Funded by the EU commission
- March 2004 to February 2006
- Three strands: One on gender

# Gender Study: Aims

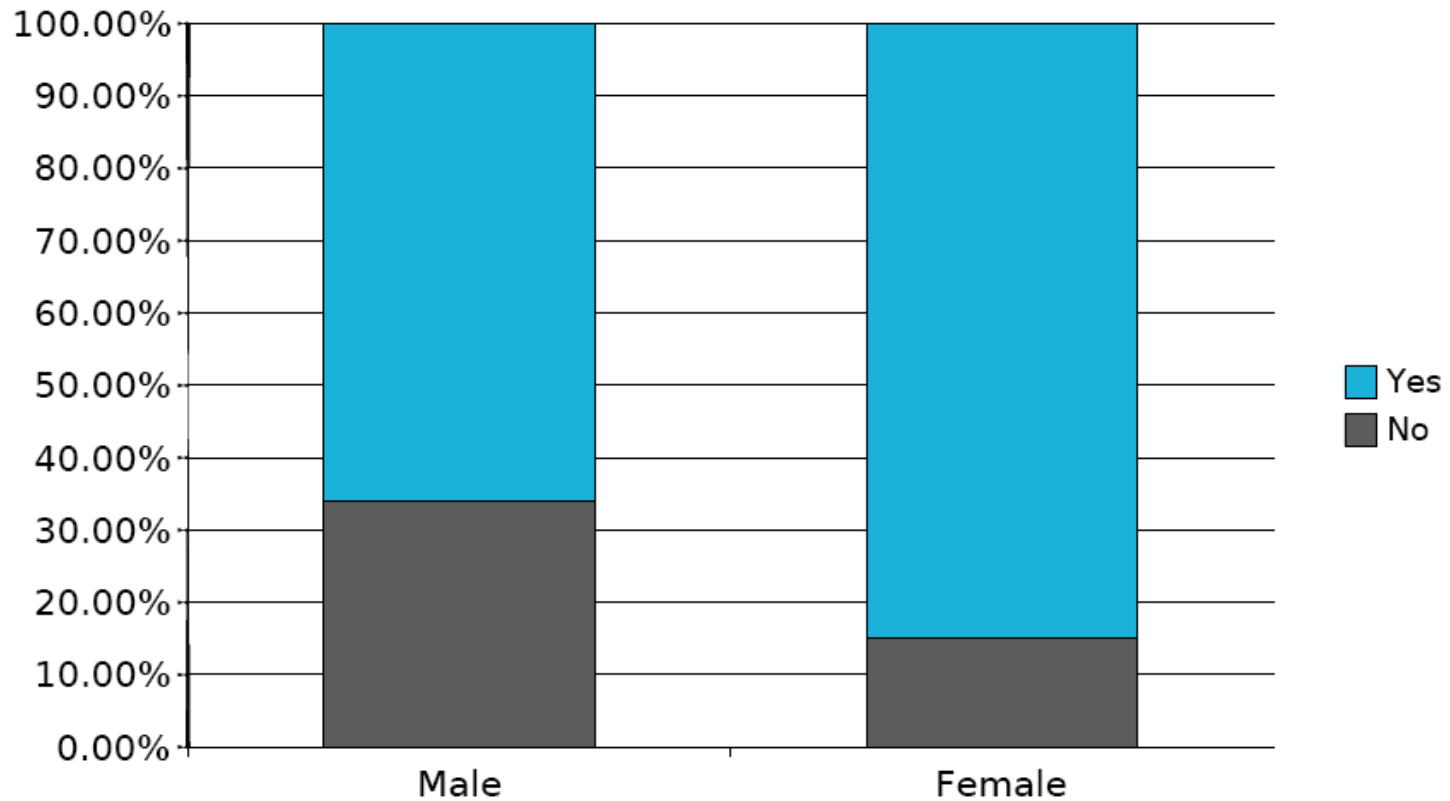
- Produce first study of gender in FLOSS
- Gather socio-economic data
- Identify reasons for the gender gap
- Establish recommendations for change

# Study Methodology

- Ethnography
- Unstructured and semi-structured interviews
- Participant observation
- Quantitative methodology:
- Online survey (1541 participants)



# Would more female participants be better for the whole community?



As FLOSS constitutes an increasingly significant arena of technological advancement and economic development, it has become an important public policy question!

Are women not interested in FLOSS?

or

Are women being excluded?

# Hidden discrimination?

"Most discrimination of all kinds is utterly unintentional, and that kind of discrimination is harder to tackle because there is no evil intent and no-one to directly blame. It still needs tackling and that is in part about making people understand when their culture and actions put off or exclude others." -- Alan Cox.

# Conscious or unconscious exclusion?

- Jokes about women
- Using "he" in documentation
- Assuming that society is gender blind
- Valuing coding as superior to all other skills

# Is code the only thing that matters?

## Typical tasks:

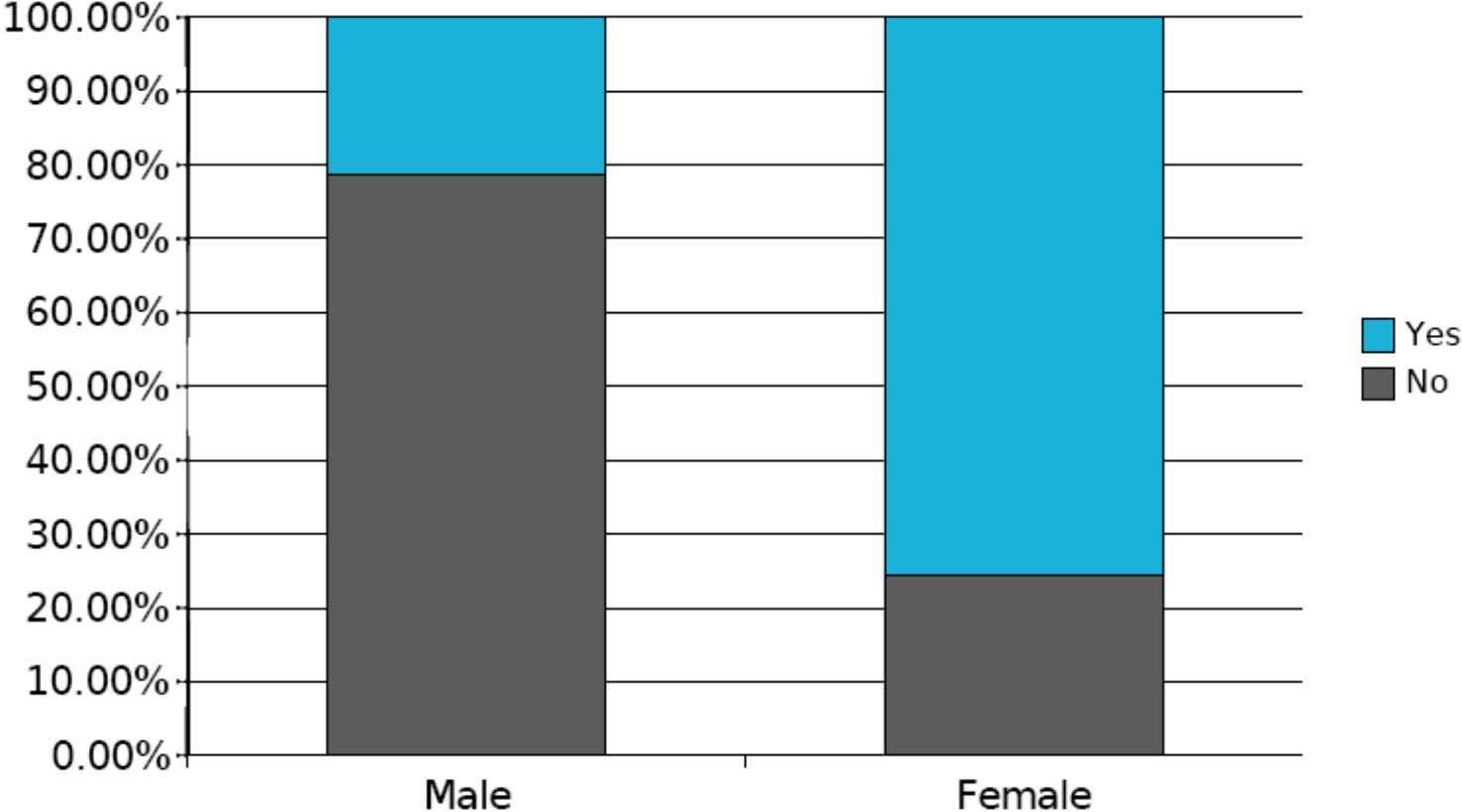
### Men

- Writing code
- Testing
- Bug reports
- "Technical tasks"

### Women

- Documentation
- Organising events
- Translating
- "Social tasks"

**“Regarding the FLOSS community as a whole, have you ever observed discriminatory behaviour toward women?”**



# Do women have as much experience with computers?

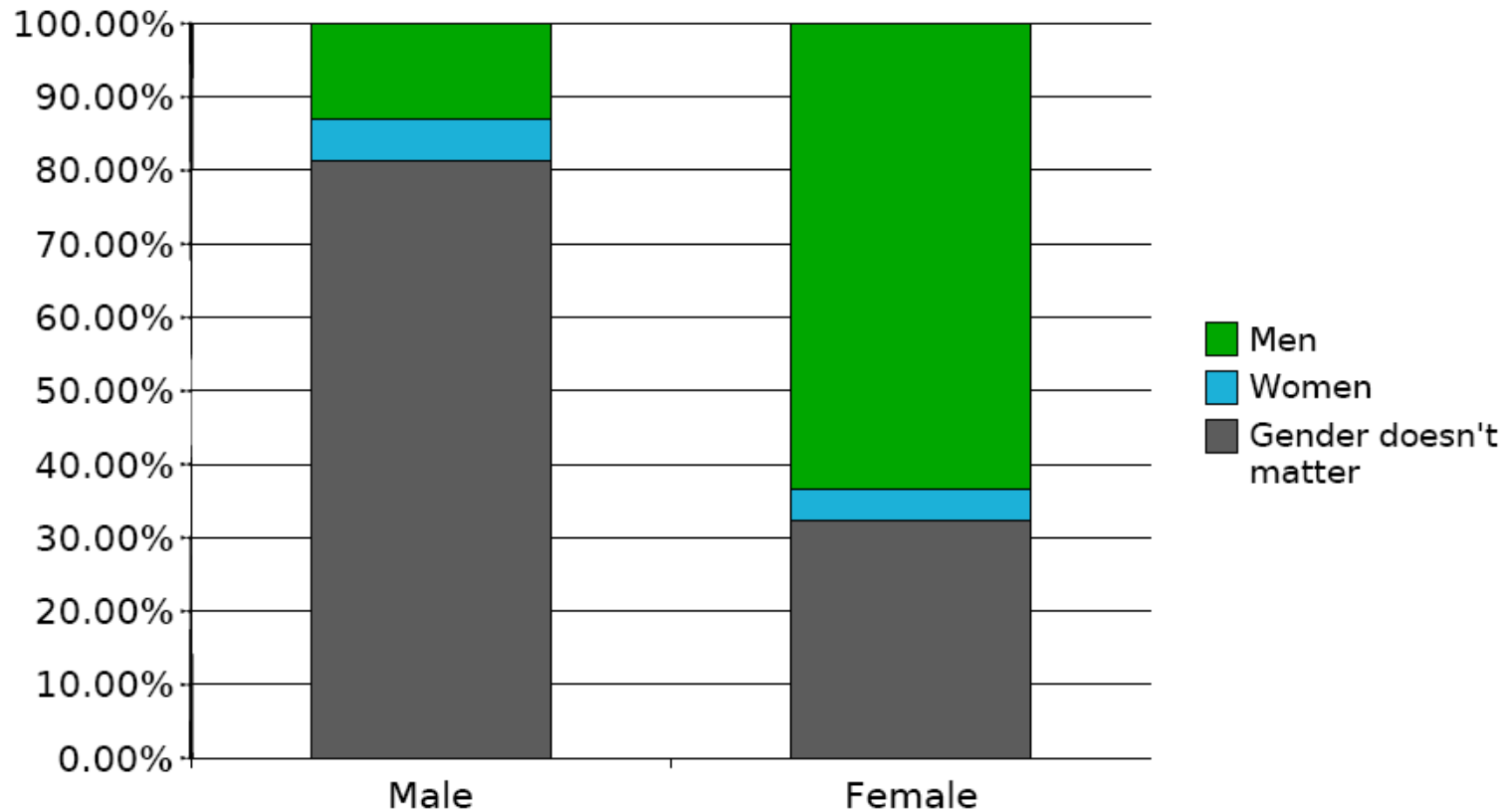
	Male	Female
Age of first computer use	12	14.5
Age of first computer possession	15	19
Year of intial F/LOSS involvement	1996	1999



The usual role models?  
Have a look at some  
new role models!

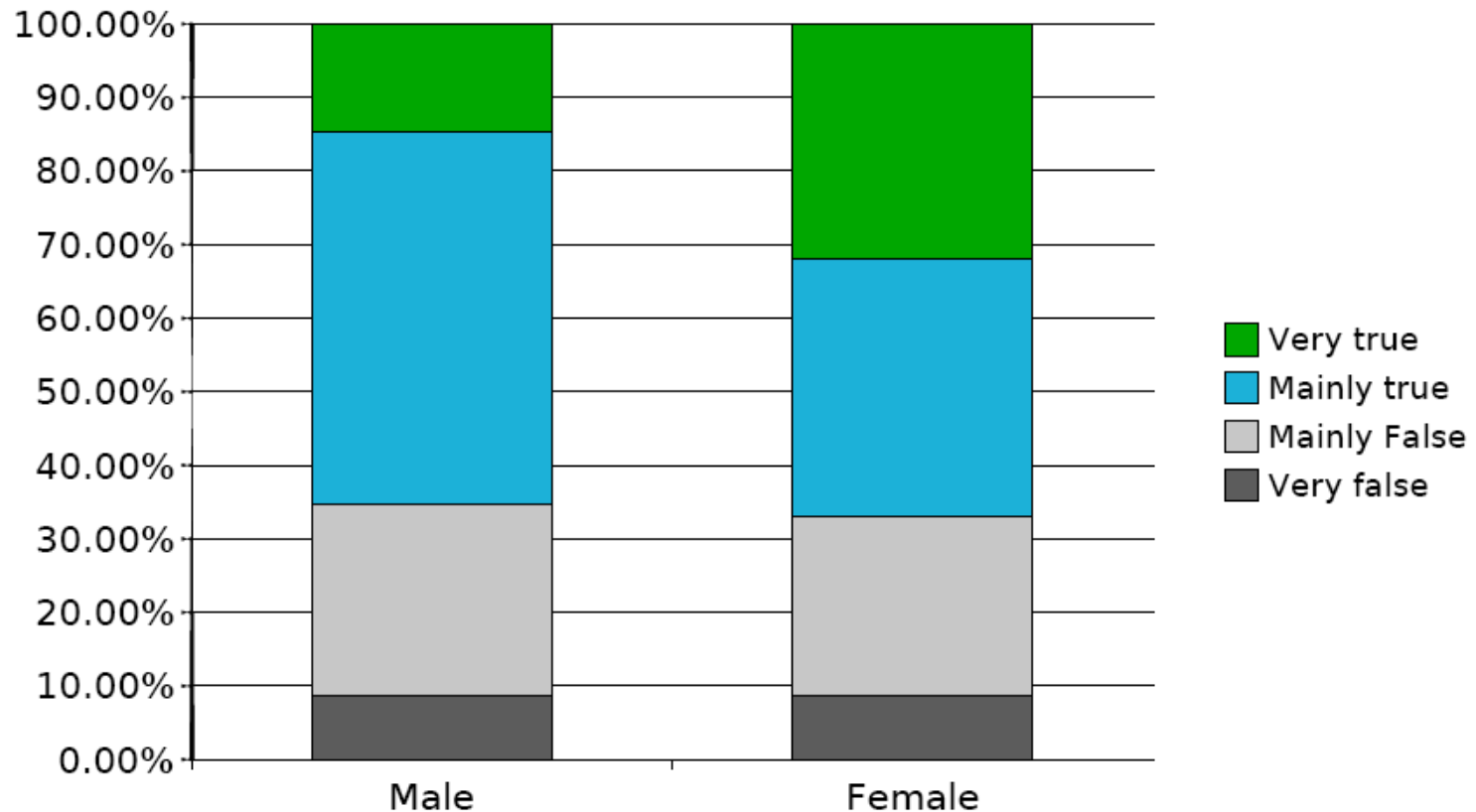


# ”For whom is it easier to get acknowledgement for FLOSS work?”



# Is it true that women get more attention for their gender than their skills?

**Men and women agree. - The answer is yes!**



# Recognition

Thank you to University of Cambridge and:

- Bernhard Krieger
- James Leach
- Dawn Nafus
- Hanna Wallach
- Graphs provided by Hannah Wallach

# The man and his machine..

”Everything was to do with computers.  
Absolutely everything.”

The question why women are absent  
from computers is the wrong question.

When in fact technology has been defined  
as ”that which men do.”

Historically technologies stop  
being technologies when women  
have access to them!

Technology is a masculine culture!

# What can be done to change the situation?

- **Code of Conduct**
- **Change of culture**
- **No "Flamewars"**
- **Value other tasks**
- **Provide role models**
- **Women giving presentations at conferences**
- **Mentoring projects**
- **Word of mouth**
- **Competition within FLOSS 4 vision and implementation**
- **Respect different ways of communication**

# What can be done to change the situation?

- **Good for women = Good for everyone!**
- **Offer help at the terms of recipients**
- **Diversity is good!**
- **Universities to start change programs**
- **No women - No sponsoring/funding?**
- **Create price for ICT female(s) of the year**
- **Merge technical and social values**
- **Have concern for the feelings of others**
- **Be open and flexible**
- **EU is behind the rest of the world**



# What can be done to change the situation?

## **Short term interventions:**

- **Holiday camps**
- **Help to overcome confidence problems**
- **Offline events are crucial for the feeling of being integrated in a community**
- **Financial support for girls**
- **Foster the participation of girls in FLOSS activities at an early age**

## Recommendations:

- 1) Work with the community's values and social dynamics.
- 2) Anything that has to do with special help based on gender is likely to undermine rather than assist.

# Recommendations

- ” If we could bring the general hostility down it would probably help all people interested in contributions.” -- Alan Cox
- Be aware of different communication patterns and habits between men and women.
  - The norms of society in general are most likely mirrored to an extent. We in FLOSS can influence the future for better norms.

Loosing a talented labour pool, and loosing with it the opportunity to build better technologies, is already recognised as a problem within the community.

This pragmatic concern is far more likely than social justice concerns to motivate action.

What if there were equally many men and women?

Do you remember the pie charts on the slide 3 and 4?

How many more contributions would there be?

# Conclusion

A mixed and welcoming culture  
is better for all ...

... than an all male dominated  
mono-culture.

# Where do we see positive change?

- The small school girls in Extremadura. 80% of the girls are active ICT users and creators - And they enjoy "IT"! :)
- Projeto Software Livres Mulheres, Brazil.  
<http://mulheres.softwarelivre.org/>
- Debian Women
- The GNOME Women's Summer Outreach Program 2006.  
<http://www.gnome.org/projects/wsop/>

# Links

- <http://www.debian.org>
- <http://www.flosspols.org/>
- The full flosspols report on gender  
<http://tinyurl.com/ekdd7>
- The recommendations  
<http://tinyurl.com/jtt2r>
- <http://www.murrayc.com/blog/permalink/2006/05/12/women-in-open-source>



# Questions? Ideas for action?

*Yes, I will do a BoF for identifying further  
ideas for a change process.*

Anne Østergaard  
aoe@gnome.org