Written with verve, compassion, and passion, *Gender and Information Technology* offers finely crafted tools for narrowing the digital divide that perpetuates inequality and injustice worldwide, marginalizing women and other socially disempowered groups. But in this much needed book, Mary Kirk does much more. She offers us a treasure trove of fascinating information that alternately enlightens, enrages, and empowers us to take an active role in creating a more just and caring future.

Sometimes what Kirk reveals about the male bias in science and technology is astonishing, as in her exposé of pornographic images in the critically acclaimed technology magazine *Wired* before was acquired by Condé Nast Magazines. Sometimes it is amusing, as when she notes how media accounts of female scientists who win Nobel prizes feel compelled to tell us the women are also wives, mothers, or grandmothers; information about family roles is notably absent when winners are male. Sometimes it is alarming, as when she shows how, despite years of efforts to change this, women and other marginalized groups such as African-Americans are subtly (and often not so subtly) discouraged from entering the IT field, and how even the language of the IT culture (terms like “hack,” “blue screen of death,” “boot,” “crash”) supports a stereotypically “masculine” culture of domination and violence, adding still another element to its inhospitality to women and the stereotypically “feminine.” And sometimes it is shocking, as when she documents how IBM gave the Nazis the technological tools to identify and exterminate Europe’s Jews, and how IBM head Tom Watson personally accepted a medal from Hitler for his support; it is a cautionary tale on the uses of technology unfortunately still all too relevant today.

Reading this book, I was constantly amazed by the wealth and breadth of Mary Kirk’s knowledge (from video games for boys that no longer idealize violence and cruelty to “female” games such as “Barbie Fashion Designer,” which reinforce
gender stereotypes and consumerism) to her challenges to sacred academic cows, such as the notion of an apolitical, race- and gender-neutral science. And though serious, these challenges are often funny, as when she ridicules acclaimed writers who assert there is no discrimination by, so to speak, hoisting these “authorities” by their own petards, quoting their own uninformed and biased statements.

In this sense, Kirk gives us a primer for debunking pernicious myths about gender and race. But her main focus is not just on critique, it is on giving us positive examples and a vivid picture of what IT and our world can, and should, be. For instance, she gives us powerful examples of women who made important (though still generally ignored) contributions to science and technology, going back to Merit Path, an Egyptian physician around 2700 BC, from there to the great scientist Hypatia (370-415 AD), and then to Grace Murray Hopper (1906-1992), a still unrecognized pioneer computer programmer, and Shirley Ann Jackson and Jennie Patrick, who had to overcome both racism and sexism as pioneering women at MIT. Perhaps most important, and useful, Kirk gives us numerous real life illustrations of people, programs, and organizations that are today vigorously working for what she calls “partnership science and IT.”

I want to here thank Mary Kirk for the excellent use she makes of my own work, of the new social categories of the partnership system and domination system and the cultural transformation theory introduced in my book The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future. It is a delight for me to see how Kirk not only uses but powerfully builds on my work, brilliantly applying it to her subject, imaginatively and always with great integrity taking it further. For instance, she details the dominator values still reflected and perpetuated in the powerful IT industry and uses the partnerism economic model introduced in my recent book The Real Wealth of Nations to show how IT can, and must, be used to create a caring economics worldwide.

In this connection, among the great strengths of this book are Kirk’s creative proposals for change. She gives us instances from many world regions and adds to them her own proposals. An example is her detailed sketch of a new IT magazine she calls connect!, combining the best features of Ms. and Wired to give women a voice and images of themselves in the conversation about digital technology and culture.

As Kirk writes, the information revolution has created an unlocked gate allowing access into the “no trespassing zone” where the cultural conversation is defined, where the character and direction of IT is determined, and it is now up to traditionally marginalized groups to “co-create partnership language, communications, and media.”
Gender and Information Technology provides guideposts to facilitate our entry into this important technological and cultural zone and to how we can provide leadership in shifting it from domination to partnership, thereby creating a real digital revolution.

Riane Eisler

Riane Eisler is an eminent social scientist, attorney, and social activist best known as author of the international bestseller The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future, which is now in 23 languages, including most European languages and Chinese, Russian, Korean, Hebrew, Japanese, and Arabic. Her newest book, The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics, has been hailed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as “a template for the better world we have been so urgently seeking,” by Gloria Steinem as “revolutionary,” by Peter Senge as “desperately needed,” and by Jane Goodall as “a call for action.” Her other books include the award-winning The Power of Partnership and Tomorrow’s Children, as well as Sacred Pleasure, a daring reexamination of sexuality and spirituality, and Women, Men, and the Global Quality of Life, statistically documenting the key role of the status of women in a nation’s general quality of life. Dr. Eisler is president of the Center for Partnership Studies, keynotes conferences worldwide, and is a consultant to business and government on applications of the partnership model introduced in her work. She has received many honors, and is the only woman among 20 great thinkers including Hegel, Adam Smith, Marx, and Toynbee selected for inclusion in Macrohistory and Macrohistorians in recognition of the lasting importance of her work. Dr. Eisler can be contacted at center@partnershipway.org. Her website is www.rianeeisler.com.