

More Than Rosie: A Look Beyond The Image

Carissa Reidel

The image that comes to mind when thinking of women working in war production factory jobs during World War II is most commonly Rosie the Riveter. Women are viewed by the majority of today's population as called to work during the war by patriotic duty. Rosie worked because there was a war, because her country needed her, and because she needed to protect her loved ones. Nowhere in this image does the need for money or professional opportunities ever emerge. Were such women simply motivated by the patriotism of the era or were they influenced by other motives? If so, why has such a representation not been acknowledged and presented to the public?

The U.S. government promoted and produced the notion of a patriotically motivated woman working in war production factories, and this view has persisted ever since. Contrary to this is the experiences of the women working in such jobs, their motivations and experiences and how they relate to the image promoted by the government. The motivations of the women working in the factories during World War II varied greatly and were much more complicated than the image promoted by the government would suggest. Women were motivated by patriotism as well as financial opportunities. Still, the oversimplified notion of women as motivated by patriotic duty persisted because it was the portrayal that society wanted to accept and that has been overwhelmingly presented since the end of World War II.

The scholarship on women working in war production factories is a rather recent field of study. The subject itself is sixty years old, and only in the last thirty years has enough time passed for historians to feel adequate distance from the subject to study it objectively. Much of this work is deeply influenced, directly or indirectly, by the women's movement. Many of the studies about women in the factories during World War II were written in the 70s when feminism was gaining momentum, or written later by women influenced by the changes in society and thinking due to the movement. At its core, such work is trying to expand women's history as well as the understanding of women in industrial jobs.

The scholarship of women in war production jobs is also grounded solidly in the tradition of social history. It looks at the creation of societal gender roles and how they changed in response to women in factories, as well as how the women changed. It also examines the societal tools which were used to recruit women. Research about women involved in war production is often found in works on the American home front, as well as in works solely on women in the war effort. Works on the home front show the nature of total war and how it affected the general population in all aspects of life. Studies which focus solely on women's participation in the war effort

show the importance of the women's contributions and the variety of the work which they did.

A major portion of the research concerning women in war production factory jobs is collections of oral histories of those who worked in such factories. Studs Terkel's works, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two* and *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, are such examples of collections of oral testimonies.¹ Works of this type show the experiences of individuals during the war and the challenges they faced. Sherna Berger Gluck's work, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change*, and Nancy Baker Wise and Christy Wise's work, *A Mouthful of Rivets*, record the personal testimonies of women working in factories during the war, and then present them in a manner which argues the historians points of views.² Their work shares the experiences of women in factories, but also puts forth an argument that these women were motivated by a wide range of factors, and that they were a diverse group with varied backgrounds and circumstances. Gluck and the Wises argue that women had more motivations, such as financial motivations, for working than has been the common perception.

Other studies focus on the process of how women became a major presence in the work force during the war and analyze their experiences. The scholarship focuses on many things, such as the use of propaganda to mobilize women to work in the factories. It looks into propaganda produced by the government, such as posters and songs, and propaganda produced by the media, such as magazines, newspapers, and advertisements. All of the propaganda shows women as extremely patriotic and capable workers. The studies show the women's experience in factories, such as how the women got along with fellow male employees, how the women were trained, the jobs they occupied and the consequences such work had on their family lives. It gives insight into women's motivations, and describes what the environment in factory work was like.

In her book, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War Two*, Maureen Honey predominately looks at women's employment in factories as well as general employment patterns before the war and the consequences that such work had on society. Honey argues that the war provided an opportunity for women to enter into a realm of work that they had not previously been allowed to enter and that the government and industry created an extensive propaganda campaign to justify this shift to the public. She looks at this campaign by analyzing magazines, such as *Post*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *McCall's*, as well as popular fiction and advertisements. Honey shows how such items depicted the government's message and its portrayal of working women. As she states, "All indications are that the magazine industry was at least aware of propaganda needs and tried to cooperate within the restrictions of editorial policies."³ Honey argues that working women were part of a war effort and had opportunities to move up in their occupations. The role of propaganda was to justify the employment of women in industry to the public and women themselves. The government needed women and it used all available resources to break down images of femininity and gender roles to get that labor force. By analyzing in detail the propaganda and the government's own documents, Honey came to the conclusion that propaganda was used to mobilize women and justified doing so by claiming it was simply their civic duty, nothing else. She states, "The

more forceful view was that women took war jobs out of duty, not because they would benefit from them personally.⁴ Honey argues that such work changed women and, though many were forced out of their jobs following the war, the experience stayed with them and led to future tension between women and society over their desire to work.

Leila J. Rupp, who wrote *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda 1939-1945*, argues that propaganda was a vital tool in the mobilization of women to work in war production factories. Rupp states, "The correlation between intensive propaganda and successful mobilization does not mean that the women entered or did not enter the labor force solely in response to propaganda."⁵ Other factors, such as "financial incentives," which were not part of the governmental campaign, also influenced women to enter the labor force. The role of the propaganda takes on the dimensions of justifying using women in the labor market to society.⁶ Rupp states that, "Propagandists intended to persuade, but they may in fact serve the function of informing the public."⁷ Therefore, the use of studying propaganda is not to see how it affected women primarily, but to see how society reacted to it and how society's response then affected the women. Rupp's main argument is that the changes in women's roles were only temporary and returned to prewar conditions after the war due to society's unwillingness to let gender roles be permanently altered. Therefore, both Rupp and Honey look at the experiences of women working in war factories differently. Each look at the influences of society and government, but Honey argues women's roles were changed by the war even if only slightly, while Rupp argues that such roles were unaffected in the long run by the war. Both historians' work is typical of scholarship focused on women working in war production factory jobs during World War II.

Another facet of the scholarship that is equally prominent are detailed analyses of the government's campaign to entice women into the factories. There are many historians who have dedicated their time to analyzing the government's media message. Some examples of such works are *Visions of War: World War II in Popular Literature and Culture* and *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History*.⁸ These works analyze the image that was being projected to society during the war and what impact that message of the patriotically motivated women could have had on those of the time and their actions. In short, they analyze the power of media on people's lives and argue much along the lines of Honey and Rupp.

The historians studying women working in war production jobs during World War II have focused the women's mobilization and experiences in detail. By putting together the scholarship of Gluck, Wise, Honey and Rupp, one gets a more complete idea of women working in the war. One receives a fuller picture of how society and the government perceived women and how the women perceived themselves and their situation. Only in this manner does a more complex image and discussion of such women emerge. What emerges from all of the varying scholarship is that women were portrayed as solely working in the factories because it was their civic duty, but in reality this was a simplification of the women's motivations to work.

The most common image of a working women during World War II is Rosie the Riveter, a woman motivated by patriotism to join the workforce. Such an image was part of the propaganda produced by the U.S. government. The government was faced

with a labor shortage problem and, to continue the production of essential war items such as planes, tanks and ammunition, the government needed workers to sustain production levels. The solution, as stated by the War Production Board, was "large numbers of women who do not normally consider themselves a part of the industrial labor supply," who would provide the labor needed. The reasoning for such a choice was that the government viewed the women as a relatively untapped labor resource that would supply a temporary workforce.⁹ From the onset, officials in the U.S. government put forth an image about the kind of women that should be filling industrial jobs. The government always assumed these workers would be women who were housewives or who had no previous work experience. They would simply be a temporary labor supply to fill jobs left behind by soldiers.

The government produced images to recruit women workers that were directly influenced by its views of the type of women which it thought would be employed. The campaign's primary tool was patriotism. As Doris Weatherford states, "Over the radio came the call for women workers; the air waves informed, cajoled, persuaded and, most of all, appealed to one's patriotism," much the same way that all media recruited for jobs.¹⁰ Consequently, the message was clear to women: their country, husbands, and brothers needed them. It was their duty to work. As Gluck states, "Self sacrifice was required to bring their husbands and sons home safely and to preserve the way of life they cherished."¹¹

Such ideas can be seen in the example of Rosie the Riveter. The poster of Rosie projects the images of a strong capable woman, one who can meet the demands of production and the needs of the nation (see Appendix A). Other posters conveyed and reinforced the patriotic feeling by proclaiming "Victory is in Your Hands," "Shopgirl Attacks Nazis," and (trying to allay [societies] nagging doubts) "War Workers Stay Womanly."¹² There is also a song about Rosie the Riveter which expands the character's public exposure. The song informs the listener about Rosie's life and reasons for working (see Appendix B). In the song, Rosie works every day "all day long" for the war effort. Not only is she working for the war effort, but Rosie is also working to "[protect] Charlie," her boyfriend who is a Marine. The point of the song is that it is one's duty to make sacrifices for the country and to help the war effort, to help loved ones. To do anything less suggests that one is not a true American, that one is not "red, white and blue."¹³

Another series of posters that highlights the government's views of women workers is a series titled *Jenny on the Job*. Posters of *Jenny on the Job* were produced by the U.S. Public Health Services and depicted things that related to women's health and factory work. At the same time, they reinforced traditional perceptions of women. The posters depicted a young, slender and attractive woman. They showed Jenny engaged in various activities such as lifting boxes and eating. The posters were titled such things as, *Jenny on the Job Eats Man Size Meals*, *Jenny on the Job Wears Styles Designed for Victory*, and *Jenny on the Job Lifts Weight the Easy Way* (see Appendix C, D, and E). The implications are that "Jenny" must do manly things like eat "man size meals" and lift weight if she works in the factories, but she must also be feminine, even in her work pants that are designed for victory (simply being functional and safe, while giving the factory uniform a glamorized look.)¹⁴ The posters romanticized women in such jobs; Jenny is always happy and sweet looking and maintains distinctly feminine qualities.

Thus while the major appeal of war work as promoted by the government was patriotism, the government attempted to promote factory work as alluring and feminine, while still keeping the image of work as a man's job.¹⁵ The government wanted to portray women's work as exciting and enchanting because, prior to the war, women in the work force carried a "stigma of economic necessity" and as one author states, "one of its most effective strategies was to glamorize the working woman" in eliminating such necessity.¹⁶ The image that was not promoted by such posters is that of women working for financial need and occupational opportunity. Rather, women like Rosie and Jenny are portrayed as still being feminine and only temporarily working in factories out of duty to their nation and loved ones. As Susan M. Hartman states, "the intent of such messages was to associate women with the durable goods production and heavy labor, they reinforce the traditional notion that women were essentially delicate and sexually alluring."¹⁷ Doing this, the government justified employing women though it went against current gender roles. Portraying women and their jobs as exciting and feminine by the government was a tool to ease the transition of women entering such jobs and to ease society's fears. As Rupp states,

Perhaps glamorizing of war work signified an attempt to ease the transition from the apron-clad housewife of the prewar image to the woman war worker in pants. Rosie the Riveter, like the flapper, was exotic in appearance, even perhaps in lifestyle. But the new image did not mean that the ideal American woman had changed beyond recognition. Beneath her begrimed exterior, she remained very much a traditional woman.¹⁸

Women may have been taking on new roles, but the government was careful to show that they were the same and would return to their prewar lifestyles when the time came.

Government and industry never viewed female employees as permanent fixtures. In fact, married women workers were viewed as working "only to enable the family to buy 'extras,'" while single women were working until they were married.¹⁹ Such a perception was the opposite of male workers, who were seen as the person responsible for earning a living to provide for their families. It was therefore commonly believed that it was the male's traditional role to work while woman's true role was one of homemaker. Hartmann states, "Because the work was conceptualized ideologically as sacrifice for a national cause, and women were representations of sacrifice, the implicit message that women could do all kinds of work was muted and eventually silenced altogether."²⁰ Therefore, the justification for women working in factories as patriotic response, counteracted the reality that women were capable of doing men's work.

The government's perception and portrayal of the female workforce was not representative of the women that actually responded to governmental recruitment. Many of these women had worked in factories before World War II. In a survey done in March of 1944, of all women working, "61 percent had been working before Pearl Harbor, 17 percent had been too young or unable to work, and only 22 percent had been housewives."²¹ Such findings suggest that the government did not correctly characterize the female labor force. Whereas the government promoted and argued that the women recruited into factory work would have been homemakers, in reality

the women who responded were those who had previously worked outside the home. These statistics show that there may have been more than the governmental argument of patriotism motivating women.

Still, the images of patriotically motivated women working in production factories which were perpetuated during the war years, had an impact on the perceptions of these women. Society was informed of women's roles during the war repeatedly through the same posters, songs and other recruitment tools focused towards women. If women had separate motives or women had already worked, the public was generally not informed of this. Rather, the image that the public perceived was the one the government gave them. Therefore it seems natural then that society's predominate image of women working in the factories was of patriotic individuals who would return to previous gender roles upon the end of the war.

Companies in Springfield, OH, also sent messages about women working in factories as a patriotic duty, reinforcing the idea of what women's roles were supposed to be and promoting the same images as the government. Robbins & Myers, a local Springfield company often simply called R & M, produced war goods for the armed services. One of the major items R & M produced was the sub-assembly units for the Norden Bombsight equipment, as well as, hoist, cranes and exhaust fans for the army and navy.²² The company received the Army-Navy "E" award for excellence due to its "outstanding production record" and it continued to receive added white stars for its sustained excellence in production.²³ Much of the work that the company did was supported by a large number of female employees working on the factory floor. The company created its own newsletter, the *R & M Co-Operator* which was distributed to its employees monthly. In 1943, the *Ladies Day* section of the *Co-Operator*, written by the female employees, estimated that twenty five percent, roughly 5,000 members of the Springfield workforce, was female, up from 1917-1918's fifteen percent. In the company itself, 1,250 women were employed in 1943 versus 880 during World War I.²⁴ The article discusses the important roles of women in war production and how women rallied to the factories to fill essential positions while championing their success. The article validates the women who worked for the nation, and serves as a celebration of the accomplishments of women. The women of the company who produced the article rejoiced over the abilities of women to help the war effort as well as their abilities to gain numbers in the workforce.

The writers also addressed society's fear of such work "unsexing the women." One story that the authors of *Ladies Day* share shows that women would not be "unsexed," but would stay feminine: "While the cameraman was setting up the picture machine, every girl in sight was fussing with her black hair. Miss Miller snickered as she looked into the stern eye of the camera, then forgot all about production records, left her lather and ran off to 'doll up a bit.'"²⁵ The story shows that women can work in factories but, ultimately, women will always embrace their feminine roles. It reiterates that factories were not the place for women and that their presence was only temporary, that, as Rupp states, "inside her coveralls, [there was] the same prewar woman who cooked, cleaned and cared for her family."²⁶ The message that comes across to the female employees reading the article is to be proud of accomplishments and abilities, but also not to challenge gender roles.

An article in the *Ladies Day* section of the January 15, 1944, edition of the *R & M Co-Operator* urges female employees of the company to recruit more women. It told of

the plight of women across the world who were involved in the war effort and urged women to bring more women in to help the war effort. It championed sacrifice for one's nation and portrayed that sacrifice as minimal pain compared to the alternative. In the end the article's sole purpose and mode of recruitment was that "Uncle Sam needs these girls."²⁷

In general, the *Ladies Day* section of the R & M newsletter projected a traditional image of gender roles to the women that worked in its factory. The section was devoted to domestic, non-work related, issues which faced women, like the duties of running a home. In fact, the section appeared more as a mini magazine focused on women rather than a factory newsletter. *Ladies Day* was always one page out of the total *R & M Co-Operator*, but the focus of the section was always on beauty tips and cooking recipes, such as how to care for your skin in the winter weather and how to keep brown sugar from getting hard.²⁸ The rest of the *Co-Operator* is about working in the plant, how many new trainees there were, letters published from employees in the armed services, poems by employees, general gossip such as who went where for vacation and who was sick, and information on output and the use of the goods manufactured there. In one way or another everything in the newsletter but the *Ladies Day* section was tied to life within the company or to the war. *Ladies Day* was a section that reinforced the roles of women at the time, the role of homemaker and maintaining femininity. Rarely did it focus on the role that women held in the factory. These same themes of reinforcing traditional roles of women caused tension within the larger community of Springfield as well.

The *Springfield Daily News* offered an outlet for the public to talk to one another and to voice many of the public's wartime controversies. On June 25th, 1942, page four is the Public's Forum, the op-ed section. In the section, a letter addressed a controversy that had been going on within Springfield. The over women wearing slacks in public; a local minister had called such action immoral, and, in the words of the author, "[condemning] them to hell."²⁹ The debate was partly based on factories' female employees, for they wore slacks to work to be practical and as a safety measure. But the other part of the debate was over women wearing slacks outside the factory. As one resident stated, "A lot of women are doing wonderful and patriotic work in the present war, but there are a lot of others who just want to 'show off' in front of men."³⁰ Such actions caused uproar among the community because traditionally women did not wear slacks, and men did. The action seemed to suggest to the public the loss of women's femininity, which would alter existing societal gender roles. Some men accepted the fact that women could wear slacks, but grieved that it was allowed and acceptable: "I am willing to concede the loss of our pants, age-old symbol of our dominance, as the major home front casualty of this war."³¹ Such men believed that wearing pants caused women to lose the "esthetic value of exalted femininity which men normally gave them."³² Many men and others were worried about women losing their role and becoming more like men, gaining power and prestige. Still some people responded with the argument that such clothing was common sense: "slacks are a very practical mode of dress for our women war workers, and dresses are very dangerous around moving machinery."³³ Others responded with respect for women and the work that they were doing: "The women slack wearers are trying to earn a living and they are giving their best efforts toward a

successful termination of our country's war effort."³⁴

Women working in the factories also took part in the debate. They pointed to the work they were doing as justification of their dress and demanded respect for such work:

The next time some of you males, and some females as well, are tempted to give some verbal or written criticisms, stop and think. Most of us are working in factories, where dresses are out-of-place. We are of necessity doing work formally done by men. They didn't wear skirts and dresses did they? ...Working in a factory is no picnic, you know.³⁵

Women demanded to be recognized for what they had been doing, for supporting the nation in its war effort, for working long hours doing hard jobs, and for supporting themselves. While justifying women wearing pants, the debate reiterates such changes in women's work as patriotically driven. Women worked out of "necessity," or, better stated, patriotic duty, and when the men returned they would have their jobs back.

Still, the dispute shows that the images that were being promoted to society and the changes women went through caused tension. Members of society knew that women were needed for the war effort, that without women in the factories the soldiers and the war machine could not continue. The community was informed of this daily in the government's call for all to sacrifice, in rationing, buying bonds, and work. However, when women worked in the factories in Springfield and challenged societal gender roles, it made the general public uncomfortable. Women were seen as becoming more like men and less like women, and the foundation of society seemed shaken and its members voiced their opinion. The government's response, and the response of the industry, was that women were not losing their femininity. They were simply using their skills in different ways and would soon return to their traditional jobs. Women's skills in the home were praised for preparing them for the workforce and women were portrayed as feminine and glamorous in their jobs, as *Jenny on the Job* or the tale of Miss Miller in the Springfield *R & M Co-Operator*.

The U.S. government created an image of women workers in factory jobs during World War II as civically minded and society accepted that fully. But was such an image really representative of the women's motivations to work? What the government promoted and how society responded shows an interesting aspect of the factories, but is there an aspect being ignored, such as financial opportunities? Is there more to the experiences of women in the factories?

The only way to know if the government's portrayal of women's motives for working in factories during World War II is correct is to compare it to the women's own words. The wealth of recent scholarship that documents oral histories from these women allows one to do this. Looking at such sources gives a more diverse image of women and their reasons to choose such war production work.

In 1943, a woman named Josephine von Miklos published a book called *I Took a War Job*, which chronicled her choice to take a war job and her experiences. Von Miklos, who had already held a job in the fashion industry as well as a Ph.D., left her job to work in a factory. To von Miklos her world of fashion seemed frivolous and unrealistic in the face of the war: "To hell I said, with penthouse studios and cocktails and fashion shows and driving through Central Park at dusk, where the building are

purple and breath-taking. To hell with dreaming of bigger and better jobs, and of making love to Fifth Avenue."³⁶ In essence, von Miklos was purely motivated by patriotism. She felt that she needed to help her nation. Therefore, she sacrificed the life she had in favor of a new one which was devoted to the war effort, the need for money never factored into her decision. She was overqualified, alone, and in a job that she did not particularly like, but she did it because she was helping her country. It is this patriotism which carried her and gave her strength to deal with the challenges she faced in factory work: "Yes, fighting and working in war plants are grim business, but somebody's got to do it, and it might as well be me. And, anyway, it is the only way I know in which I can say, thanks, America, thanks for everything, I've had a wonderful time."³⁷

Other women were also motivated to work because of patriotic reasons. Doris Whitney had a reaction similar to von Miklos. She had been living a life that revolved around gambling and horse racing and one day thought to herself, "Jeez, I'm living this indolent life, and the war is going on. I should do something serious."³⁸ She joined the war effort by working in an aircraft factory. Faiga Fram Duncan remembers a woman who she called Bataan Mother. Her son was captured when Bataan fell and she did not know whether he had lived or died, but it was for him that she worked. For the personal reason of helping her son and the patriotic reason of helping the men in the armed forces, she returned to work each day.³⁹

However, such women who worked for their fighting brothers and husbands were truly unrepresentative of the whole. As Gluck states, "In reality only one in ten new women workers had husbands in the service. (And only 8 percent of *all* women were married to service men.)"⁴⁰ While such women who appear singularly motivated for patriotic reasons existed, there were also women who worked for financial reasons, for the opportunity, and for a combination of reasons.

Some women were greatly motivated by the money that could be made in the factories. A historian stated, "Some women saw an opportunity to earn more money than was possible in the lower-paying, more traditional 'women's' jobs of that period."⁴¹ They were motivated by the money that they could save for their lives after the war, that they could use to help their families, and money that was their own. Katie Lee Clark Knight and her husband were so motivated by the money that was involved in the war production factories that they left their home in El Paso and moved to the West Coast so they could both take jobs. "Of course, being young, we wanted to go where the big money was. At that time, that was good money. I remember I made, I think it was \$50 a week."⁴² It was for the money that she, as well as her husband, decided to radically change their lives, something that went against the governmental image. Knight saw a chance to improve her situation and she took it and fully embraced the opportunity. The money that was saved was used after the war to better her situation by buying a house: "We went back to El Paso after that, before we started traveling, and bought a home."⁴³

Tina Hill also worked in the plants that created products for the war effort. When a friend told her that there was lots of money to be made in war plants, enough to not have to "work in the hotel or motels," she took her advice and got a job. Her reaction to the job was excitement about the increase in pay: "And what I liked about it was the money. I felt like if I could make more money, I could do more with it."⁴⁴

Hill went to work in factories because the pay was good and she could "do more with it," such as provide better for her family, get a better living space and even have money of her own to spend on herself. Polly Crow chose her job because it allowed her to "have her cake and eat it to [sic];" she could work the swing shift and still be home during the day to take care of her son, as well as earn money to save for later: "I'm gonna start sockin' it in savings and checking too so's we'll have something when our sweet little Daddy comes home."⁴⁵ Not only was she motivated by the money and her ability to save it, but the money was her own and it gave her power and excitement to be in control of her own finances: "Opened my little checking account too and it's a grand and a glorious feeling to write a check all you own and not have to ask anyone for one."⁴⁶

Women were motivated by money and by patriotism, but these incentives were not necessarily separate from each other. Weatherford states, "Given the opportunity of earning their own paychecks and the satisfaction of contributing to the war efforts, millions were glad" to work in the factories.⁴⁷ Often women were motivated by both patriotism and money, as well as other things. Margarita Salazar McSweyen worked for Lockheed subassembly plant in Los Angeles during the war. To her, the time was an exciting one to be living in, a time of struggle and full of new experiences: "it was exciting and being involved in that era. You figured you were doing something for your country-and at the same time making money."⁴⁸ For McSweyen, the need to help her country was a reason for work, and made her feel good to have a job, which she needed to help support her family, and she could also contribute to the war effort. Althea Bates Gladish, who operated a machine in Massachusetts, also shows the same tendency of money and patriotism both being motivating factors: "The money however was not the most important point of my working that summer. It was kind of a patriotic duty."⁴⁹ To her, the money mattered, but so did the war.

Other factors that influenced women were the opportunity to work or the ability to have a better job that had not been previously offered to women. The job was important to women because they needed it and the opportunities in war production factories were a step up from the traditional employment which women had been offered. The Wises argue that "some women saw the opportunity to earn more money than was possible in the lower-paying, more traditional jobs of that period."⁵⁰ For some, work was just a natural experience. Geraldine Amidon Berkly always knew she would work like all the other women in her family: "Working during the war didn't change my mind about working. I was always going to be a career person. It never entered my mind that I'd do anything else."⁵¹ But the war production factories gave her an opportunity which she took, and it allowed her to work in new kinds of jobs. When working in factories she made sure that she worked men's jobs: "I was adamant about getting a man's job. Every time I applied somewhere, I wanted to take a man's job."⁵² The war factories allowed her to do men's jobs, like riveting, that she would not have had before and it "broadened" her view on life. After going to work in a war production factory, Mildred Admire Bedell also had a new perspective on life; she took hold of the opportunity to work during the war and always kept a job: "I was a mother with three children, and I had graduated from high school and had no idea of how to work. I had no career. All of a

sudden, I was making money, I was head of a household, and it made a different person of me. I had never been without a job since that day."⁵³

However, the truth was that women took jobs in war production factories because it provided better opportunities. Honey argues, "The flood of positive images of working women promoted non-working women to expand their vision of what life could offer," to strive for something more than house work.⁵⁴ Those that had never worked before, as well as those who had in different jobs, liked the opportunity and did not want to quit. A survey "taken in 1944 revealed that seventy percent to eighty percent of women in war production areas planned to remain in the labor force after the victory was won, and they wanted to keep the jobs they were then performing."⁵⁵ The women wanted to keep their jobs even after their soldiers returned; this does not support the patriotic image of the female worker gladly giving up her job to return to the kitchen. This can be seen by the exit patterns of women at the end of the war. Women who had never worked before did not quit when the men came back, but held on to their jobs until they were fired to make room for the returning soldiers. This showed that patriotism was not the only reason for working because, if it was, then the women would have gladly quit.

Women were motivated by more than the governmental image of patriotism. The image is not inaccurate but oversimplified because it does not show that financial concerns and job opportunities that interested women. The question that then arises is why does the image of patriotically driven women working in war production factories still exist if it is a simplified image? Why have the other images and motivations of such women are not recognized? Rupp suggests that the image of women may have changed drastically during war but that the image does not change because the larger culture never viewed it as a permanent change. She states, "The economic role and the popular image of women may change drastically in the course of a modern war, but basic ideas about women's proper sphere, characterized by cultural lag even in the case of long-term economic developments change little."⁵⁶ Basically, during the war the image of women changed, but after the war it reverted to its common perception. Members of society did not want to change and only did so temporarily to accomplish what it needed to win the war. The government intended that the use of women in such jobs would be temporary, "the mode of adaptation of public images assured that the wartime range of options would contract once again in peacetime," and so it promoted an image which would recruit women for a short period.⁵⁷ Therefore, society was not ready to accept the role of women as workers, equal in ability and strength to men, after the war.

Society chose to not recognize the motivations of women working in factories during the war other than patriotism because such motivations went against the traditional gender roles it was trying to reinforce. The simple fact is that, as Rupp states, "the mobilization propaganda directed at women allowed the public to accept the participation of women in unusual jobs without challenging basic beliefs about women's roles."⁵⁸ Since the propaganda of the government did not hurt the image of women's roles, its message could be remembered and passed on through the years and not interfere with societal messages. It became a part of the war memory and the nostalgic view of women working in war production factories.

By looking at women's experiences and motivations, a new image of these women can be recovered and shared. To do this, more communities need to take the

oral histories of the women who worked in war production factories during World War II. The scholarship that exists is a start which sparks interest and discussion, but it is one that is generally focused mostly on women in major urban coastal areas. Smaller communities across the United States need to record these women's testimonies while they still have the chance. They need to talk to these women to find out what motivated them, and to learn of their experiences during the time. This will provide a wealth of new information and discussion. If such testimonies are taken and more scholarship is written to explore the complex, differing experiences of women working in war production factories it will allow these women and their stories to emerge from behind the patriotic shadow of Rosie the Riveter and desimplify the image of women in war production factories.

Appendix A

"Rosie the Riveter"



Bird, William. *Design for Victory: World War II Posters on the American Home Front*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998.

Appendix B

"Rosie the Riveter"
by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb

All the day long,
Whether rain or shine,
She's a part of the assembly line.
She's making history,
Working for victory,
Rosie the Riveter.
Keeps a sharp lookout for sabotage,
Sitting up there on the fuselage.
That little girl will do more than a male will do.
Rosie's got a boyfriend, Charlie.
Charlie, he's a Marine.
Rosie is protecting Charlie,
Working overtime on the riveting machine.
When they gave her a production "E,"
She was as proud as she could be.
There's something true about,
Red, white, and blue about,
Rosie the Riveter.

Miller, Alan and His Orchestra "Rosie the Riveter," *Songs that Won the War: Rosie the Riveter*. LaserLight Digital 12 499.

Appendix C

"Jenny on the Job Eats Man Size Meals"

Jenny on the Job: Eats Man Size Meals.
Washington D.C.: United States Public
Health Service, 1943.
<http://www.library.northwestern.edu/otcgi/digilib/llscgi60.exe>.



Appendix D

"Jenny on the Job
Wears Styles Designed for Victory"

*Jenny on the Job: Wears Styled Designed
for Victory.* Washington D.C.: United States
Public Health Service, 1943.
[http://www.library.northwestern.edu/
otcgi/digilib/llscgi60.exe](http://www.library.northwestern.edu/otcgi/digilib/llscgi60.exe).



Appendix E

"Jenny on the Job
Lifts Weight the Easy Way"

Jenny on the Job: Lifts Weight the Easy Way.
Washington D.C.: United States
Public Health Service, 1943.
[http://www.library.northwestern.edu/
otcgi/digilib/llscgi60.exe](http://www.library.northwestern.edu/otcgi/digilib/llscgi60.exe).



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