

Rugged Arms and Rosy Cheeks: The Working Women of World War II

The image of *Rosie the Riveter* has become a symbol for the traditional narrative of women's role in the war-production labor force during World War II. This image, created by Norman Rockwell and published on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on May 29, 1943, portrays a white woman, approximately thirty years of age, wearing work overalls and factory goggles on her head, and holding an industrial riveting tool in her lap. Rosie, depicted trampling on a copy of *Mein Kampf*, represents the female war hero. She is one of the most well recognized symbols for the, "ideological frame through which women's wartime experience would be presented to an American public," (Dabakis 183). According to this ideological frame, this was a time period of great empowerment and liberation for women; in images like that of Rosie, women were portrayed as capable of performing tasks traditionally reserved for men (riveting, for example), and there appears to be a breakdown during this time period of the traditional ideals about gender roles. Rosie wears a man's uniform and wields a man's tool, clearly implying that women were coming to be viewed as equal to men in their labor capacities; however, one must still ask, what about Rosie's rosy cheeks?

In order to understand this entrance of women into job fields traditionally reserved for men, we must go beyond this popular narrative and examine the historical situations that have been left unaddressed by this story of empowerment. To what extent did images such as Rosie create a new idea of the female subject, and to what degree were traditional gender norms preserved during this period? What mechanisms of power were at play in the production of this wartime discourse (or ideology)? What phenomena were masked by these images? What institutions were called upon to produce these images, and who were these images directed towards? How did power operate to facilitate the entrance of women into traditionally male job

fields? Michel Foucault has provided the tools needed to address questions such as these, and so this analysis of female employment during World War II will be carried out in the tradition of his methodology. As Foucault points out in *The History of Sexuality*, power is exercised by mechanisms that reach beyond the state government and its official apparatuses, through a variety of techniques that are employed on all levels of society, both locally and nationally, explicitly and implicitly, and it is this notion of the operation of power that shall be maintained within this study (Foucault 89). As we shall come to see, the mechanisms of power that operated during this period far exceeded the state apparatus. Power relations cannot be separated from other relations such as economic relations, relations of knowledge, and sexual relations, and, in addition to the usual top-down model of power relations, there are also relations that come from below in the home or the factory or the salon, and it is this network of force-relations that must be investigated as it winds its way into every instance of society (Foucault 94). Within this network, one of the mechanisms of power and knowledge that shall be given attention here is the production of discourses that serve to produce power relations and propagate particular types of knowledge (Foucault 12). As one examines the peculiar historical situation that America faced during World War II, one must ask such questions as: How did the media exercise power over individual subjects and industry leaders at the local level? How was power embedded into gender relations in a period that presents itself as one of gender equality, at least in the workforce? What strategies and techniques operated at the local centers of power-knowledge? How were relations of power modified in order to meet the needs of the wartime crisis? What discourses were circulating around this phenomenon of women in the workforce and how were these discourses communicated in both particular techniques and ultimately in an overall strategy? In what ways did the propaganda discourse serve to produce and constitute

economically useful subjects? How did these discourses both serve to engender particular power relations and produce a particular episteme around the issue of female employment? By addressing questions such as these, we shall outline the ways in which a variety of institutions employed various strategies and techniques of power to produce an image of the female worker that would facilitate the temporary employment of women in war-production factories, but without trampling over traditional ideals about gender roles and family values.

To begin this analysis, let us return to the image of Rosie. The image of Rosie, as we noted, has come to stand as a symbol for the narrative of empowerment through which this story is usually told, but this narrative is highly misleading as it masks the actual nature of these historical moments. Within the image of Rosie, we can unravel some of the immense contradictions embedded within this wartime ideology. As Foucault notes in his analysis of sexuality, one of the strategies of power-knowledge is the production of a particular type of subject through discursive mechanisms (in this instance, the media) that create sexual identities, and so we must examine what type of subject is produced by the image of Rosie (Foucault 105-6). *Rosie the Riveter*, “formed part of a discourse, a constellation of beliefs, images, and representations which did not simply reproduce the experience of women but sought to shape that experience,” and it is through this discourse represented in Rosie that women’s experience of their wartime occupations was shaped, or produced (Dabakis 185). In the image of Rosie, masculine and feminine signs are mixed, expressing the inconsistency of the discourse of this time period which both asserted that females ought to be employed in masculine roles while simultaneously asserting that working women were still ultimately feminized subjects. On the one hand, Rosie represents a masculine sort of hero; she has swelling biceps, she is wearing denim overalls, and she has an extremely phallic power tool on her lap, signifying an image of

empowerment for women in this resistance to gender norms (particularly given that Rosie is, largely speaking, cross dressing) (Dabakis 196). At this stage, Rosie can be viewed as a technique of power operating to produce females who see themselves as capable of performing a man's task and capable of fully participating in the war effort, and thus females who *will* participate in the war effort. Rosie is part of a strategy employed to create a labor force, so desperately needed at this time, of women workers. On the other hand, Rosie is also presented with certain feminine attributes; she is wearing lipstick and rouge, she has rosy cheeks, and the keen observer will notice that peeking out of the pocket of her overalls are a compact and a lace handkerchief, and furthermore, the sandwich in Rosie's hand can be viewed as an allusion to the traditional domestic role of women as homemakers. In this respect, Rosie signifies submission to femininity and the constraint of gender norms (Dabakis 196). According to these attributes, a totally contrary discourse is being proliferated, one that asserts that even though a woman may currently be performing male work, she is still a woman deep down, and this wartime shift in the distribution of laborers is thus demonstrated not to be a threat to traditional gender roles. Although this image is usually seen as a monolithic symbol of liberation, it is clearly embedded with multiple discourses and strategies of persuasion, affecting society at its various levels by playing off the variety of feelings people had about these changes in the labor force.

We are getting ahead of ourselves though, so let us take a step back and examine the factors that brought Rosie and other such images into existence. We have indicated that the techniques of persuasion within this iconic image did not actually reflect a strategy intended to empower women as is commonly believed, so what was the strategy represented by this technique? As America's participation in World War II increased, the economic demands of the nation saw a drastic shift, and many civilian factories that had previously produced commercial

goods were converted into war-production factories (Anderson 27). The war made high industrial production into a national imperative, particularly in such fields as the skilled metal trades, aircraft production, shipping yards, and small ammunitions assembly (Honey 21). It is interesting to note that although war is an activity of the federal state apparatus, it was largely economic relations between the state and local communities that led to this wide spread changeover. Many local business leaders in cities such as Detroit and Seattle were reluctant to make this shift, claiming that the financial risks of the factory expansions that the government was calling for in order to supply its soldiers should not be assumed by local businesses. In response to this reluctance, “federal spending... dominated the local economy during the war,” through war contracts between industry leaders and federal agencies, as well as economic incentives for companies that made the shift to war-production, thus ensuring that the goals of the state would find cooperation at the local level (Anderson 16). Here one can see how unbalanced the power relations were between the state and industry; industry leaders would only comply with government directives in so far as it would remain economically beneficial to them. One can also see that this was a complex strategic situation, wherein the relationship between the state and industry had to be continually modified, rearticulated, and sometimes even reestablished in order to ensure cooperation.

Simply converting factories from civilian to military goods was not enough though, and among business and political leaders in various communities there was a, “realization that the pool of available men was rapidly being exhausted while the demand for workers was skyrocketing,” (Anderson 26). Since most of the nation’s able-bodied men had either enlisted in the war or been drafted to fight, there was a severe shortage of traditional labor resources. It was in response to this that government policy leaders suggested that women could serve as a

temporary labor reserve, but industry leaders were not easily convinced. Many men found themselves unemployed since commercial goods production had been largely halted, and business leaders feared that employing women would deprive these unemployed men of work. Since company heads believed that the pool of unemployed men would prove sufficient to meet the demands for workers, when women were hired for factory positions it was only as a last resort (Honey 26). In order to try to convince companies to hire women, the government attempted many strategies, such as the institution of new labor policies calling on companies to reach a certain quota of female employees and recruitment strategies intended to encourage women to apply for jobs that they had previously been excluded from. However, these techniques were largely ineffective, since the government only had a limited reach to exercise its power over the economy (Honey 29). Thus publicity, advertising, and propaganda were only the last attempts among many to encourage female employment in those factories desperately in need of workers.

The government needed an ideological framework to back up their economic and labor policies, and it is through media propaganda that this discursive framework was established. A whole network of institutions was created for just this purpose, such as the War Advertising Council (WAC), established in November of 1941, comprising a mixture of government officials, advertising company executives, and business leaders. Once a month, the WAC would create a “War Guide for Advertisers,” informing media industries such as magazines and newspapers of the nation’s publicity needs, including the need to get more women into factory work (Honey 30-33). The *Saturday Evening Post*, in which *Rosie the Riveter* was published, worked closely with government agencies to promote ideals relevant to the war effort. The Office of War Information (OWI) formed the Magazine Bureau, which published the “Magazine

War Guide,” which suggested the appropriate methods magazines should employ to stress women’s roles in the war effort (Dabakis 193). Thus we see a high level of coordination at the “top” of power apparatuses in order to orchestrate a national movement to produce certain ideals among individuals that would promote particular behaviors among subjects. However, the actual exercise of this ideological power, the location at which it was implemented, was “below” at the local levels. Magazines, newspapers, movies, and posters engage people in their everyday lives and activities, on the streets and in their homes, thus subversively creating discourses at the local level which proliferated throughout communities until this strategy took on a national significance, creating the particular ideology necessary to instigate government policies. In a sort of feedback loop, these locally implanted discourses permeate back up to the top echelons, engendering the same ideals and behaviors among business and industry executives that it had promoted in the social capillaries. What we see happening here is the state appropriation of a particular technology of power, long employed by the advertising industries as a technique of mass persuasion, now operating in and through these institutions no longer to sell goods, but rather, to sell ideas. It is through this commercial production of ideas that these apparatuses of power were able to construct a new female identity, thus producing the particular types of subjects (both male and female, since this presentation of the female subject was intended to assuage fears on both sides of the gender binary) that would enable the implementation of the government policies which called for higher female employment rates.

In this particular historical situation, we see an instance of the long-standing tradition where discourse functions as a mechanism of power and knowledge to produce economically useful subjects. As Foucault notes, the concern that motivates sexual discourse is the need, “to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative,” and it is precisely

this concern that led to this collaboration between government officials, advertising executives, and industry leaders (Foucault 37). The goal and the challenge in this appropriation of advertising techniques as a strategy of power was to construct a discourse around working women that would allow female subjects to enter the work force (be economically useful) without obstructing the traditional forms of sexual relations (be politically conservative). Historically speaking, around the issue of sexuality there arose, “a whole multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions,” and this particular historical moment is no exception (Foucault 33). In this instance, advertising mechanisms operated to produce discourses about working women in accordance with the collaboration of a variety of institutions (federal and economic). The deployment of sexuality, through which sexuality is constituted, has long served as the mechanism for, “proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way,” (Foucault 107). Thus just as the state appropriated a technique of power long in use by advertising companies, advertising companies appropriated a discursive technique long in use to establish economically and politically useful subjects.

What then were the discourses produced by this cooperation between economic and political institutions? And who were these various images intended to effect? And how did they come to create a discourse that constituted economically and politically useful social/sexual relations? Contrary to popular belief, not all of this propaganda was directed at women, despite the fact that the majority of the images portrayed women. As previously noted, factory leaders were reluctant to hire women, even when male labor resources had been completely exhausted, and many of these images and discourses produced in the media were intended to convince

business leaders to hire women, rather than to convince women to apply for work. Leila Rupp notes that, “public images of women during World War II adapted to the temporary employment of women in male fields so as to leave traditional gender norms untouched,” (Honey 5).

Business leaders feared that hiring women would trump the status of males as the breadwinners and make it harder for men to find jobs, and thus the images proliferated during this time period were careful to remain politically conservative by stressing that this employment was temporary, only for the duration of the war (Anderson 24). Likewise, the propaganda that was disseminated throughout the country was careful to portray women in such a way as to maintain the gender dichotomy, thus ensuring the population that once the war was over and the economy could go back to its usual state, gender roles would likewise go back to their usual state.

The strategies of power exercised through propaganda had to work within the discourses of knowledge already in existence if they were to effect people in their local, everyday relations. In order to create an ideological framework that affirmed the legitimacy of female employment, the techniques of power had to begin with traditional ideals and assert that this knowledge (of the way the gendered world was organized) was not being ignored or overturned by this new framework. A clear example of this interplay between power and knowledge can be found in a directive issued in 1942 by Paul McNutt, Chairman of the War Manpower Commission (WMC), where McNutt said that, “no women responsible for the care of young children should be encouraged or compelled to seek employment which deprives their children of essential care until all other sources of supply are exhausted,” (Anderson 5). We can see this discourse regarding the significance of maintaining firm family values reflected in economic relations insofar as women with young children and women whose husbands were *not* at war were the least likely women to enter the labor force. Furthermore, although advertising campaigns

depicted women performing a variety of tasks, both reflecting traditional female roles and the new jobs they were performing during this period, the one thing always excluded from these ads is the role of women as mothers. It is significant to note that this, “striking absence complied with OWI guidelines that dictated that any conflict between women, work, and family be minimized in wartime images,” thus carefully preserving the traditional distinction between the labor force and the child-rearing force (Dabakis 193). All of this reflects that the practice of employing women in male job fields was only acceptable to industry leaders and to the American public (again, both male and female) if it was presented in such a way that it implied that the male status of breadwinner would not be threatened.

The careful maintenance of the gender status quo was also reflected in the way female employment was advertised as a continuation or extension of domestic responsibilities: to serve men. Many of the goals of the propaganda campaigns were couched in terms of self-sacrifice, a goal, “for which traditional ideas about women were well suited,” (Honey 6). In her domestic responsibilities, a woman’s role is to sacrifice herself for the sake of her husband: the woman stays home and tends to the children and the household so the husband can fulfill his duty to the family, which is to go out and make a living. This traditional idea was easily adapted to the wartime ideology, which simply extended the scope of these domestic responsibilities of women. One of the common slogans of this time period was, “The woman behind the man behind the gun,” (Dabakis 187). Thus the general discourse was not asserting that women had become equals, but rather, that the role of a woman to serve her man was taking on a new aspect during this period; during the war years, serving your men meant taking on jobs in war-production factories and plants to support your men overseas. The traditional discourse which asserted that a woman stayed home while the man went out to work was simply transferred to a woman

staying in the U.S., taking care of the *home* front by working in factories, while her man went out to fight the war. The power-knowledge matrix was extremely careful to present these issues to industry leaders in such a way that their fears about hiring women, as a threat to the gender status quo, were quieted. This is further reflected in OWI pamphlets distributed to business leaders, including one published in 1943 entitled “Engineering Womanpower,” where the usefulness of employing women was carefully described in terms that maintained the stark separation between male and female ‘powers.’ This pamphlet proposed that, “To understand these things does not mean to exclude women from the jobs for which they are peculiarly adapted, and where they can help to win this war. It merely means using them as women, not as men,” (Dabakis 201). Thus within this discourse, as it was presented to the economic institutions, the role of women was always put forward in terms that maintained that these workers were always women first and laborers second.

In this production of a particular type of female subject, one that could be economically useful while remaining politically conservative, certain power relations were also produced. We noted earlier that the state apparatus was unable to use relations of force to get women into the workforce, and by turning instead to relations of power and knowledge, a particular power relationship, mediated by the media, was established through which the federal government was able to see its economic plans put into action. Furthermore, in this strategy of power-knowledge, a traditional mechanism was employed to help establish this discursive mediation between politics and economics: the socialization of procreative behavior (Foucault 103-5). When addressing industry elites, female employment was linked to traditional familial gender roles, and this is a play on one of the many traditional discourses on sexuality. Sexuality is intimately linked to economic and political relations, since sex is located at the heart of population

concerns. In the discursive tradition, sexuality is linked to a political and economic responsibility to reproduce the labor capacity and to reproduce good political subjects, and so by calling on familial gender norms to legitimate the employment of women in war production industries, this propaganda ideology was once again appropriating a common discursive tool for a particular social, political, and economic need. Additionally, since sexuality is constructed and perceived through familial relations, and since, as a result of this discursive fact of sex (that sex is put into discourse), sexuality has come to constitute identity as such, the familial sexual relations had to be reckoned with in order for this discourse on working women to remain politically conservative (Foucault 43).

This analogy between domestic work and war-production was also presented to the women who were being encouraged to work, most specifically directed towards homemakers who were encouraged to enter the labor force for the first time in their lives. Many of the recruitment campaigns orchestrated in 1943 operated under the assumption that the women who were coming to occupy factory jobs formerly held by men were all coming from the homes, and the advertising campaigns of the period also reflected this assumption (Honey 27). The propaganda strategies put forward by the OWI heavily employed this analogy, encouraging advertisers to describe a transfer of domestic skills to war work. Many ad campaigns would describe factory work as no more difficult than working a sewing machine, promoting the sentiment among women that their lack of factory experience did not prohibit them from contributing to the war effort. Furthermore, the extension of the meaning of “serving one’s man” discussed earlier was also presented to women, often going so far as to pose the issue in terms of a threat; many ads would claim that an empty machine meant a dead soldier, which could be a dead brother, sweetheart, husband, or son (Dabakis 188). These sorts of ads were directed

toward women who were homemakers, toward women who would be affected by propositions about sewing machines and dying husbands. By working with the traditional ideas about familial sexual relations, this discourse was able to present war production work to women in such a way as to seem familiar and non-threatening. Advertisements of this sort played off of the historical conditioning of women that had subjugated them into the roles of homemaker and wife, thus employing a long-standing social discourse in order to promote the particular demands of war time industrial production.

Advertisements directed towards these middle-class women not only used the subjugated position of females as a persuasive tool, but also played off of their senses of femininity, and this is reflected in the intense glamorization of wartime work. Since an individual's identity is intimately linked with their sexuality, factory work had to be represented as something that could be integrated into the traditional feminine sexual identity. Many of these middle-class women expressed fears that working in a factory would make them coarse and rugged, that, in short, it would make them too masculine. The OWI, working closely with advertising companies, both recognized and responded to this concern in many of the images it produced. In an image sponsored by several electric companies, produced as part of the OWI's "Womanpower Campaign," female labor power is depicted as glamorous, feminine work. This image shows a petite woman with blond, flowing hair, delicate features, conventional makeup, and a distinctly hourglass figure standing in front of a towering press machine. In addition to her ideally feminine physique, she is wearing a bandana and overalls, but as the image depicts it, this masculine dress does not detract from the worker's womanhood. In this image and others like it, "femininity, marked by glamour, coexisted with the work uniform of overalls and bandana," thus alleviating any fears that employment during the war would do permanent damage to a woman's

prized femininity, (Dabakis 191). Even in the images that portrayed women with more manly postures and muscular arms, other attributes such as dress or facial features would carefully express, emphasize, and embody feminine ideals. These images expertly represented the working woman as a subject who could maintain their feminine sexual identity, regardless of their masculine occupation.

During World War II, “cooperation between government agencies, propaganda organizations, and private industry was close,” and this network of power-knowledge produced a discourse expertly catered to a variety of often contrasting demands (Honey 33). The economic needs of the war, coupled with the lack of available male labor resources, made the employment of women in traditionally male fields a necessity, and thus the discourse that we most often hear about is the one we began with: the needs of war lead to an empowerment of women due to the propaganda ads that asserted a woman could perform a man’s work just as easily and efficiently as a man could. However, this discourse was only one among many. In the ads addressed to the industries, this employment was presented as purely a temporary situation, and one in which traditional gender norms were untouched, insofar as these new positions of women were presented as simply an extension of their traditional, domestic gender roles within the family. Furthermore, ads directed towards women presented war work likewise as a familiar domestic duty, and they carefully merged wartime work with traditional ideals about feminine glamour and identity. At this point, the study of these wartime discourses extends far beyond the alleged empowerment of Rosie as a breakdown of gender norms, but these discourses are still misleading, because they imply that this transition of female labor was a move from the house to the factory, and they likewise imply that within the factories, a newfound, although temporary, gender equality had been established. This was absolutely not the case, but as has been shown,

this was the necessary way to construct the discourse around female employment in order for the network of force relations to be able to exercise its power over women at the individual, local level (with magazines and ads and posters addressing them in their homes, in their communities, on the streets, etc.) and simultaneously over industry leaders whose compliance had to be encouraged, but could not be forced (and this compliance was encouraged by the discourse of temporary necessity which maintained the gender status quo).

What then was the actual situation within the labor force during the war years, and how extensively did it actually change? What were the circumstances in the factories? What aspects of this historical period were masked by these propaganda images? In order to continue to conduct this analysis in the tradition of Foucault, we must address these subjugated knowledges, which are the historical contents that have been masked or buried by the dominant historical discourses outlined above (Society 7). We have mentioned that discourse produces not only power but also knowledge, and the knowledge produced by this discourse covered up many of the actual social relations and economic situations surrounding the issue of working women during this time period. The propaganda ads insinuate that the women occupying jobs in war-production industries had all been housewives before the war, but in fact, only approximately one third of these women war workers were homemakers prior to the war years. The other two thirds had been gainfully employed prior to World War II (Honey 19). So what actually changed during the war years? Contrary to the way in which the media framed this shift in the labor force, the actual transition was not from the home to the factory, but from female dominated occupations, almost always in industries with low profit margins and thus low wages, to male dominated occupations which overall had significantly higher wages (Honey 20). This shift is reflected in the fact that fifty percent of the women previously employed in the service or trade

industries (clerks, phone operators, maids, etc.) left their jobs for the higher paying positions opening up in the factories, and sixty-six percent of the female employees in food and drink establishments likewise left their jobs in order to profit from the opportunities that were available during this period (Honey 22). Furthermore, the general assumption represented in the propaganda discourse was that the women who were filling these factory positions were doing so for patriotic motives, but that was only one, and perhaps a minor one, among many motives, the most substantial of which being economic motives. The majority of these women were not white middle-class housewives, but working class women, single women, single mothers, and women of minorities who took these jobs out of economic necessity, not patriotic duty (Dabakis 186). Additionally, despite the discursive insistence that these new jobs would only be temporary and that the women fulfilling them agreed about this (since they were believed to be white, middle-class wives who had no *need* to earn a wage), studies have shown that seventy-five to eighty percent of the women performing ‘male’ factory work said they intended to remain in the labor force in their current positions after the war was over (Honey 23). The propaganda rhetoric claimed that *all* women working in war production industries would return to the home when the war was over, including those that were employed prior to the war, thus neglecting to represent these permanent laborers in the wartime discourse on women workers. These fulltime female laborers found no expression in the wartime propaganda, because any acknowledgement of them would have worked against this discourse that maintained that these changes were temporary and were patriotic necessities and that these women would happily return to their homes when the war was over.

Furthermore, the situations within the factories were not as egalitarian as the media would have liked the public to believe. Even where women saw a high rate of employment in

traditionally male-dominant fields, they were excluded from the policy decisions that their male coworkers were allowed to take part in, and they lacked the union protection accorded to males in their fields (Honey 2-3). Since the women in these factories were viewed as temporary workers, their needs as employees were always subordinated to the needs of their male coworkers (Dabakis 186). Additionally, despite promises of “equal pay for equal work,” one and the same position, when occupied by a man, would be deemed ‘heavy’ work and thus receive a high wage, whereas if a woman occupied this position it would be deemed ‘light’ work and receive a lesser wage (Dabakis 187). This discourse on female employment as only a temporary necessity led to gross inequities within the work force, despite the fact that, according to the media, this was a time of female empowerment and equality.

Focusing on the media discourse on women workers is also misleading because this class of female employees performing ‘male’ jobs was not actually representative of the majority of female workers; Rosie was an atypical case (Anderson 10-11). Whenever circumstances would allow for it, the segregation of jobs by sex was maintained, and always within a hierarchical structure that reserved the highest paying jobs for men. Many of the new entries into the workforce occupied jobs in the traditionally female fields such as waitress or clerk, and, “With women occupying these jobs, men were freed either to fight in the war or to take better-paying war jobs,” (Dabakis 186). In companies where female employment could not be avoided, the particular tasks accorded to females versus males were still sex-segregated and quite often the roles accorded to the female employees were determined at a whim by their male supervisors (Dabakis 187). When women were hired, the men who had previously done clerical work would be migrated to the factories to receive the higher wages, while the lower paying clerical work was left to the women. In other instances, men who had done the light, indoor work requiring

speed and dexterity, such as small ammunitions assembly, would be promoted to the higher-paying and heavier skilled work, with the light, indoor, low-paying assembly work left to the women (Anderson 35). In short, when hiring women was unavoidable, the majority of male employees would receive a promotion so that the gender segregation and hierarchy within the labor force could be maintained.

Thus there seem to be two key transitions of this time period, the one represented in the media discourse, and the one occurring in the labor force, and these two movements, while sometimes in contradiction, had a constant interplay within the network of power-knowledge relations. Despite the economic imperatives, business and industry leaders were reluctant to hire women because the American public (of which these leaders were a part) was not prepared to sacrifice the established gender norms that had conditioned their cultural experience prior to the war. Sexual identities, and thus gender roles, were intimately linked to economic and political relations, and so many people feared that any rupture in traditional sexual identities (and roles) would likewise lead to a rupture in politics and economics. The trauma of war was change enough, and for the government to maintain public support for both its participation in World War II and the economic changes that this participation necessitated, certain cultural desires had to be satisfied, and one of the most relevant of these desires for the issues of female employment is the desire for stability and a return to normal family values. As such, the propaganda proliferated during this time, as organized by immense cooperation between the federal government, industry leaders, and advertising companies, formed a discourse that represented the changes of this period as only temporary. Given this temporary character, the images of female workers were constructed in such a way as to present a curious mixture of non-traditional gender performances as well as long established ideals about femininity. Furthermore, the women

portrayed in these images tended to be white, middle-class homemakers, since a housewife who would happily return home after the war was not as threatening to the status quo as a long-time laborer who desired upward economic mobility. In light of this discursive production of the female working subject, established by propaganda campaigns, the actual treatment of women in the fields that were opened up to them still reflected the maintenance of strict gender dichotomies and hierarchies. When we reflect on images such as *Rosie the Riveter*, we must not forget that despite the exaggerated claims of female empowerment, liberation, and equality, the transitions in the economic relations of this period did not actually produce effects that changed the long-term status of women in the American labor force, and as we have shown, this is due to the fact that they were never supposed to. The careful mixture of masculine and feminine, empowerment and submission, seen in the media during World War II reveals that the discourses around women produced during this time were highly calculated to ensure both the compliance of industry leaders with the economic needs of the time, and the compliance of American subjects with the traditional gender norms embedded in existent discourses on sexual separation.

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