

# Gendering the Automobile: Men, Women and the Car in Helsinki, 1900 –1930

## Introduction

What is an automobile? The design of the car has changed so much that it is hard to imagine the early motor car as the same vehicle we know as the car today. The first generation motor car was invented in the late 1880s. The birthplace of the automobile is in Europe: in Germany and in France. The design of that new technical invention resembled horse-drawn carriages with an engine attached to it. The coachman was replaced by a chauffeur who, instead of reins, steered the vehicle with a wheel. In other words, the first era motor cars were more like modified wagons with an engine instead of a horse. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the modern car design was invented: the engine was moved to the front, and the design was freed from the coach-style model.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the technological prehistory of the car is more complicated than this simplification, but the focus of this article is elsewhere.

The automobile was a new technological invention and a material object, but it became meaningful in relation to social and cultural practises. This article aims to demonstrate how the emergence of the automobile shaped life in Helsinki, the capital of Finland.<sup>2</sup> In this process, the notions of gender played a significant role.

The scholars of design and material culture, Pat Kirkham and Judy Attfield, have reminded us that, in studying objects, we should locate them both historically and in the cultural sphere of consumption. The relationship between objects and gender is constructed in ways that have become the accepted norm and, thus, invisible.<sup>3</sup> The focus of this article is to discuss the dialectical relationship between the automobile as a material artefact and gender in Helsinki in 1900 – 1930. During that period, Helsinki was the most motorized city in the whole country.

## The automobile age begins in Finland

“Motor car trips are comfortable and especially popular among the ladies. No stress, just motion and fun.” So claimed the first motor car advertisement in a Finnish newspaper in late August 1899. Since the Finnish audience was not familiar with the new vehicle, the advertisement gave technical information about cars along with driving instructions. The company promised to provide different kinds of French and German models designed for “1, 2, 3, 4 and more persons”.<sup>4</sup> In October, the company tried to promote the automobile with a picture of two fashionable ladies sitting on a French De Dion Bouton car. The text suggested that, due to the climate and road conditions in Finland, electric cars would be the best option.<sup>5</sup> Despite the tempting promises, not a single motor car was yet sold. The cold autumn and snowy winter ahead meant that it was not the best time of year to try and promote the new open-model vehicle with unfamiliar technology.

These first Finnish advertisements are similar to the early advertising and gendered images of motoring in Europe and the United States. Historian Kurt Möser has observed the gendered nature of automobility at the turn of the century. He has linked, on the one hand, the flâneur culture in the big cities, such as Paris, with women’s use of cars, and on the other hand, car races and dangerous speeding on the open roads with male drivers.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in the United States,

automobiles were considered fashionable accessories for wealthy men and women. But as Cotten Seiler has pointed out, American women also participated in races, car clubs and cross-country road trips prior to the First World War.<sup>7</sup> In Europe, Baroness H  l  ne van Zuyel competed in the international Paris-Amsterdam-Paris race already in 1898. In Finland, the first car races were organized in 1910, and bigger races began in the 1920s.

Before the motor cars eventually appeared on the market and the streets of Helsinki, newspapers and magazines began to familiarize the reading audience with the concept. In December 1899, a Finnish newspaper published a humorous fictional story of a wife who had begged her husband to buy an automobile. Finally, the husband promised to test drive one for a week. When he was trying to steer the monstrous and uncanny vehicle, the wife's screaming caught the attention of the passers-by. One of the spectators on the street wondered why the husband wanted to kill his wife in such a horrible way. Another one commented that it would not be a surprise if the woman lost all interest in having an automobile after all.<sup>8</sup> In following years, jokes about women who wanted to have an automobile or preferred to marry a man with an expensive car became popular.

Texts like the first Finnish car advertisement and the humorous stories are valuable sources for studying the interrelations between objects and gender. Not only do they show us how the automobile and gender were linked together from the very beginning, but they also reveal the ways in which these cultural representations began to construct the image of the automobile as a desirable material object even before most Finnish people had seen a car in real life. The advertisement implied that motoring was socially acceptable for ladies. It also explicitly linked motor cars with attributes such as pleasure and ease and an upper-class identity. The first motor cars were luxury items which offered adventure and freedom to move independently, but only to those who had the money and leisure time.

However, the humorous story about the unpredictable car also represented the criticism of the machine which became commonplace in the media over the following decades. The story gave a gendered meaning to the automobile by implying that it was the woman who wanted to have the automobile in the first place, not the man. Thus, these texts also constructed the gendered role of the consumer. Since these pioneering representations, not only has the design of the car changed, but the meaning of the automobile and the image of the driver have also been repeatedly renegotiated. As the historian of design, Penny Sparke, has stated, the meanings of material objects change in response to different contexts. At the same time, objects also carry their accrued and gendered meanings from one context to another, transforming in the process.<sup>9</sup>

In May 1900, the first motor car arrived in Finland as Benz Velo Comfortable was imported from L  beck in Germany to Turku on the south-west coast of Finland by Businessman Victor Forselius (1838 – 1905).<sup>10</sup> Gradually after the turn of the century, people began to import cars to Helsinki.

According to the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, by July 1908, 75 motor cars had been registered in Helsinki, 54 of them were privately owned and the other 21 belonged to government agencies and public bodies.<sup>11</sup> The population of Helsinki had surpassed 100 000 in 1907, so, at the beginning of the century, it was still a relatively small town with more pedestrians and horse-drawn wagons than automobiles. Regardless of the low numbers at the beginning, in the following decades, the automobile began to shape irreversibly the traffic systems and the ways in which people moved and experienced the town.

Automobiles were advertised for leisure, but in reality, driving a motor car was not just fun and games as the first car advertisements were trying to establish. In fact, in the open-design motor cars, motoring could be quite dirty. Starting the engine by cranking was dangerous, and it required physical strength. Therefore, cranking was not seen as an appropriate job for a lady.

Streets and country roads were designed for horse-drawn wagons and pedestrians, and the road and weather conditions in Finland limited motoring mainly to the summer months. The socio-economic group of people who could afford an automobile or was even interested in buying one was narrow. Not surprisingly, compared to the first motorized European countries, like France, Germany and Great Britain, Finland was motorized rather slowly.

## Emergence and reception of the first cars

Before the automobiles, cycling as a sport and leisure activity had attracted especially young men in Helsinki. The first high wheel was brought from England to Helsinki in the 1880s by Lars Krogius (1860-1935). He and his brother Ernst Krogius (1865-1955) took part in the first official cycling race held in Kaisaniemi Park in 1884. Both were leading figures in the shipping industry and Finnish sporting life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ernst was also one of the founding members of the first national automobile club in 1919.<sup>12</sup> The most prominent motor trader before the First World War, Sergej Nikolajeff Junior (1878–1920), also got into cycling before the automobile era.<sup>13</sup> The close relationship between high wheels, bicycles and automobiles as sports equipment was evident when one of the cycling clubs in Helsinki changed its name to the Automobile and Bicycle Club of Helsinki in 1907.

In Finland, the first popularity boom of the car took place in 1910 to 1914. By 1912, the number of cars had increased to 237. Before 1914, car ownership was confined to the upper and middle-classes in Helsinki: motor traders, wealthy entrepreneurs and industrialists, some doctors and engineers. Also restaurants and hotels, for example the luxury hotel Kämp along the Esplanade Park in the city centre, had automobiles, as stated in the first motor register (1912–1913) held by the Helsinki City Police Department.<sup>14</sup>

The reception of the car in Finland resembles the early history of the automobile in other European countries and in the United States. The first automobiles owned by the wealthy evoked resentment and suspicion both in the country and in towns among the less opulent. The emergence of the automobile emphasized the differences between the wealthy bourgeoisie and the working-classes and increased the tensions between the urban and rural.<sup>15</sup> The first automobiles were frequently referred to as the beast or the motorized monster in folktales and early car memories. They also affected the senses of people. The bright lights of the automobile were described as the eyes of the devil, and the sound of the engine and the horn frightened both horses and pedestrians.<sup>16</sup>

In studying early automobility in Finland, the symbolic meanings and the cultural representations of the automobile are to be taken as seriously as the physical presence of the object. In the early 1900s, automobiles were so rare that every minor car accident was carefully reported in Finnish newspapers. Even the car accidents abroad, in the big European cities like Berlin, Paris and London, received press coverage. To give an example, in May 1903, a Finnish newspaper published two news items on automobile accidents in Europe. According to the newspaper, on 25<sup>th</sup> May, there had been nine fatalities in a car race from Paris to Madrid. Several drivers had been killed or badly injured. “The automobiles have even killed some spectators”, said the paper emphasizing the active role of the car instead of the driver. The following short news item told that in London there had also been many car accidents where several people had died.<sup>17</sup> The news item did not tell the exact places nor the actual time of the accidents, since the point was simply to convince the readers of the dangerous nature of cars. The automobile caused problems on city streets and country roads, which were still seen as public places, accessible for everyone.

Another discourse of the resistance was humour. Humorous stories and jokes that made fun of car owners and drivers were central to the early negative media publicity. Short films with names like “The Bolting Automobile” referring to the similarity between horses and automobiles, and “A Dangerous Animal or the chase of an Automobile Driver” were shown at cinemas in Helsinki.<sup>18</sup> However, some films presented a more adventurous and appealing side to motoring to the Finnish audience by showing how one could easily travel around Europe by car.

### The first women taking the wheel in Helsinki

In 1909, the first car accident caused by a female driver in Helsinki was reported in the newspapers. Mrs Olga Nikolajeff, the wife of Motor Trader Sergej Nikolajeff Junior, had taken some of her friends for a short drive in the centre of Helsinki. She forgot to give signal at a busy corner and crashed into a boy on his bicycle. Fortunately, the boy was not badly injured, and only his bicycle suffered damage. The local newspapers pointed out that Mrs Nikolajeff’s lack of driving experience and her high speed had caused the accident. The newspaper *Uusi Suometar* wanted to draw the readers’ attention to the driver’s gender by making a comment that driving seemed to be difficult in general and especially difficult for the ladies.<sup>19</sup>

Olga Nikolajeff was working in the automobile business with her husband, so she was undoubtedly more accustomed to automobiles than other women in Helsinki at that time. Before that, she had worked in an agency that sold bicycles. Sergej Nikolajeff Junior began to sell automobiles already in 1904 whilst he was officially working at Stockmann department store. In 1905, he started his own business with his wife Olga. Nikolajeff Jr. visited the main car shows in Berlin, London and Paris, and the biggest car manufacturers on the continent. Between 1906 and 1913, there were around 1000 cars in Finland, and most of them were imported by Nikolajeff. In 1913, he built a huge 5-storey car showroom called “The Car Palace” in the centre of Helsinki. In 1914, the First World War ceased the business, and after a couple of years, the family moved to the French Riviera.<sup>20</sup>

British Historian Sean O’Connell has pointed out that the car arrived at the time of great controversy over the issue of women’s role in the society. While the debate over the suffrage was raging in Britain, the female driver became a powerful symbol of potential equality.<sup>21</sup> The automobile was an ideal vehicle to manifest political aims and rights to public places. In the United States, for example, impressive automobile campaigns for suffrage took place in the 1910s.<sup>22</sup> Whereas in Finland, women got the voting rights before the era of the automobile properly began, since Finland was the first European country to grant equal and universal suffrage to its citizens in 1906. In the 1907 elections, 19 female MPs were elected to the Parliament. Nevertheless, the automobile was an artefact that provided free and autonomous mobility for those women and men who could afford to buy one.

In Helsinki, the question about women’s right to drive a motor car was not raised officially until 1913. Car Inspector Pehr Blom was enquired whether it was appropriate for a woman to become a chauffeur. Blom addressed the question to the register office of Helsinki. Since women were not forbidden to drive according to the rules and regulations of Helsinki, the register office could only suggest that women should not work as professional chauffeurs. Female drivers were also advised not to wear clothes that could pose a risk to driving.<sup>23</sup> The reference to women’s long skirts and scarves in this suggestion was obvious. As the scholars of design and gender have pointed out, clothing and fashion are the essential issues that define and redefine the gender boundary in our culture.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the statement of the register office explicitly defined a gendered line between professional and leisure driving. Taxi cars took customers to restaurants and to a variety of entertainment in the city including brothels, so working as a taxi driver was not

seen as an appropriate job for a decent woman. Such examples show how, through the gendering process, the car eventually began to be coded as dangerous both physically and morally. It must be noted, however, that there were a few female taxi car owners in Helsinki. In 1912 and 1913, there were at least four female entrepreneurs, who did not drive themselves, but had several professional male chauffeurs working for them.<sup>25</sup> The taxi cars provided, thus, income for some women, even though driving a taxi was gendered as a man's job.

The automobile clubs and the organisations of professional drivers played a significant role in developing and promoting early automobile traffic in Finland. Doctor Karolina Eskelin (1867-1936) was the only female car owner among those first automobile enthusiasts who wanted to establish a Finnish automobile club in 1914. However, the time was not right for the national automobile club until 1919, when the car owners club, the Finnish Automobile Club was founded at hotel Kämp in Helsinki. The Club accepted some female members from the very beginning. However, until the 1950s, the members were mainly upper- and middle-class Swedish-speaking Finns from the metropolitan area.

Eskelin was an exceptional woman in many ways. She had lost her parents at an early age, but she managed to educate herself. She started her studies in the field of medicine at the university with special permission, and in 1885, she became the first Finnish woman to defend her doctoral thesis. Apparently, she had become familiar with automobiles during her visits to the leading motorized countries of that time. Eskelin made study trips to Germany at the beginning of the century. In 1903 to 1908 and in 1912, she practiced medicine in Massachusetts, United States, in the Finnish immigrant settlements.<sup>26</sup> In automobile historiography, medical doctors have acquired an almost iconic status as the first adopters of automobiles. But as Gijs Mom has noted, it was not as simple as that. Physicians, especially in many European cities, might have been the most likely car owners, but the situation in the countryside varied around Europe.<sup>27</sup>

Karolina Eskelin got her driving licence in her late forties in 1913. In a letter to a relative, she expressed her joy at having passed the chauffeur's exam at such a late age and stated how much fun it was to drive around town with a mechanic boy at the back of the car and a driver's license in her pocket. The automobile was also handy for driving from town to her villa in Alberga, in the outskirts of Helsinki. She wrote that the only unfortunate thing was that she had had to miss the congress of surgeons in Copenhagen, as all the money had gone to the car.<sup>28</sup>

Her friend, historian Alma Söderhjelm, wrote in her memoirs how the flâneurs of the city enjoyed watching Eskelin drive.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Helmi Tengén's (1875-1971) memories of how the first female drivers were received are quite contrary to Söderhjelm's recollections. In a late 1960s' newspaper interview, Tengén reflected on how difficult it was for Doctor Eskelin to drive in her open top car when "the gentlemen of the capital" threw sand at her face. Tengén was never mistreated that way herself, even though her driving also caught much attention. In her own opinion, the reason for that was her "masculine" occupation as a carpentry teacher: "Men soon got used to seeing me drive."<sup>30</sup>

Stoning automobiles and bicycles was a form of resistance towards these new upper-class technical objects around Europe.<sup>31</sup> Stoning in Tengén's memories might have been resistance to the elite automobile as well as female drivers. Tengén's memories should be interpreted in the context of her life story. She was an active member of Unioni, the League of Finnish Feminists (founded in 1892 in Helsinki) which focused primarily on fighting for women's right to vote, equal pay, improvements in education, and prohibition of prostitution.<sup>32</sup> For her as a suffragette, driving a car and the ownership of one were battlefields of gender and strong symbols of the women's movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As machines, automobiles have been connected to masculinity from the very beginning, but, at the same time, the automobile has been a strong symbol of female emancipation and gender equality.

The stories of these independent, wage-earning female drivers as examples demonstrate that women were also active motorists from the beginning of the automobile history in Helsinki. They used the car for fun and leisure, but it was also a useful object for business or simply travelling freely and fast in and around town. In European automobile history, racing young men have often been presented as the pioneers of automobility. As noted, in Helsinki, the small group of the early adopters of the car included middle-aged women as well.

## The chauffeur, the New Man

At first, professional chauffeurs had to be hired from abroad. Even when the car owner had the ability to drive, a chauffeur or a mechanic boy was required to change flat tires and to do all dirty and physical work that motoring required. During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, motoring was mainly a luxury male hobby with the exception of some privileged women, but it also became a male profession. As the numbers of cars went up, the automobile offered a new profession for working-class men as chauffeurs, taxi drivers and mechanics. Taxi drivers who had a car of their own were somewhere in between working class and middle class like coachmen before them.

In terms of gender, clothing is an important factor, as was noted earlier. Taxi drivers had to start wearing special chauffeur uniforms in order to be distinguished from their customers as well as leisure drivers. At the same time, the uniforms began to underline the professional male identity of the chauffeur. In 1911, the guidelines for the automobile traffic in Helsinki stated that taxi drivers were to wear a uniform that was clean and immaculate. The authorities kept careful watch that the guidelines were followed, and a chauffeur with wrong trousers or without a uniform was sometimes sent home to get changed. Furthermore, the automobile clubs of leisure drivers began to offer suits that resembled a uniform and caps to their male members in the late 1920s. These items of clothing, thus, coded both the gender and the social group of their wearer. When looking at chauffeurs' uniforms, it is easy to see their resemblance to other masculine garments and especially officers' uniforms.<sup>33</sup> The suit as a garment is a symbol of the non-personal: it does not tell who the wearer is, but it gives a clue as to what he or she does for living. Clearly, it is an important object in the discourses of power and gender and, thus, social relations.<sup>34</sup>

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1: A Taxi Driver, 1910s Helsinki. Source: Helsinki City Museum.

A foreign chauffeur driving the owner's luxury car was also a symbol of wealth and prestige. For example, Chamberlain Hjalmar Linder (1862 – 1921), who was the richest man in Finland and the pioneer of Finnish automobility, owned several cars in 1900 to 1910s and had a French chauffeur for many years. Still in the 1920s, when the cheaper American mass-produced cars had arrived in the market and cars had become more reliable, a chauffeur symbolized the social status of the car owner. Madame Minna Craucher, a famous socialite, purchased a Willys-Knight car from Stockmann department store on deposit and hired a Russian chauffeur in order to present herself as a wealthy lady. She introduced the chauffeur as an emigrant prince, even though, he had been a pilot before this new job. The chauffeur was almost like an accessory of the car that underlined the social class Craucher wanted to be identified with. Craucher (née Aalto) had a shady past, and she had changed her name and invented an exciting life story for herself to impress the high society of Helsinki. Craucher kept a literature salon which was a popular meeting place for writers such as Olavi Paavolainen and Mika Waltari, who were central figures in a literature group called Tulenkantajat (The Flame Bearers). The motto of the group was "Windows open to Europe". In the late 1920s, both above-mentioned writers praised urban life,

technology and automobiles in their writings. Waltari's first novel begins with a scene that takes place in Madame Spindel's aka Craucher's salon. Eventually, Craucher had to give up the car since she could not pay the loan instalments, and her Russian chauffeur resigned when he realized the truth about Craucher's messy money affairs.<sup>35</sup> In Craucher's life story, the car with its foreign chauffeur symbolized the desire to climb up to the upper class.

## Speeding and racing in Helsinki

During the 1920s and especially between 1923 and 1928, the number of cars increased in Finland due to economic growth as well as the import of cheaper mass-production cars, primarily Ford Model T. In 1925, there were two cars per 1000 people in Finland.<sup>36</sup> The numbers were still relatively low compared to the most motorized countries in Europe. According to a Finnish motor journal, there was already one car per 57 inhabitants in England and one car per 69 inhabitants in France in 1925.<sup>37</sup> In 1928, the busiest year for car import before the Great Depression of the 1930s, the total number of passenger cars was approximately 3600 in Helsinki.<sup>38</sup> The prohibition of alcohol (1919-1932) is considered to have promoted motorization in Finland. The smuggled spirits had to be transferred fast from the seaside into the rest of the country, so smuggling increased the demand for cars. With the income from smuggling, new and better cars were purchased both for smuggling purposes and legal transportation.<sup>39</sup> Speeding, drink-driving, smuggling or delivering spirits and driving drunken customers were the main traffic offences in Helsinki during the prohibition.

Speeding and drunk drivers were problems that caught much publicity in the press. The car was represented as a modern and advanced vehicle which, unfortunately, had transformed traffic in cities into chaos. The police authorities and automobile organisations, in particular, expressed the need for organized traffic culture. In the mid-1920s, Helsinki City Council founded a special committee to develop the traffic system in town. The European cities of Paris, Berlin and Stockholm were used to find a new model for safer traffic in the city.<sup>40</sup>

More civilized speeding was seen in car races. After the declaration of independence, the first Finnish Winter Games were arranged on sea ice, on the Taivallahti bay in 1920. The Games featured different sports including car races. That was an important event for the new nation. The presence of President K. J. Ståhlberg and his family manifested the significance of the games.<sup>41</sup> In 1923, the first female drivers took part in the winter car races. Dagny Krogius (1902-1981), who was the daughter of Ernst Krogius, and her friend Brita Saurén (1901-1979) competed with each other on a one-kilometer track. Saurén won by only three seconds. The two young women wearing leather "from head to toe" attracted wide publicity from the audience and media. In the women's magazine, *Våra Kvinnor*, they were represented as exotic "automobile princesses", and, according to the journalist, the motoring garments made them look like "elegant bats".<sup>42</sup> The nature of the race was more of a social event than an aggressive battle of motors.

In the late 1920s, the organizations and clubs of professional drivers began to organize car races in Helsinki and other towns around Finland. The first races organized by the Chauffeur's association in Helsinki took place at Käpylä trotting track. According to the motoring journal, *Autoilija* (Motorist), the race attracted 1500 paying spectators inside the racetrack, and at least the same number of non-paying spectators were watching the races from the hills around it.<sup>43</sup> From gender perspective, it is noteworthy that the drivers were mainly men, but the races attracted female spectators as well.

Some women were racing in the same series with male competitors. Miss Terna Åkerman, who successfully participated in short and long-distance races, was called "our sprightly Car-Amazon"

by *Ford-news*.<sup>44</sup> The model for calling racing women warlike Amazons and Valkyries was adapted from the European press. For instance, the pioneering female driver from France, Camille du Gast, who took part in the notorious Paris to Madrid race in 1903, was called “l’Amazone” and “la Walkyrie de la Mécanique”. Women who were dressed in unfeminine motoring clothes, drove big and heavy cars and were competitive blurred the conventional boundaries of gender and, thus, caused unease. However, the racing women with their goggles, leather jackets and helmets also provided a new model for identification.

### [INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Figure 2: Miss Terna Åkerman and her Singer car, 1928. Photo: Olof Sundström. Source: Helsinki City Museum.

Towards the end of the 1920s, a woman behind the steering wheel was no longer an anomaly. Nonetheless, the automobile was considered a technical artefact that primarily belonged to the masculine domain. Racing women were admired, whilst female drivers were also consistently presented incompetent in humorous sources as well as in serious articles. In literature, films and advertisements, the automobile and the new woman at the wheel became one of the most noticeable symbols of the new era in the 1920s.<sup>45</sup> The gender of the driver was constructed by repeating these cultural representations. The word “driver” simply referred to a male driver, while a female driver always needed the sex prefix.

A speeding young man in a luxury car was a common fictional image of a modern hero in light reading and in the literature group Tulenkantajat’s poetry and prose. The driver was a modern knight, and the fast car was his best friend. The Spanish luxury car, Hispano Suiza, was presented as the most romantic car of these modern times. The literary references to French Pierre Frondaie’s novel *L’Homme à l’Hispano* (1925) and (Armenian born) British Michael Arlen’s novel, *The Green Hat* (1924) were obvious. The leader of Tulenkantajat, Olavi Paavolainen, praised the car in his collection of essays, *Nykyäikää etsimässä (In Search of the Modern Age, 1929)*. For Paavolainen, the car was the symbol of the present day and the future, made of iron, steel, leather and varnish. In his opinion, only a modern, civilized man could fully understand the contours, strength and speed of the car. According to Paavolainen, Helsinki was the only city in Finland that deserved to be called a city, whilst also criticizing it by saying that, compared to the big European cities, Helsinki was still just a small town, where one could easily cross the road reading a book without the fear of cars.<sup>46</sup>

### From Beast to Beauty

During the thirty-year period from 1900 to 1930, the car settled in Helsinki. The story of the object began as a scary beast in the press. By the end of the 1920s, the car had become the symbol of modern times and a potential means of transport in town. Car advertising reflected and constructed the binary notions of gender that set the gendered spheres for car usage. For men, cars were advertised as useful vehicles for work and family outings on Sundays. Whereas for women, reliable and comfortable cars were promoted as tools for more efficient housekeeping. In Helsinki of the 1920s, however, that was more of a gendered representation than reality, although the number of female drivers began to rise from the mid-1920s onwards.<sup>47</sup>

The car as an object was both gendered and humanized. As a prime example, the Ford Model T was called in Finnish ambivalently Heikki after Henry Ford or sometimes Liisa (Finnish female name) after the Model T’s English nick name Tin Lizzie. In humorous stories and jokes, cars were repeatedly compared with women’s looks and stereotypical feminine features and vice versa. In the context of material culture, the car is a tangible object but a visual one as well. The

appearance of the car and how and where it is looked at are important factors in studying the gendering process of the object.

In 1923, General Motors introduced colours for its Chevrolet Superior Model. From the mid-1920s onwards, Ford's slogan "any colour as long as it's black" was challenged by the updated idea for mass-production introduced by General Motor's new Art and Colour Section: "Car for every person and purpose". The aesthetics of the car, its colour, line and form, became an important factor in the design and marketing of mass-produced cars. Penny Sparke has suggested that the idea of feminine fashionability which was, in the previous century, transferred from women's dress to the domestic interior was now extended into a new masculine arena.<sup>48</sup> Yet, it is worth emphasizing that cars were associated with fashion and femininity from the very beginning.

In Finnish motor journals, the beauty of the car was repeatedly mentioned as one of the key factors when choosing a new car. Already in 1924, the Finnish Automobile Club organized a beauty competition in which cars were judged by their shape and colour. The jury also reviewed the shape and comfort of the seats and the automobile equipment and accessories. The winner was an Essex with a radio.<sup>49</sup> By the end of the 1920s, beauty and technology were equal factors in marketing and representing cars.

In Helsinki, the car trader's association's annual car exhibitions in 1926-1928 presented to the public the newest models and fashions of the car industry. Rather than just selling cars and giving customers information about cars, the exhibitions also aimed to influence public opinion and transport policy, especially with regards to road construction. From the mid-1920s onwards, car buyers and taxi services welcomed with pleasure the new closed-bodied cars, which offered shelter from the changeable weather conditions and a private place within an urban space. The interior design of the car started to resemble a home with its comfortable upholstery, rugs and curtains and small accessories such as mirrors and flower vases. Eventually, the car became a spatial extension of the home.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the emergence of the car speeded up the pace of life in town and created new cultural practices, consumer culture and social activities, such as car clubs, races and car shows. The automobile presented a new technology and an object that not only influenced the lives of car owners and drivers but also had a huge impact on urban culture and everyone's rights to the streets and mobility in general. It was an object that aroused feelings and emotions among the owners and the non-users.

In terms of gender, the automobile is an important artefact, since the object itself, as well as, the representations and narratives of the automobile and driving reflected and constructed the notions of gender. The concepts of femininity and masculinity and the gendered ideology of separate spheres have influenced the design, technical development, advertising and uses of the automobile. Gender and the car were linked together, and they shaped each other from the very beginning of the history of the car. The car was a technological object, which provided free and individual mobility and was, thus, linked more with the male sphere. Then again, the driving jazz-girls in popular fiction and the growing numbers of female drivers in real life expressed the changing notions of gender in the early 1900s.

- 1 See Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile. Looking Back into the History of Our Desires* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1984), 6–10; Christoph Maria Merki, *Der holprige siegeszug des Automobils 1895–1930: Zur Motorisierung des Straßenverkehrs in Frankreich, Deutschland und der Schweiz* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), 38–65; Rudi Volti, *Cars & Culture: The Life Story of a Technology* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 1–5.
- 2 Finland was an autonomous region of the Russian Empire 1809–1917. The Grand Duchy of Finland was ruled by the Russian Emperor as Grand Duke. Finland became an independent republic in December 1917, and it went through a short Civil War during spring 1918.
- 3 Pat Kirkham & Judy Attfield, "Introduction", in the *Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 2–3.
- 4 *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 20 August, 1899, 1.
- 5 *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 15 October, 1899, 1.
- 6 Kurt Möser, "The Dark Side of 'Automobilism', 1900–30: Violence, War, and the Motor Car", *Journal of Transport History*, volume 24/2 (2003): 244–245.
- 7 Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 50–54; see also Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel. Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 67–88.
- 8 *Automobiilin ansioita, Päivälehti*, 6 December, 1899, 4.
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This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in *The Routledge History Handbook of Gender and the Urban Experience* on February 2, 2017, available online:  
<https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-History-Handbook-of-Gender-and-the-Urban-Experience/Simonton/p/book/9781138815940>.