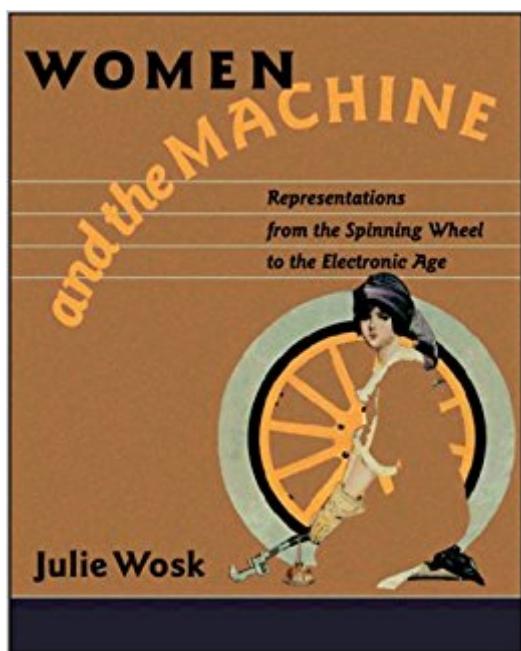


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# Women And The Machine: Representations From The Spinning Wheel To The Electronic Age



## **Synopsis**

From sexist jokes about women drivers to such empowering icons as Amelia Earhart and Rosie the Riveter, representations of the relationship between women and modern technology in popular culture have been both demeaning and celebratory. Depictions of women as timid and fearful creatures baffled by machinery have alternated with images of them as being fully capable of technological mastery and control -- and of lending sex appeal to machines as products. In *Women and the Machine*, historian Julie Wosk maps the contradictory ways in which women's interactions with -- and understanding of -- machinery has been defined in Western popular culture since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Drawing on both visual and literary sources, Wosk illuminates popular gender stereotypes that have burdened women throughout modern history while underscoring their advances in what was long considered the domain of men. Illustrated with more than 150 images, *Women and the Machine* reveals women rejoicing in their new liberties and technical skill even as they confront society's ambivalence about these developments, along with male fantasies and fears.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The image of the flustered woman unable to change a tire or recognize a Phillips screwdriver is so common it's practically archetypal but then again, so is her counterpart, Rosie the Riveter. Wosk (a professor of English and art at the State University of New York, Maritime College) takes these images their place in history, literature, art and advertising and deconstructs them in this engaging

and entertaining but nonpreachy feminist history. She posits that women and technology always seemed like strange bedfellows to men, and to many women, too. The world of machines, after all, historically belonged to men; women's involvement in technology signaled both an intrusion into male turf and an abandonment of the female landscape of hearth and home. Using illustrations, cartoons and photographs from the past three centuries, Wosk delineates shifts in social acceptance of women's relationship to technology. Typewriters, spinning wheels, sewing machines and household appliances are all given their due, as are bicycles, cars and airplanes. But there are intriguing asides, too, like the technology of women's corsets, bustles and hoops. How women were inveigled into factories during World War II and then lured back into the home all via the mechanics of machines and appliances is fascinating. Wosk also delves deep into the use of women to sell machines, from factory equipment to automobiles. With the sleek detail of a gift book, Wosk's history may look deceptively slight, but her work is complex, comprehensive and highly readable. Illus. and photos. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Art historian Wosk analyzes the overt and covert messages in depictions of women and machines in an array of fiction and, more impressively, in some 150 visual images. Historically, the spinning wheel gives way to the typewriter and pounding rivets with Rosie the Riveter to pounding computer keyboards. Wartime glorification of female capability usually showed women being instructed by men, reminding everyone that the necessity of women's labor was temporary, and subordinating laboring women to men. Examining a wide range of advertisements, fashion stories, cover illustrations, and photographs, Wosk contrasts images of women as fearful of machinery and scientific technology in general with others showing mastery and control, thereby illustrating gender stereotyping and the hesitant advances women have made in a supposedly male domain. Although primarily pitched to scholarly readers, Wosk's study will also inform nonacademic readers. Whitney ScottCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Fantastically interesting. Many good photos too.

"Women and the Machine" by Julie Wosk is a bright new breakthrough text and picture book, thoroughly and adeptly written in a classical narrative-chronological style. I was intimidated at first because of the knowledgeable depth she so aptly displayed, but gradually I began to appreciate Wosk's underlying message that women will no longer stand to be ignored in the roles of human history. Free of resentments and bitter feelings, Wosk discusses the treatment and attitudes of

women since times of "the spinning wheel to the electronic age." "Women..." makes an excellent sourcebook for book reports, covering "Women and the Bicycle" (Chapter 4), "Women and the Automobile" at Chapter 5. From there she moves into "Women and Aviation" and "Women in Wartime" at Chapters 6 and 7, respectively. This book is beautifully arranged with full color photographs, old advertisements, curios, mosaics and even art. As a grown man myself, I feel men could develop a deeper respect of women's roles in modern history, as well as a well-deserved slice of humble pie. We can say, "No, women are not mechanically incompetent, nor are they completely helpless without men in their lives." This book has proven that women are quite capable and adept, having had an important role in shaping the 20th century and beyond. Remember Rosie the Riveter? There's a picture of her in here. That women played a vital role in our World War 2 victory is self-evident, having left the role of housewife and instead have helped to build our fighter planes, gun turrets and tanks--which the fighting men used on the battlefields. Men, take note. Women, take hope. We are, after all, together part of making the world a better place. It's not always men first. Women sometimes have the last word, and we have to accept that. "Women and the Machine" is nothing short of brilliant and provocative, completely unequalled to date.

Writing from the perspective of an art historian, Julie Wosk examines the role of machines in helping women transform their lives, considering how these inventions and developments offered women new liberties, growing work-associated competencies, and ultimately confrontations with established perceptions of women's work. Add over 150 images of women at work with machines from American and European art depiction and you have *Women And The Machine*, a fascinating and informative blending of social history and art.

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