

"Beauty and the Helldivers": Representing Women's Work and Identities in a Warplant Newspaper

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Article abstract

In this article, we discuss representations of women's identities as workers in the wartime newspaper, *Aircrafter*, produced by management at the Canadian Car and Foundry Company Limited in Fort William, Ontario, during World War II. We argue that *Aircrafter* functioned as an ideological mechanism by which pre-war, middle-class prescriptions of femininity, emphasizing women's roles as decorative homemakers in the private sphere, survived the challenges of women's war work to shape post-war gender roles. The article demonstrates the efficacy of this ideological mechanism by revealing the comprehensive way in which different rhetorical styles and varied sections of the newspaper — the front page news and pictures, the editorial page, the women's page entitled "The Feminine Touch," as well as cartoons and pin-ups — collectively conveyed an ambivalent attitude that both praised and questioned women's war work in traditionally male jobs thus reinforcing pre-war socially prescribed forms of femininity. This research reveals how state policies concerning representations of women workers in government war propaganda influenced a northwestern Ontario war plant and shaped the ideological atmosphere which the women war workers at Canadian Car would have to negotiate as part of their daily working lives.

“Beauty and the Helldivers”: Representing Women’s Work and Identities in a Warplant Newspaper

Helen Smith and Pamela Wakewich

ACCORDING TO DEBORAH MONTGOMERIE, “[h]istorians have spilled rivers of ink discussing the impact of World War II on women’s roles.”¹ This scholarship has gone well beyond believing the official wartime propaganda — that the war revolutionized women’s work by laying out the welcome mat for their participation in the paid labour force — to elucidate the ways in which women’s wartime work contributions were being underscored as temporary and unusual at the same time as they were ostensibly being praised. Yet, as Montgomerie argues, “[d]espite the strengths of this scholarship, we are still struggling to understand the specific mechanisms by which such ideological continuity was maintained.”² More specifically, what were the mechanisms used to ensure that the pre-war ideology concerning gender roles persisted through the war to be largely reinstated in the post-war era?

To date, scholarship on representations of women’s work has concentrated on the text created by government and media. By centering our analysis on a different type of text — a warplant company newspaper — we wish to extend this dialogue. This paper explores how the wartime newspaper *Aircrafter*, produced by the Canadian Car and Foundry Company Limited (Can Car) in Fort William,³ functioned as one such mechanism of ideological continuity through its representation

¹Deborah Montgomerie, “Reassessing Rosie: World War II, New Zealand women and the Iconography of Femininity,” *Gender and History*, 8 (April 1996), 108.

²Montgomerie, “Reassessing Rosie,” 108.

³The twin cities of Fort William and Port Arthur were amalgamated in 1970 to form the city of Thunder Bay. The region is commonly known as The Lakhead, given its location at the head of Lake Superior.

and construction of women's identities as workers within the local context of a northwestern Ontario community and the broader context of the Allied war effort.⁴ We argue that the efficacy of this ideological mechanism resided in the comprehensive way in which different rhetorical styles and varied sections of the newspaper — the front page news and pictures, the editorial page, the women's page entitled "The Feminine Touch," and the cartoons scattered throughout — collectively conveyed an ambivalent attitude that both praised and questioned women's war work in traditionally male jobs thus reinforcing pre-war women's roles and socially-prescribed forms of femininity. These double messages were essential for legitimizing the decision by Can Car management, in keeping with national and international trends, to hire as many as 2,707 women at the peak of war production, (40 per cent of the total 6,760 employees),⁵ and to dismiss all but 3 female plant floor workers at the war's end.⁶

The last 25 years of feminist scholarship concerning the impact of World War II on the status of women has recognized the necessity of distinguishing between the narrow, uniform depictions of women's war work found within war propaganda and women's lived experiences.⁷ Research focusing on the realities of women's

⁴An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Canadian Historical Association meetings in June 1997. Portions of this article appear in a condensed version entitled "Representations of Women and Wartime Work in the Canadian Car and Foundry Company Newspaper, *Aircrafter*," *Papers and Records*, XXV (1997), 64-77, published by the Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society.

⁵James Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead," in Torold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp, eds., *Thunder Bay from Rivalry to Unity* (Thunder Bay 1995), 51.

⁶Gordon Burkowski, *Can-Car: A History 1912-1992* (Thunder Bay 1995), 90.

⁷In her landmark study on representations of women in World War II propaganda, Leila Rupp argues that it is as essential to research the prescriptive history of women as their lived experiences — that prescriptive history, in fact, "describes one aspect of those experiences." See Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (New Jersey 1978), 6. Our article highlights Can Car management's representations of women's work at the plant and the extent to which this representation reflected Canadian government policies on war propaganda. We will deal in later work with the question of how women understood and represented their own work identities and experiences both within *Aircrafter* and in the oral histories we are collecting as part of a larger oral history project on women's work at Can Car during World War II. We do not intend to leave the impression that we consider the management representations of women's war work as an accurate description of how the women workers understood their experiences. Rather, our intent is to understand the values underlying the prescribed roles for women as distinct from, but interconnected with, the diversity of women's lived experiences. A similar methodological approach is used in *Nationalising Femininity*, a study of British War propaganda's representations of femininity which "documents a diversity of discourses, practices and representations in which we can trace the frameworks which shaped and responded to the necessary social changes of the time while maintaining as far as possible a sense of stability and continuity for a war-torn society." See Christine Gledhill and Gillian

working lives during the war emphasizes the diversity of such experience. It is important to explore how the women workers negotiated the politics of the workplace and how they were situated within such social/historical constructs as gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, family, and region.⁸ Whether focusing primarily upon the propaganda or the lived experiences, this revisionist scholarship largely concludes that women's participation in war work did not radically change the social value placed upon women in the labour force either during or at the end of the war; in fact there was a renewed vigour in the post-war era to reinforce the middle-class ideal of the breadwinning husband and housekeeping wife. As Sugiman argues in her analysis of gender politics at a Toronto autoplant during the war years, "[i]n confining women to specific jobs in the plants, in regarding them as temporary labour, and in presenting their employment as a purely patriotic mission, employers never fully relinquished the image of women as secondary wage earners, undeserving of full rights in the workplace."⁹

Swanson, eds., "Introduction," in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and Cinema in World War Two Britain* (Manchester 1996), 1. By focussing on Can Car management's use of *Aircrafter* to construct images of female plant workers we are presenting a dimension of the ideological atmosphere which the female plant workers would have to negotiate as part of their daily working lives.

⁸For an excellent summary of the debates within scholarship between 1972 and 1991 concerning the extent to which World War II radically altered the status of women within the paid labour force both during and after the war, as well as the impact upon individual women's lives, see Valerie Endicott, "'Woman's Place [Was] Everywhere': A Study of Women Who Worked in Aircraft Production in Toronto During the Second World War," MA thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1991.

⁹Pamela Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937-1979* (Toronto 1994), 26. The increasing number of such local studies as Sugiman's, illustrate the impossibility of presenting a single wartime work experience common to all women. For other studies analyzing the extent to which either the actual or the representations of women's employment during World War II challenged their traditional positioning in the labour force see Ellen Scheinberg, "The Tale of Tessie the Textile Worker: Female Textile Workers in Cornwall During World War II," *Labour/Le Travail*, 33 (Spring 1994). Scheinberg argues that liberal historians, including feminist scholars, have tended to assume that the war opened doors for women to leave the domestic sphere and enter the industrial workforce largely because of attitudinal changes on the part of a patriarchal government, management and union. However, Scheinberg's regional case study breaks down this generalization of women's war work experiences. "While Canadian middle-class women may have had the luxury to work during the war for patriotic reasons or to escape the confines of the home, as the early feminists argue, their working-class counterparts enjoyed no such choice, for individuals' choices are shaped by market forces. It was therefore economic necessity, rather than a change in attitudes, domestic ideology, or egalitarian rhetoric at the state level that dictated the occupational decisions of most women who worked during this period," 155. A preliminary analysis of our interviews suggests that most of the women employed at Can Car were also involved in paid labour prior to the war. As an

Canadian scholarship on government and popular media representations of women's war work concludes that pre-war definitions of femininity, excluding women from paid labour, were reinforced throughout the war despite propaganda praising and encouraging women's participation in the workplace. As Ruth Roach Pierson's landmark studies concerning Canadian war propaganda have revealed, "women's obligation to work in wartime was the major theme, not women's right to work."¹⁰ Susan Bland points out that while advertising in *Maclean's* magazine during the war did "not underestimate the contributions and sacrifices made by war workers, we are continually reminded that these women have feminine qualities."¹¹ According to Yvonne Matthews-Klein, wartime films produced by the National Film Board (NFB) "establish limits to women's full participation in the labour force which arise out of an underlying, and fixed, notion of what is appropriate feminine behaviour . . ."¹² Matthews-Klein's description of how the post-war National Film Board depicted women also holds true for Canadian propaganda during the war: "women were the object of a complex and confused series of double messages. Flattered and assured of their immense, if undefined power, women were simultaneously trivialized at every opportunity."¹³ Despite such extensive research worldwide on the topic of the war's impact on women's actual and prescribed roles in the labour force, the ambiguity of these mixed messages within diverse texts and contexts demands continued unravelling.

Before discussing *Aircrafter* itself, we will provide a brief description of the inter-war prescribed roles for women and the realities of their work situation during the Depression, and also a brief history of both Fort William and Canadian Car and Foundry to provide a regional context. While the primary focus of this paper is the

example of recent scholarship focussing on the tensions between representations of Canadian women's war work and lived experiences based on oral histories within a particular regional and industrial context, see also Susanne Klausen, "The Plywood Girls: Women and Gender Ideology at the Port Alberni Plywood Plant, 1942-1991," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 199-235; and David Sobel and Susan Meurer, *Working at Inglis: The Life and Death of a Canadian Factory* (Toronto 1994). Such scholarship builds upon the path-breaking research by Ruth Milkman in her analysis of the impact of World War II on the status of women in the workforce in the United States, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago 1987).

¹⁰Ruth Roach Pierson "They're Still Women After All:" *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto 1986), 23.

¹¹M. Susan Bland, "Henrietta the Homemaker, and 'Rosie the Riveter:' Images of Women in Advertising in Maclean's Magazine, 1939-50," *Atlantis*, 8 (Spring 1983), 75. See also, Susannah J. Wilson, "The Changing Image of Women in Canadian Mass Circulating Magazines, 1930-70," *Atlantis*, 2 (Spring 1977), 33-44.

¹²Yvonne Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us: Images of Women in National Film Board Films of the 1940s and 1950s," *Atlantis*, 2 (Spring 1979), 21.

¹³Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us," 26.

gendered construction of femininity and women's work in *Aircrafter*, our analysis also seeks to make visible related dimensions of class and ethnicity. As will be argued below, these are largely masked by the democratic and egalitarian language of the paper which aimed to create a unified work force for the war effort. However, beneath this mask lies a presumption of Anglo-Canadian, middle-class notions of femininity which shape the representations of women and women's work in the newspaper.¹⁴

Inter-War Prescribed Roles for Women

To recognize in war propaganda the continuity of inter-war gender ideology concerning women and work we must first of all establish the nature of this gender ideology. The call for women to enter wartime industry during World War I resulted in few changes to the middle-class Victorian ideal of women's natural and moral role as guardian of the family and home within the private sphere. In her study of Canadian women's work experience and identity in the context of the small town of Peterborough from 1920 to 1960, Joan Sangster points out that "this sexual division of labour was sustained and reinforced by ideological representations of femininity and masculinity and by an image of the nuclear, male breadwinner family as the ideal."¹⁵ The economic conditions of the mid-1920s allowed this ideal to be put into practice as more men earned a large enough wage to support a family on one income.¹⁶

The Depression of the 1930s reversed this situation and increasing numbers of married and unmarried women faced the necessity of finding paid labour. Social adherence to the prescribed role of the male breadwinner resulted in public debates concerning women's proper sphere. According to Margaret Hobbs, even many of the defenders of women's place in the labour force argued not for women's right to work, but rather that women had no choice but to work since the Depression

¹⁴In our larger research project, we are currently exploring the actual class/ethnic/racial makeup of the women hired at Can Car and the extent to which these aspects of identity were significant for the workers.

¹⁵Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto 1995), 81.

¹⁶Wendy Mitchinson, Paula Bourne, Alison Prentice, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, and Naomi Black, eds., *Canadian Women: A Reader* (Toronto 1996), 211. See also Veronica Strong-Boag's gender and class analysis of women's working lives during the inter-war period in *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto 1988), 49. Strong-Boag points out that it was understood that daughters from both middle- and low-income families would need to work for a short time before marriage, and as such certain jobs were designated as "feminine" and thus sufficiently respectable to ensure that a young woman's chances of marriage were not damaged. The low pay associated with these respectable jobs assumed that the unmarried women received room and board under their fathers' roofs. The marriage bar assumed that once a respectable woman married, all paid labour stopped.

interfered with the proper role of fathers and husbands earning the income necessary to keep women in their proper domestic sphere of unpaid labour.¹⁷ Hobbs points out that these defenders of women workers drew upon the same "stock of traditional images of femininity" as those who opposed women as wage earners.¹⁸

Sangster argues that while women negotiated the dominant images in various ways according to their diverse lived experiences, there were "common factors that shaped their views of work: the exposure of young girls to a rigid sexual division of labour especially in domestic life; a cultural view of extended education being of limited use particularly for girls; and the socialization of children to a familial ideology of obligation and respect for authority."¹⁹ Also included in these social values, and of particular relevance to the later representations of women's war work, was the "image of female technological incompetence and male competence."²⁰

The mass circulating magazines which would later celebrate women's war work were the same magazines which during the 1930s reinforced the ideology of female domesticity in the private sphere. Sangster nicely summarizes the ideals of womanhood portrayed in the inter-war popular culture as follows:

The emphasis on fulfillment through heterosexual romance, on domesticity as a female career goal, and the portrayal of motherhood as an expression of women's maturity, indeed as an expression of her natural abilities, were continuing themes in the media throughout the interwar period, despite the dislocation of the Great Depression and an increased incidence of married working women.²¹

It is ironic that, only a decade before the Canadian government was again encouraging women to enter the labour force, the popular culture of the 1930s reinforced the ideology of feminine domesticity, and public debates raged over the right of women to work during a period when economic reality necessitated women's participation in the paid labour force for their own and their families' survival. Canadian World War II propaganda would have to take into account the legacy of fear left by the 1930s that "femaleness itself was a potential cause for suspicion in the workforce of the Depression."²²

Can Car in Regional Context

While little historical research exists on the status of women in the city of Fort William, it is reasonable to assume that the female population would also have had

¹⁷See Margaret Hobbs, "Equality and Difference: Feminism and the Defence of Women Workers during the Great Depression," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993), 201-223.

¹⁸Hobbs, "Equality and difference," 202.

¹⁹Sangster, *Earning Respect*, 26.

²⁰Sangster, *Earning Respect*, 82.

²¹Sangster, *Earning Respect*, 87.

²²Hobbs, "Equality and Difference," 212.

to negotiate the same dominant ideology of femininity as the small-town women of Peterborough described by Sangster. However, a major regional difference affecting women's work identities and experiences was Peterborough's location in southern Ontario. It was closer to large economic centres, while Fort William remained largely isolated due to its location in the northwestern Ontario region.²³ Canadian women as a whole working in war industry shared in common with the city an ambiguity of representation in Canadian war propaganda. On the one hand, they were praised as essential to not only the Canadian but also the world-wide allied war effort. On the other hand, embedded within this praise was the underlying assumption of their so-called inherent natural state of marginalization from the marketplace, a state to which both would return after the war — women because they naturally belonged to the private sphere of the home; and Fort William because of its geographic isolation from the largest Canadian and American urban centres. Out of necessity, both had nobly risen to the occasion, but were expected to return to their proper isolated positions after the war.

The importance of the Canadian Car and Foundry plant to the area's economy during World War II made it a key player in the construction of workers' identities around the issues of gender, class, and ethnicity since its large workforce brought together the diverse elements of the community under one very large roof.²⁴ The Lakehead was hit particularly hard by the Depression in relation to the rest of the country.²⁵ A major contributor to the Lakehead's economic recovery was war-re-

²³ A common theme in historical studies of Thunder Bay is the tension between its central geographic location and its social isolation, resulting in the development of a split identity. While the area was (and is) recognized as the centre of Canada and as such a centre of transportation in terms of rail and shipping, the area was also perceived as isolated because of its distance from big metropolitan centres. See Thorold J. Tronrud, "Building the Industrial City," in *Thunder Bay From Rivalry to Unity*, 101.

²⁴ The local Indigenous peoples and those who have migrated to the region for employment since the late 19th century have created an ethnically diverse community. Tensions among ethnic groups at the Lakehead prior to World War II reflected the tensions existing within Canada as a whole. By the late 19th century, the largest ethnic group at the Lakehead was of British descent. In keeping with Canada's social purity movement, the Lakehead's own moral reform groups were concerned that the increasing numbers of continental European immigrants threatened the British values concerning respectability and nationhood. See Margaret Frenette and Patricia Jasen, "Community Through Culture," in *Thunder Bay From Rivalry to Unity*, 146-47. According to the 1941 census, the largest ethnic group at the Lakehead was still British, making up almost 54 per cent of Port Arthur and Fort William's joint population of 57,002. The next two largest ethnic communities were Finnish and Ukrainian, followed by the French, Italian, Scandinavian, Polish, and Czech/Slovak. See A. Ernest Epp, "The Achievement of Community," in *Thunder Bay From Rivalry to Unity*, 195-196.

²⁵ "On 1 June 1931, 28 per cent of wage earners in Port Arthur and Fort William were out of work, a full 10 per cent worse than the average for urban Canada No other Northern

lated manufacturing, especially the re-opening of the Canadian Car and Foundry Plant in 1937. Can Car, based in Montréal, was established in 1909. While the Fort William plant thrived during World War I, a lack of post-war business persuaded the Montréal head office to close the plant from 1921 to 1937. In 1937, the intention was for Can Car to start up again modestly by building small aircraft and hiring approximately "100 people a year from 1939 to 1946." As one might anticipate, few of these employees were expected to be women. The first female employee hired after 1921 was Peggy Hampton who filled the traditional female job of secretary-to-the plant manager. A notable exception to the typical gender segregation of the workplace was Elsie Gregory MacGill, hired in 1938 as Can Car's chief engineer and head of wartime production through the early war years.²⁶

A key player in helping Can Car become an important war industry was C. D. Howe, Port Arthur's federal MP, who was also Canada's Minister of Munitions and Supply.²⁷ Howe, along with the Can Car president, managed to persuade the British government that Fort William was neither too remote nor lacking in skilled labour to be able to produce top quality military aircraft for the Royal Air Force.²⁸ To fulfill such an order, obviously the original modest hiring proposal of 1937 would not be sufficient and with Lakehead men enlisting in the Canadian armed forces, women would also have to be hired for jobs other than clerical. At Can Car's production peak, the plant's workforce numbered 6,760, 40 per cent of whom were women working at almost every stage of production.²⁹

Ontario community experienced jobless rates as high as the Lakehead in 1931." See Tronrud, "Building the Industrial City," in *Thunder Bay From Rivalry to Unity*, 113.

²⁶Burkowski, *Can-Car*, 6, 23, 28, 45. MacGill and her contributions to the war effort took on heroic and legendary proportions in a wartime comic book entitled "The Queen of the Hurricanes." (True Comics, No. 8 Jan. 1942, 117-21.) However, she had left Can Car to set up her own private engineering practice in Toronto by the time *Aircrafter* was in publication. See Pamela Wakewich, "Queen of the Hurricanes: Elsie Muriel Gregory MacGill - 1905-1980," in S. Cook and K. O'Rourke, eds., *A Century Stronger* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's Press, forthcoming). No reference was made to MacGill and her role at Can Car in the *Aircrafter* newspapers in our collection, although she is remembered by some of the women who worked at the plant. Part of our larger research project includes archival research on Elsie MacGill's early career at Can Car and situating her within the prescribed roles for, and lived experiences of, the other women working at the plant.

²⁷A. W. Rasporich and Thorold J. Tronrud, "Class, Ethnicity and Urban Competition," in *Thunder Bay from Rivalry to Unity*, 220.

²⁸Burkowski, *Can-Car*, 49, 53. For an illustrated study of the aircraft produced by Can Car during the 1930s and 1940s, also see David Kemp, "Can-Car: The Aviation Years," *Papers and Records*, 22 (1994), 59-68.

²⁹James Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead," in *Thunder Bay from Rivalry to Unity*, 51.

Can Car's Wartime Newspaper, Aircrafter

A fascinating dimension of *Aircrafter* as a company newspaper regulating representations of women as war workers is the fact that it was created specifically for the wartime needs of the plant in the last year of the war. While the newspaper was produced for only a very brief point in time, the wartime rhetoric and images of women must be read within the broader historical context of company newspapers as a whole to understand why the newspaper was chosen as a mechanism for disseminating state and corporate propaganda and also to examine the regionally unique features of the paper.

During the inter-war decades, to minimize both government and union intervention in profit-making, company management used plant newspapers "to present the employment relationship in a familial and mutually supporting guise."³⁰ Along with the rhetoric of the harmonious family were the gender ideals of the breadwinning husband and the housekeeping wife. In her analysis of the Westclox manufacturing plant in Peterborough, Joan Sangster describes how the company newspaper *Tic Talk*, introduced by management during the late 1930s, "promoted a vision of Westclox as a family, and in doing so, reinforced certain images of women's and men's gendered work and family roles."³¹

Ironically, the family rhetoric intended to prevent the government from interfering with management control over workers and production was later used by the Government to control management and workers for wartime production needs.³² Whereas before the war company management represented the paternal heads of family, during the war the Government took over the role of the patriarch to ensure harmonious relations among the family dependents — management and workers. As part of its policy to control public information the Government regulated not only public newspapers but company newspapers as well as one mechanism by which to spread the state version of "family harmony."³³ The Labour-Management

³⁰Margaret E. McCallum, "Corporate Welfarism in Canada, 1919-39," *Canadian Historical Review*, 121 (1990), 71. "In reading their company paper or participating in company sports events, summer picnics, Christmas parties and ceremonies from distributing small annual bonuses or for honouring long-service employees, workers and their families shared in affirmations of the existing order." (72)

³¹Joan Sangster, "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-1960," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (1993), 194.

³²See Peter S. McNinn, "Teamwork for Harmony: Labour-Management Production Committees and the Post-war Settlement in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 77 (September 1996), 317-352. McNinn points out that World War II allowed for government intervention on a massive scale. "Now, Ottawa held the reins of a 'command economy' and, with it, had considerable leeway for implementing a wide range of programs for social engineering." (318) The wartime focus of this social engineering was productivity.

³³For other discussions concerning the role of Canadian company newspapers as mechanisms for the ideological continuity of gender roles during the inter-war, war, and post-war

Production Committees, established by the Government in 1942 "to encourage teamwork and harmony among competing interests in the workplace" and counter "wartime problems of worker absenteeism and low industrial productivity," published their own monthly newsletter entitled *Teamwork for Victory*. When the wartime labour reserve was exhausted by 1943, the Canadian Government "found it necessary to develop mechanisms to guarantee 'maximum production and harmonious relations.' The terms 'teamwork,' 'harmony,' and 'cooperation' proliferate throughout government literature, as if officials hoped these invocations themselves could invoke such reality."³⁴ It is at this point during the war that Can Car management received permission to use newsprint, a restricted resource, for the purpose of publishing its company newspaper.³⁵ In line with Government propaganda as a whole, Can Car's *Aircrafter* would use the same family rhetoric; however, for the duration of the war, "family" would change to allow the temporary aberration of women's proper place being in the warplant as well as in the home.

As a regional wartime newspaper, Can Car's *Aircrafter* proudly proclaimed itself, on its masthead, a paper "published for and by employees of Canadian Car and Foundry Co., Limited, Fort William, Ontario."³⁶ The phrase "for and by" bears close examination in terms of its connotations. While a section of the paper was dedicated to department news provided by the employees, much of the paper was tightly monitored by management. According to Gordon Burkowski's history of Can Car, *Aircrafter* was "the most ambitious Company sponsored newspaper ever to be produced" at the plant and its eight pages "became everyone's Monday evening reading."³⁷ Every week, from 7 May 1944 to 11 August 1945, employees were handed a copy of the paper at the gate as they exited the plant. Certainly, one major reason for the paper was to shape employee attitudes to meet the needs of both the Fort William managers and the Montréal head office. Russell was replaced as Manager of both the plant and the newspaper by his assistant, W. O. Will.³⁸ The editor, R. M. Walker, had been employed by the town newspaper until he enlisted in 1939 and served for two and a half years. He was also a city alderman for three years.³⁹ The editorials were generally not signed. However, given the periodic references to events in Montréal, it would appear that some of the editorials originated from the head office.

years see Valerie Endicott's MA thesis "'Women's Place [Was] Everywhere'"; Susan Klausen's article "The Plywood Girls"; Joan Sangster's article "The Softball Solution"; David Sobel and Susan Meurer's monograph *Working at Inglis*; and Pamela Sugiman's monograph *Labour's Dilemma*.

³⁴ McInnis, "Teamwork for Harmony," 317, 319, 334.

³⁵ *Aircrafter*, 7 April 1945, 1.

³⁶ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 1.

³⁷ Burkowski, *Can-Car*, 92.

³⁸ *Aircrafter*, 7 October 1944, 1.

³⁹ *Aircrafter*, 23 June 1945, 2.

Aircrafter reflects the final fifteen months of Can Car's war production after it had shifted from building planes for Britain to building planes for the United States. In May 1942, about 6 months after Pearl Harbor, Can Car obtained the contract to build 1000 Curtiss Helldivers for the American navy.⁴⁰ Two years later, in May 1944, *Aircrafter* began its run. Management's two central goals of every *Aircrafter* issue appeared to be the maintenance of high productivity from the plant workers, especially as the war's end drew near, and also the preparation of the work force for the post-war economy. Canadian war propaganda had primarily linked Canada to its symbolic mother country, Britain. When Can Car started building for the United States, the Canadian government and industry had to create a form of propaganda that created familial links with the Americans — as Britain was mother, the Americans were cousins, especially after VE day, May 1945. As early as July 1944, the National Film Board of Canada created the film "Fortress Japan" to demonstrate Canada's part in the allied war effort against Japan in the Pacific.⁴¹

To ensure all employees remained working at full capacity for the Americans as they had done for the British, *Aircrafter* presented themes very much in line with Canadian government propaganda as a whole — while differences do exist among people based on region, sex, class, and race, those differences can and must be put aside, not only for the greater good of the local community, but for Canada, the Allies, and the world.⁴² Despite "the internal differences of the nation — of class, gender and so on — the most important divide was between ... democracy and fascism."⁴³ However, a wartime official rhetoric needed to be developed for the "management of internal divisions in relation to an external picture of unity."⁴⁴

As discussed above, two key rhetorical devices to keep all workers focused on constant production for the war effort were the words "teamwork" and "family." These were intended to work on a variety of levels involving constructions of gender, class, and race — what Ruth Roach Pierson refers to as "egalitarian rhetoric" and Gledhill and Swanson describe as "a rhetoric of 'equality'."⁴⁵ All differences were to be put aside for the common cause of the war effort. Management presented Can Car as a family, not only in itself but also in connection to the rest of the world. Together, they must transcend differences based on sex, class, religion, and race to end the war and create one big happy harmonious global family.

⁴⁰Burkowski, *Can-Car*, 74.

⁴¹Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda 1939-1945* (Toronto 1984), 220.

⁴²Evans, *The Politics of Wartime Propaganda*, 220.

⁴³Antonia Lant, "Prologue: Mobile Femininity," in *Nationalising Femininity*, 14. While this quote and the following refer to Lant's analysis of the British government's construction of a national wartime femininity, her description is applicable to Canadian wartime propaganda as well.

⁴⁴Lant, *Prologue*.

⁴⁵Pierson, 'They're Still Women,' 13; and Gledhill and Swanson, "Introduction," in *Nationalising Femininity*, 4.

As one *Aircrafter* editorial states, the purpose of the war is to fight to ensure the right kind of world after the war — to “fight to build sound homes, a sound family in the nation and a sound family of nations.”⁴⁶

Aircrafter Front and Editorial Pages

Our analysis of the depictions of women's war work in *Aircrafter* begins with the recognition that various textual styles and images may be “encoded with subtexts or secondary meaning systems”⁴⁷ capable of containing contradictory messages. By critically “decoding” these texts and subtexts, the means by which ideological continuity concerning prescriptions of femininity is achieved becomes more transparent. Beginning with the Front and Editorial pages, we will discuss typical examples of the image of women's work as central to the war effort, and by contrast, examples of those images emphasizing the middle-class ideology concerning women's “feminine” and decorative role in the workplace. Both types of representations contained the underlying message of the middle-class expectation of women returning, after the war, to their ideal role as housewives guarding the family which in turn guards the community, country and world — an exemplar that ignored the inter-war realities of women in the paid labour force. Consequently, *Aircrafter* readership was presented with mixed messages concerning the value placed upon women in the workforce.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Aircrafter*, 4 November 1944, 1.

⁴⁷ Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines from Mademoiselle to Ms.* (New York 1993), 4. McCracken's theoretical framework draws on the analysis of gendered representations in cultural studies, with special reference to advertising. Her work is influenced by the writings of such key scholars as Erving Goffman, Roland Barthes, John Berger, and Laura Mulvey. While we make use of some of the theoretical insights from this field, we use this work cautiously in recognition of historical context. McCracken is focussing on women's magazines, outside of the context of war, at a time when companies had much greater freedom to construct their images for the primary purpose of profit-making. It is essential to keep in mind that during wartime, governments had the power to supercede the private needs of industry and use all forms of media and the representations within them for their own ideological purposes. Texts must be “decoded” within their historical context.

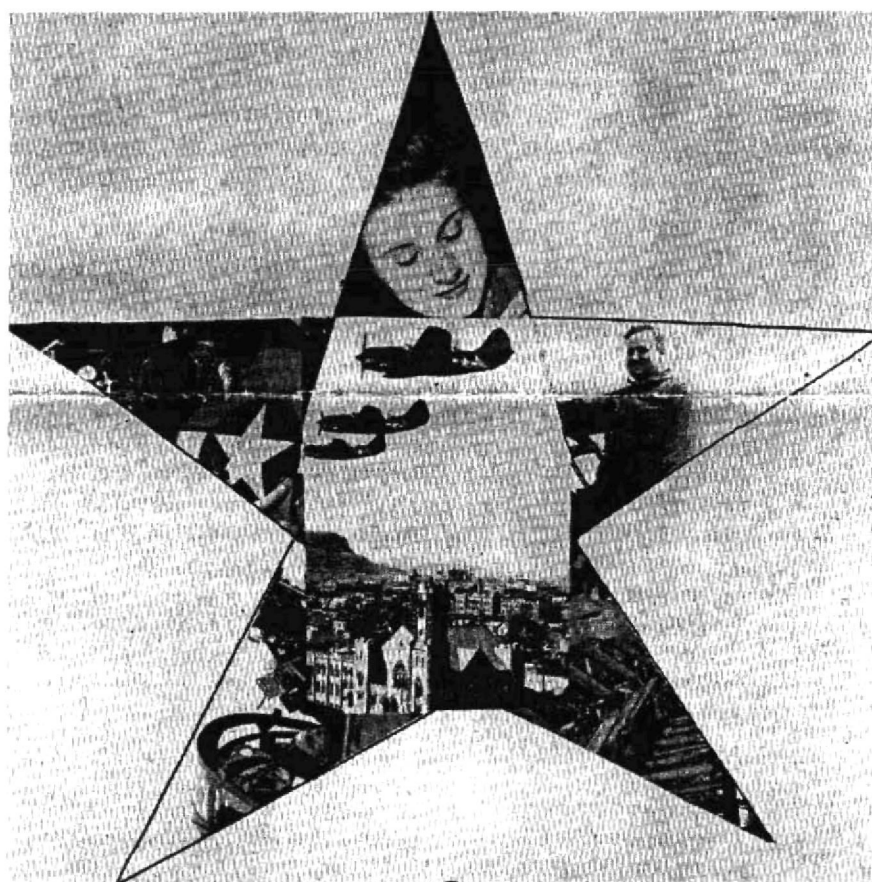
⁴⁸ A similar point is made concerning British representations of wartime women factory workers by Penny Summerfield in her article “The girl that makes the thing that drills the hole that holds the spring . . .”: Discourses of Women and Work in the Second World War,” in *Nationalising Femininity*, 42. According to Summerfield, the “stress on the special steps needed to protect and enhance femininity in the war context emphasized both that women were crossing into masculine territory and that this was exceptional and temporary. Commentators who celebrated women's war participation communicated the same idea in official and semi-official publications. Their stress on the heroism of women's war participation contributed to the construction of the war effort as masculine, and their reassurances to their readers that the individual women they described had in fact not deserted femininity emphasized the limited and temporary nature of that participation.”

One of the clearest examples of the depiction of women's war work as central is the Saturday 26 August 1944 issue dedicated to Labour Day. The front page picture (figure 1) demonstrates the recurring theme of emphasizing both Fort William's and women's roles in the big picture while at the same time highlighting how such "naturally" marginalized players have risen above their usual place simply because of the war.

Symbolizing the insignia of the U.S. navy, the above picture in composite shows the Canadian Car and Foundry Company plant at Fort William in production of the Curtiss Wright Helldiver, now known as the "Navy's Sunday Punch." From the little lady in the top of the picture who has been taught to do a welding job, to the R.C.A.F. who carry out their job of inspection, from all components to armaments. To the engine which is installed and tested, then the final assembly line, thence to the test pilots who put the ship through its final test in the air. — This is the Canadian Car and Foundry Company at Fort William, and no fitting picture could be made of these proceedings emblazoned within the U.S. Navy Star, which will carry this ship to the battle fronts of the world. Fort William should be proud of this link between our cousins across our invisible border — proud of the fact that we here in Fort William have been chosen, of all the factories throughout Canada to build the Helldiver ... Let us pause for a moment and think of our boys who were trapped at Hong Kong, what better retribution could we ask than that this ship be the means of defeating the wily Jap — slapping him down once and for all, never again to have the audacity to think that he could master the people who fed him in his starvation, who taught him in his ignorance, who educated him when he had desires to live as human beings should live. We here in Canada have a debt to pay, and how better can we pay it than by providing Helldivers for the Navy to sign on the dotted line for us.⁴⁹

Although the text and picture draw special attention to the woman worker, the emphasis upon the lone female figure suggests that she represents all women workers. Consequently, characterizing this woman as a nameless, generic "little lady," with the suggestion that she has had no previous experience with such difficult mechanical work until taught specifically for the war effort, also sends the message that her small stature and inexperience typify all women war workers. This image also assumes a contrast to the "typical" male worker who is presumed to be physically large and mechanically adept, an assumption, as Sangster has noted, also belonging to the inter-war period. The diversity of women and women's work histories and experiences are reduced to a singular stereotype. By contrast, male workers are generally pluralized in the text, thereby entrenching the assumption that the normal workplace is made up of a diverse group of men. Praise of the woman worker appears to be based upon a sense of wonder that she is there at all; similarly, Fort William's pride of place is based upon a sense of wonder that the town was selected above so many other possible places to be an important site of war production.

⁴⁹ *Aircrafter*, 26 August 1944, 1.



U. S. NAVY STAR OVER FORT WILLIAM

Figure 1. Labour Day front-page picture highlighting Can Car's "Little Lady" welder working on the Curtiss Helldiver for the United States, *Aircrafter*, 26 August 1944.

Also included on the front page are letters from various American and Canadian military leaders thanking working men and women for their efforts without which victory would be impossible. Similar kinds of letters or quotes from officials were frequently published in *Aircrafter* issues. In the Labour Day issue, this careful attention to both male and female workers is continued in the editorial, though again underlying the egalitarian rhetoric is the marginalization of women's work as somehow an afterthought, auxiliary and temporary. The congratulatory letters on the front page are listed in the editorial as evidence that "much credit is due to these men who have manned the lathes, poured molten metal, or in any way

turned their craftsmanship to this purpose, to say nothing of the hundreds of women who have added their part to this Home Front effort." One wonders where the author got the figure of hundreds, given that thousands of women were working at Can Car in Fort William by this point. He goes on to say that "Labor Day, affords them an opportunity to convey thanks to the people of the Home Front, for the will and tenacity of the Canadian workmen and women too, in helping to place Canadian industry among the top ranking countries in the world today." The editorial emphasizes teamwork using the success of "a ball game or a hockey game" as a metaphor for the kind of "team-work" necessary to win the game "where productivity is the goal."⁵⁰ In this paragraph, which equates sports teamwork with production teamwork, only "he" and "him" are used. Yet, this particular issue, even with its minimal reference to women, stands out as an affirmation of women's war work as most of the editorials over the newspaper's entire run refer to the worker in general, and at Can Car in particular, as a "he."

To promote productivity, the newspaper often used the front page to highlight the work done by a particular department with a picture naming the men and women employed in that unit. The 2 December 1944 issue draws particular attention to the contributions of women in its headline story, "Machine Shop Plays Important Part in Helldiver Production." At the end of the article, the point is made that while the job is not traditionally associated with women, they are surprisingly capable of quite mechanically complicated work — again, a mix of praise and wonder. "While the term machinist has in the past usually referred to the male element, the Machine Shop of Can Car completely refutes this fallacy, as, one may see while walking through the shop, girls side by side with men operating lathes or drills, and using with equal exactitude such precision instruments as callipers and micrometers." This image is somewhat diluted by the editorial on the next page stating that among the items returning soldiers will want is the "old job back again, of course, and a raise too!"⁵¹ The implication appears to be that no matter how good a job the women may be doing, part of their team and family commitment will be to leave the position once the rightful owners have returned from their temporary roles as soldiers.

With victory in Europe, the mixed messages became even murkier as women were encouraged to keep working even as the homemaker image begins to dominate the news articles. According to Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, "[f]or most Canadians the real war stopped on VE day, 1945. Hitler and Germany were the enemies they understood, and both were now defeated ... So far, Canadians had

⁵⁰ *Aircrafter*, 26 August 1944, 2. Similarly, Sangster argues in the case of the Westclox factory, "[s]ports were meant to create a sense of company loyalty, suggesting competition with the outside, but team effort inside; they were supposed to create a loyal, disciplined, and committed workforce that strove to give its best performance on and off the job." This rhetorical style can also be compared to Lant's description of British war propaganda's need to manage internal differences to maintain an 'external picture of unity.'

⁵¹ *Aircrafter*, 2 December 1944, 1, 2.

done almost all their fighting alongside the British⁵² On the eve of the war, the Lakehead's ties to the British crown had been reinforced by all of the ceremony surrounding the Royal Visit in 1939.⁵³ Intense propaganda was needed to ensure Canadians would work as hard for their American cousins as for their "mother country" Britain. The front page dedicated to VE-Day represents Can Car workers through the image of two women welders. (Figure 2) The entire page is taken up by a photograph of the Can Car plant taken from a plane with two Helldivers flying over; superimposed at opposite corners of the picture are the figures of two smiling women welders at work.⁵⁴ Above the picture are words "From VE-Day to VP-Day;" and beneath the picture it states, "It's CanCar all the Way."⁵⁵ Can Car women's labour was obviously still so essential that it was necessary to represent the worker as female.

However, as essential as war production still might have been for victory in the Pacific, preparations were increasing for the re-ordering of society in the post-war era. A 16 June article entitled "Victory — What Next?" sets up how Canadian society must be shaped to ensure that the returning soldiers who have fought so hard for the democratic way of life will not have to do so again.

Every man coming home from fighting dictatorship abroad will be hungry for news of the following at home: 1) The different races beginning to know and draw the best from each other. 2) Sections of the country giving up resentments and beginning to pull together. 3) Management and labor building the kind of trust and teamwork in industry that will give returning men a sense of security and hope for the future. 4) Husbands and wives, after years of separation, quickly finding a common meeting ground and a working relationship in the fight for the new world.⁵⁶

Within the egalitarian rhetoric of region, class, sex, and race, men are now clearly defined as the paid workers and women are referred to only in their roles as wives.

Celebration of women's war work is paralleled throughout *Aircrafter* with the celebration of women's decorative value in the workplace as front page pin-ups for the war-time purpose of maintaining men's morale on both the home and battle

⁵²Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, *Victory 1945: Canadians From War to Peace* (Toronto 1995), 140.

⁵³Rasporich and Tronrud, "Class, Ethnicity and Urban Competition," in *Thunder Bay From Rivalry to Unity*, 221.

⁵⁴This image was on display at a small reunion of Can Car women held in November of 1997 at the Thunder Bay Museum. Alvena Bolt, a welder who was one of the three women who remained working at Can Car after the war, recognized herself as the woman on the left. However, she had no recollection of this picture of herself being taken at the time - she stated that she was too focussed on her work - and this was the first time she had ever seen this image.

⁵⁵*Aircrafter*, 26 May 1945, 1.

⁵⁶*Aircrafter*, 16 June 1945, 2.



Figure 2. Front page celebrating Victory in Europe with two women welders representing the Can Car workers who built the Hawker Hurricanes for Britain. *Aircrafter*, 26 May 1945.

fronts — what Kirkham refers to as “Beauty as duty.”⁵⁷ Although the proportion of women workers at Can Car reached as high as 40 per cent, representations of women in text, photographs, and cartoons throughout *Aircrafter* conventionally presume the gaze of the “male spectator” and are, as Berger points out, “designed

⁵⁷ Pat Kirkham, “Fashioning the Feminine: Dress, Appearance and Femininity in Wartime Britain,” in *Nationalising Femininity*, 154. Kirkham is referring to a recurrent theme in British media reflecting the British government’s encouragement of women to beautify themselves for men of the armed forces and the factories. While the pin-up was more of an American than a British phenomenon, certainly both countries influenced Canadian wartime propaganda with their versions of women’s wartime duty to maintain an attractive appearance to boost men’s morale. For a reproduction of an actual British ad using the text “Beauty is your Duty” see Jane Waller and Michael Vaughn-Rees, *The Role of Women’s Magazines 1939-1945* (London 1987), 100.

to flatter him."⁵⁸ The pin-up functioned as a mechanism for the ideological continuity of women's prescribed position as objects to be looked at by men and women through the male gaze — what Mulvey refers to as "to-be-looked-at-ness."⁵⁹ However, as Westbrook notes, "pin-ups were more than masturbatory aides. They also functioned as icons of the private interests and obligations for which soldiers were fighting."⁶⁰ Pin-ups served state as well as personal needs and functioned as an ideological mechanism to encourage soldiers to fight for their country to protect their loved ones. The title of this article, "Beauty and the Helldivers," refers to the front page pin-up photograph of the 30 September 1944 issue. (Figure 3) A plant worker smiles for the camera as she stretches out in her bathing suit. The caption beneath the picture informs us that:

Pin-up Girls may be the vogue, and Canadian Car in keeping with the times, pictures above their own "Pin-up Girl," Miss Virginia Dunlop, who is employed as stenographer with the R.C.A.F. Inspection. Graceful and alluring, Miss Dunlop efficiently carries on her duties getting out the multitudinous and intricate reports, concerning the Helldiver, that emanate from this busy office in the plant.⁶¹

The caption makes clear that part of women's wartime work, "in keeping with the times," was to function as the pin-up — the sexy, decorative female pinned to the wall to boost the troops' morale and remind "the men why they were fighting."⁶² However, the woman in this particular picture is not a Hollywood star like Betty

⁵⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London 1977), 64.

⁵⁹ See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, 16 (Autumn 1975), 6-18; and her revision of her earlier theories, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington 1989).

⁶⁰ Robert B. Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James": American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II," *American Quarterly*, 42 (December 1990), 596. According to Westbrook, "[w]artime pin-ups can tell us as much about liberal political theory, as well as much about sexual politics. Or to be more precise, they can tell us something about the ways in which the American state attempted to draw on the moral obligations prescribed by prevailing gender roles to solve the problem of obligation posed by liberal ideology." (589) He argues that within liberal states ideologically shaped by the enlightenment principles of private rights and freedoms, the state must appeal to citizens "to go to war to defend *private* interests and discharge *private* obligations" (588) since the concept of fighting as a duty to one's country was not sufficiently persuasive. To what extent the Canadian Government would fit within Westbrook's argument lies outside the focus of this article. However, it is likely that the Canadian Government would have been aware and appreciative of the ideological usefulness of pin-ups during wartime.

⁶¹ *Aircrafter*, 30 September 1944, 1.

⁶² Elaine Tyler May, "Rosie the Riveter gets Married," in Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* (Chicago 1996), 139.



BEAUTY AND THE "HELLDIVERS"



MAIL PRESS FOI

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Figure 3. "Beauty and the Helldivers" — Can Car's own front-page pin-up, secretary Virginia Dunlop, "graceful," "alluring" and "efficient." *Aircrafter*, 30 September 1944.

Grable, but rather an employee of the Can Car plant who may or may not have known that the photograph would be used as a pin-up.

In her article on wartime representations of American women, Elaine May argues that women's roles in Hollywood movies and pin-ups "were often constructed around images of conjugal bliss" that reinforced the values of family life with the domestic housewife and mother at its core. As such, popular wartime culture encouraged soldiers' wives and girl friends to represent themselves as pin-ups to keep soldiers' sexual fantasies clearly focused on the proper marital

relations.⁶³ In keeping with this popular trend, the Can Car pin-up tends to reinforce the middle-class values of home and family rather than the subject's skills as an employee. Also, a dual role for female workers is established that is not expected of the male employees — both to carry out the official work "efficiently" and also to be decorative, ensuring that "masculine" labour did not rob the women of the "femininity" necessary for the domestic role they were expected to return to after the war. Emphasizing women's presence as sexualizing the workplace distracts attention from their value as skilled workers and reinforces the pre-war, middle-class ideal of women's decorative rather than productive role.⁶⁴

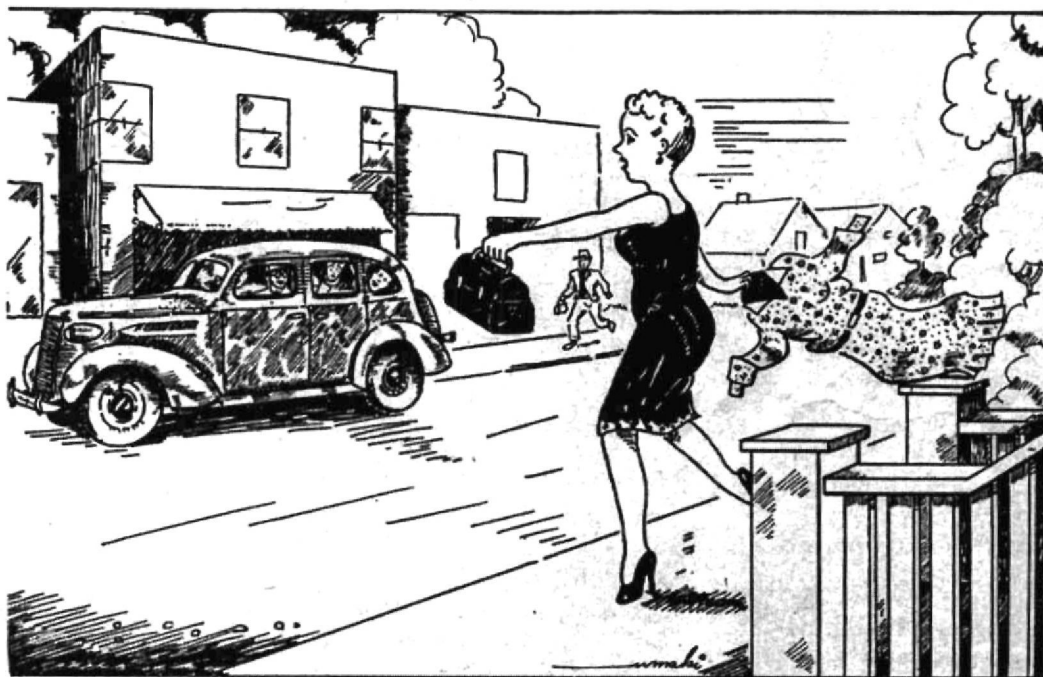
This connection between women's sexual presence in the workplace and the trivializing of their war work is reinforced by the cartoon found on the editorial of the same issue.⁶⁵ (Figure 4) Supposedly, the intent of the cartoon is to praise the lengths to which the female employee will go to avoid absenteeism, a very serious concern of warplants in general. On the one hand, nothing will stop this woman from being present and on time, even if it means arriving only partially dressed. On the other hand, the cartoon highlights the woman's sexual decorativeness by depicting her in only a slip and high heels, with her dress in one hand and her lunch box in the other, as she runs to the car. There is ambiguity in who this woman is supposed to represent. Is she meant to be a warplant worker? The clothing might be suitable for a secretary, but not for the thousands of women dressed in required flat shoes, pants and bandana for operating the machines on the shop floor.

Can Car's "own Pin-up Girl," Miss Virginia Dunlop, is highlighted again as front page news in a June 1945 issue. (Figure 5) The headline reads "Sunny Days Mean Play Days for Can Car Staff." In this full-page collage of pictures, numerous fully-clothed men are depicted as golfing, fishing, and playing tennis; women's activities are represented by a single, central picture (that appears to be a slightly

⁶³ Tyler May, "Rosie the Riveter gets Married," 139, 140. May argues that Betty Grable was the most popular pin-up, not for her potent sexuality and beauty, but rather for looking like the girl-next-door. Westbrook establishes a similar argument in his article "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James'."

⁶⁴ In her study of women workers at the Port Alberni plywood plant, Susanne Klausen discusses the tensions between male and female employees constructed by the post-war mentality, with the "reemergence of conservative gender ideology," that perceived women in the labour force as promiscuous pin-ups, resulting in "the backlash against even single women working at ALPLY." See Klausen, "The Plywood Girls," 224-225.

⁶⁵ *Aircraft*, 30 September 1944, 2. The editorial for this same issue further marginalizes women from the workforce at Can Car by simply not mentioning them in its discussing of safety issues. While twice referring to "men and women" of the armed forces as having to be safety conscious, when discussing plant workers, women are clearly relegated to the role of housewives and the reader of the newspaper is clearly assumed to be male. "Safety First does not cease with the armed forces, but must continue if we are to be a victorious country — in the workshop, on the street and in the home, each one of us has an obligation — perhaps to your employer, perhaps to a wife and family, but more particularly to oneself . . ."



"That Last Minute Passenger," or "Presenteeism at All Costs."

W. J. Maki, No. 933, Dept. 39.

Figure 4. Cartoon on Editorial page drawn by Can Car employee depicting a woman worker avoiding absenteeism at all costs. *Aircrafter*, 30 September 1944.



Figure 5. The return of Can Car's pin-up to the front page representing female plant employees "at play." *Aircrafter*, 30 June 1945.

different version of the "Beauty and the Helldivers" image) of a carefully made-up young woman in a bathing suit stretched out in a standard pin-up pose. In the issue's editorial, women are not included in the discussion of post-war industrial teamwork between management and employees: "Only a new spirit in men can bring a new spirit in industry."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Aircrafter*, 30 June 1945, 1, 2.

While in some instances the women represented as pin-ups were clearly identified as secretarial staff, it is unclear which parts of the plant the women featured in the coverage revues and social functions worked in. As such, it is not clear whether secretaries, in their more traditionally feminine employment, were more likely to be used, and more easily viewed, as pin-ups. Certainly, women's decorative value in the workplace came to the forefront when putting on socials, one way of keeping Can Car operating as one big happy family. The impact of these events was obviously intended to go beyond the needs of local employees. In the 12 May 1944 editorial, the revue being prepared in honour of the new management appointees J. J. Russell and W. O. Will is clearly tied in with the egalitarian, happy family team rhetoric.

With a plant the size of this, giving as it does a complete cross-section of the Canadian people, regardless of race or creed, and can quite readily be compared with a community unto itself, it would appear from the thousands to draw from, surely some must be capable of taking part in this scheme If the average employee would only take a personal inventory of himself, or herself, and find out if they can in any way meet the requirements as set out in the questionnaire, then submit it properly filled out, we feel sure that greater headway could be made in bringing the talents of the Canadian Car employees not only before their fellow workers, but before the public in general.⁶⁷

Here we again clearly see the idea that representing the plant employees as working together regardless of sex, class, and race, will spread the morale to the community at large to create a better Canada and world — the local is connected to the universal, thus Fort William can help to shape the world. And yet, the women employees are still marginalized in the rhetoric by enclosing them within commas — “of herself,” — as though they were an afterthought and not yet an “average employee.”

Obviously, the highlights of this revue, according to the front-page pictures leading up to it and the pictures of revue acts used to entertain at various later functions, were the can-can and hula girls. While the actual experiences of the women involved in these revues may have been far more complex and varied than their representations, the editing of the paper ensured that the “decorative” function of the women was emphasized.⁶⁸ Little attention is paid to performances by men or to those by women in less revealing clothing. The headline of the Saturday 16

⁶⁷ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 2.

⁶⁸ Current theoretical discourse concerning representation goes beyond the simple passive/active structure of “male looking/female to-be-looked-as-ness” to evaluate the role of the female gaze as an active process. See Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (Seattle 1989), 5. We do not presume that the women workers at Can Car internalized the images of women in *Aircrafter* only through the “male gaze.” An important part of our oral history interviews involves asking the women how they “saw” and responded to representations of women in *Aircrafter*.

December 1944 issue reads: "Can Car Revue is Taking Shape." (Figure 6) The accompanying three large pictures encourage the reader to interpret the word "shape" as also meaning the shape of the women themselves so that women's bodies become a central part of the story. The pictures are of women employees wearing short, leg-revealing rehearsal outfits "taking shape" as they practise the hula and the can-can — the assumption being that their regular work clothes of loose pants and shirt are inappropriate for rehearsing dance numbers and are less "shape" revealing. Another headline reads "Girls Work Hard for CanCar Review." For women, reinforcing the ideal shape of "femininity" was as much a part of team work as building planes. The editorial in the same issue reinforces the front page message of pre-war, middle-class gender roles of decorativeness and domesticity by equating household work with the survival of the world family.

'Housework is drudgery, Purity is nonsense. Authority should be undermined.' These ideas, often attractively camouflaged, are an attack on the Canadian home. We can defend our homes only if we believe sound home life is basic to a healthy society. That home is the guardian of the nation's purity. That home is the foundation of teamwork.⁶⁹

This fear of sex role destabilization is connected to class and race anxiety by a denouncement, within the same article, of stirring up "class struggle" and "race conflict," followed by another promotion of teamwork: "Fight for teamwork. Work for the nation."

The hula dancers show up again to perform at functions whose purpose excluded the presence of women employees except as entertainers: the annual foremen's dinner and the party held for workers employed at Can Car since 1937.⁷⁰ Women are referred to only as workers' wives or as performers. A later front page news story included the note that two management guests from the Philadelphia plant building helldivers, "were given a good time, and so they might not forget it, were presented with Canada Car pins, as well as having their pictures taken with the Hula Dancers."⁷¹ Women's sexualized decorativeness was a definite part of the plant public image. A women's group called the 'Cancarettes' also performed.

Aircrafter's "Feminine Touch" Page

These mixed messages found on the front page and in the editorials praising women's public work performance while at the same time highlighting pre-war, Anglo-Canadian, middle-class definitions of femininity are consistently reinforced by the "women's page" of the newspaper. "The Feminine Touch," a regular feature located on page four of each *Aircrafter* issue, was oriented specifically to the female reader. It is perhaps on this page of the newspaper that the contradictions of the

⁶⁹ *Aircrafter*, 16 December 1944, 2.

⁷⁰ *Aircrafter*, 24 February 1945, 1 & 8.

⁷¹ *Aircrafter*, 10 March 1945, 1.

GIRLS WORK HARD FOR CANCAR REVIEW



Figure 6. Female plant employees rehearsing the Can Can and Hula for the Can Car Revue. *Aircraft*, 16 December 1944.

egalitarian rhetoric are most prominently displayed. Appearing under a banner of stylized fashionably dressed and coiffeured women — certainly not the uniform of the factory floor — the articles on “The Feminine Touch” page are a veritable *pastiche* of war news, plant gossip, recipes and homemaking hints, poetry, and fashion updates. While at first glance the feature articles may appear a disconnected and random mix, a more careful reading indicates a strong and consistent moral message aimed particularly at the female plant worker.

The articles on “The Feminine Touch” page extol the virtues of proper “feminine” consumer behaviour; they emphasize the necessity of devoting one’s work and leisure time to maximize the war effort, they celebrate women’s able contributions to the wartime labour force, and at the same time they reinforce the so-called naturalness of women’s domestic and familial roles and decorative duties. Women’s war industry is not presented as a challenge to prevailing ideals of womanhood and women’s roles, but rather as an extension of their roles in the maternal and domestic sphere. Household hints and recipes focus on achieving efficiency in the working woman’s home by offering readers ways to “save time” in meal preparation, housecleaning and household management. Fashion features reinforce the importance of decorativeness to the working woman (even in the industrial workplace) despite the exigencies of wartime economy — this time, “beauty is duty” to maintain male plant workers’ morale. Articles stress the importance of practical fashions, hairstyles, and make-up to give the working woman the edge in the “tough competition” for men. While the content of feature articles, photographs, and cartoons varied both within the same issue and from issue to issue, the central themes and cautionary tales remained consistent throughout the *Aircrafter* run, as the following typical examples illustrate.

The 12 May 1944 issue provides an excellent example of how ostensibly different articles, genres, and information on the same page can mutually reinforce the mixed messages of praising women’s war contributions and at the same time reinforce pre-war, middle-class definitions of femininity. Centred under the header of “The Feminine Touch” page is a photograph entitled “Putting Victory First.”⁷² The photograph celebrates the purchase of a \$700 Victory Bond by a female plant worker receiving congratulations from a female member of the plant bond drive committee. While the photograph itself shows the bond purchaser at the plant and in her work overalls and kerchief, the text accompanying the photograph is careful to preserve her “war effort” within her familial and domestic context. The text reads: “her husband is a member of the RCAF. Mrs [E.] is doing her part for the war effort by helping turn out ‘helldivers’ while at the same time takes care of her baby son [sic].”⁷³ Here, the woman’s roles as wife and mother are highlighted. By emphasizing her domestic and familial status, and the connection to her husband overseas, Mrs. E’s main contribution to the war effort becomes not her role in war production

⁷² *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 4.

⁷³ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 4.

per se, which indeed remains unidentified, but rather the protection of her husband and family through her victory bond purchase. Ironically, upon victory at war's end, she will be expected to give up her job in the plant to a returning veteran such as her husband and return to her domestic role. By contrast, representations of male workers' special contributions, through, for example, blood donations or bond purchases, typically identify the worker's occupation and department in the plant and do not mention his marital or parental status. His identity as a war industry worker is presumed to be the significant marker.

The first column appearing on the same page as the above item is a thinly disguised cautionary tale about women's vanity and proclivity for consumerism and the risk these hold for the success of the war effort. Entitled "The Grablins will Get You if You Don't Watch Out" this article describes women's propensity for wasteful spending.

Buying fever is as contagious as measles. Let a neighbour woman start telling you that "So-and-So's are selling their pre-war rugs off at a bargain, my dear — those deep crimson ones, and you'd better get one, for there's no telling when we'll be able to get them again — the war might last for years, and you might never get another chance.

And something happens to you — you get buying fever, and that night you begin to work on your poor husband and by the time you've talked yourself hoarse, he gives in. Next morning when the bank opens, you're right on the doorstep — to sell your Bond, take back the money you loaned your country.⁷⁴

The article goes on to explain: while you are contemplating how the rug may "look beautiful on the living room floor," some careful reflection will indicate that "the boys in Italy aren't walking on handsome rugs." Their living conditions are poor and dangerous and the only way to bring them back alive is to save your money and put it to work for your country through the purchase of Victory Bonds to help defeat the enemy. The article concludes "... when Bill comes marching home, he'll be looking about to see what kind of job you've been doing on the homefront — not what kind of rug is on the living room floor. Will you measure up?"⁷⁵ Clearly, the story signals some anxiety about how women will handle their new-found economic independence as well as a strong paternalistic sense that women's spending habits must be carefully monitored especially since, as Sangster has pointed out, women were prescribed to consume as part of the conventionally defined notions of "feminine" identity. To maintain the wartime expectation of "beauty as duty," women walked a delicate balance between moral and immoral decorativeness and consumption for both their private homes and their public bodies.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 4.

⁷⁵ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 4.

⁷⁶ Within the British wartime context, Antonia Lant analyses how advertisements, and the women consumers at which they were aimed, developed various techniques in order to walk

Additional features on "The Feminine Touch" page of this issue include "Suggestions for the Lunch pail" — a variety of sandwich filling ideas, humorous poems about the jitterbug, and "kicking Hitler and his henchmen" through work efficiency. An article entitled "On Your Toes" begins with a brief discussion of the importance of safety shoes to protect feet against falling articles in the workplace, but quickly evolves into a discourse which links the worker's care of her shoes not only with her safety in the workplace, but also with the potential success of the war effort.

Take good care of your safety [sic] shoes and they will take good care of you. Remember, first, that they contain two things this country needs — steel and leather. The longer you make your safety shoes last, therefore, the less steel and leather you personally will require, and the more will be released for other essential uses.⁷⁷

A final entry in this issue, "Mohammedan Girl in Mechanic's Bib on Plane Overhaul"⁷⁸ is an example of the contradictory inclusion of the ethnic "other" despite an overriding emphasis on the importance of teamwork and family. Here again we see the mixed message of the egalitarian rhetoric.

Dark complexioned [sic], May became an expert mechanic after just a one month's course at the local technical school. She went straight from a kitchen apron to a mechanic's bib and is adept at her work . . . The family is of Mohammedan faith."⁷⁹

While superficially this article is a celebration of the able contribution of this first-generation "new Canadian" and her family to the war effort and suggests all women's common ties to domesticity, it clearly draws attention to her "otherness" through an inexplicable reference to the different colour of her skin and to her family's religion. Curiously, the item is possibly intended to reinforce the message in the editorial of the same issue, discussed previously, which celebrates how the Can Car plant is "a complete cross-section of the Canadian people, regardless of race or creed . . ."⁸⁰

"the tightrope" between unpatriotic and patriotic consumerism — "the contradictory status of feminine glamour" in terms of wartime waste and frivolity, yet the national need for the feminine role as decorative and beautiful to keep up family values and men's morale. See Antonia Lant, "Prologue: Mobile Femininity," in *Nationalising Femininity*, 25-26. This delicate balance between women's patriotic duty to maintain their decorative function and the unpatriotic waste of time, money, and resources is also discussed by Sugiman in *Labour's Dilemma*. "Company publications both reinforced and reflected these concerns in regular women's columns such as 'The Fair Sex' and 'To the Ladies.'" (74)

⁷⁷ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 4.

⁷⁸ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 4.

⁷⁹ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 4.

⁸⁰ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1944, 2. This editorial has been discussed above with reference to women workers' decorative roles in Can Car revues.

As with the front and editorial pages, mixed messages conveyed by egalitarian rhetoric and the expectations of women's "natural" and primary preoccupations with their domestic and decorative duties are scattered throughout the issues on "The Feminine Touch" page, as the following examples from other *Aircrafter* issues demonstrate. The call for teamwork was vigorously reinforced on "The Feminine Touch" page where readers were frequently encouraged to replace their complaints and concerns with activity in the interests of the war effort. Admonitions such as "let's give our government all our best thinking, and not just a piece of our mind"⁸¹ and "to take part in the fight for a new and better world we have got to be new and better ourselves"⁸² appear as regular column fillers signifying the correct attitude for the committed and loyal worker. Women, in particular, were encouraged to set aside their vain concerns about the shortages of fashion and beauty items, such as bobby pins and stockings, and instead to direct their attention to the purchase of war bonds as part of the larger team effort.⁸³

The explicit ideological link between teamwork, democracy, and the war effort was most evidently displayed in a column entitled "Thanksgiving" which appeared on "The Feminine Touch" page in the Saturday 7 October 1944 issue. Purportedly reflecting on the meaning of Thanksgiving Day, the column quickly shifts from the event itself to the opportunity it provides for reflection about our fellow workers and the personal qualities we would wish them to have. The qualities identified — honesty, hard work, and respect for other workers — are presented as central to the success of the war effort and the remaking of society and democracy as the following quote suggests:

We want, in short, a fellow fighter in the greatest battle ever fought — the battle to remake the relationship among all men.

Teamwork such as this is more than working together to get a job done. It is working to make democracy workable — to weave a new social fabric — to put together a new kind of world. When we work to build that kind of caring in each other all along the production line and throughout the whole industry — when we work to build it now with the next man — then by Thanksgiving Day next year we will have the substance of the new world for which we are fighting.⁸⁴

Ironically, news items on "The Feminine Touch" page of subsequent issues describing the inclusion of the enemy Japanese women in the workforce of their country are not represented as reflective of democratic teamwork in Japan or a sign of common ground, but rather as an alien threat with which to spur on Allied women to even greater work efficiency. In the 28 October 1944 issue, an article entitled "Japanese Fashion in Volunteering" details a new volunteer service set up to recruit

⁸¹ *Aircrafter*, 7 October 1944, 4.

⁸² *Aircrafter*, 17 February 1945, 4.

⁸³ *Aircrafter*, 4 November 1944, 4.

⁸⁴ *Aircrafter*, 7 October 1944, 4.

female war workers in Japan, a theme which is presented as of potential amusement to the readers here in "democratic Canada." The article notes that as "mobilization" is thought of as inappropriate for "the weaker sex" in Japan, recruitment of women had to be accomplished through a volunteer labour service which arranges to send single women "in groups of 20 to 50 to factories and workshops who need them." However, the article points out that there is a penalty for not volunteering: "[a] woman who ignores an order to 'volunteer' will be punished by a fine of up to 11,000 yen or imprisonment of not more than one year."⁸⁵ The article has a two-fold effect. It mocks the apparent hypocrisy of the Japanese government's recruitment policy for women workers with its pretense of volunteering thus reinforcing the image of egalitarian democracy for Canadian women workers and, at the same time, it also exhorts Canadian women to work even harder in the face of the "uncivilized" forced labour of Japanese women to strengthen the Japanese war machine.

Recognizing that the woman working in war industries would have less time for domestic duties, "The Feminine Touch" page regularly included time-saving hints for housekeeping and food preparation, as well as tips on maintaining one's decorative appearance while on the run. Hints for the home included advice on improving organizational skills through better household planning and the encouragement of children's participation in daily tasks.⁸⁶ The central message of these articles is that while time is limited, the double-work day can be readily handled by the "clever" housewife. For example, an article entitled "Clever Management Leaves Time for Fun" in the 21 October 1944 issue, states:

According to one war-working mother it's by no means impossible to carry on with two jobs: one at home, one in a factory.

Maybe not all women could manage as well as this forelady of a swing shift but everyone who has extra work on their hands these war days can profit by her advice. 'The main thing,' this clever woman says is, 'that everyone in the family does responsibilities . . . My oldest girl plans the meals, using simple recipes from my file and Canada's Official Food Rules as a guide....'⁸⁷

Readers are entreated to avoid "unnecessary work" such as floor waxing and to simplify the rituals of daily living, by eating in the kitchen rather than a dining room, cooking one-pot dinners rather than more elaborate meals, and avoiding the use of extra dishes such as bread and butter plates in order to economize on their personal and household time and energy.⁸⁸ Such strategies are presented as the obvious individualistic solution to the challenges of the wartime double-work day. Yet, despite the double-work day, a woman worker was still expected to maintain

⁸⁵ *Aircrafter*, 28 October 1944, 4.

⁸⁶ *Aircrafter*, 13 January 1945, 4.

⁸⁷ *Aircrafter*, 21 October 1944, 4.

⁸⁸ *Aircrafter*, 21 October 1944, 4.

a decorative, feminine appearance. Helpful hints on quick and attractive hairstyles and make-up application techniques peppered the women's page of *Aircrafter* along with frequent reminders of the importance of "graceful carriage" and poise for women.⁸⁹

Cartoons were also used on "The Feminine Touch" page to remind women of their dual role in the warplant as both worker and decorative morale booster. However, as with the cartoon from the editorial page previously discussed, such cartoons tended to create a tension between women's decorative role and their ability to function with authority in a definitively masculine work space. In the Saturday 16 September 1944 issue, below a column of "Seasonal Jams and Jellies" recipes, a cartoon depicts a secretary, with long blond curly hair, as the pin-up of the office. (Figure 7) She strides across the office floor in a bathing suit and high heels, carrying an armload of files, followed by the admiring glances of male employees working at their desks. The caption reads "since they have hired her, absenteeism has gone down 100%." Purportedly a cartoon depicting the dangers of absenteeism for the war effort, the image also suggests a range of underlying tensions and anxieties that certainly refute the rhetoric of an egalitarian work force. These tensions are presented as arising not only between male and female employees, but also between women working on the production floor, with all its clothing restrictions, and the office women workers who dressed in the typically feminine secretarial "uniform" of the era with high heels, stockings, dress and styled hair.⁹⁰

Tensions and anxieties concerning women's proper place in the workforce are expressed in a variety of rhetorical styles on "The Feminine Touch" page. From time to time, features drew attention to the changing nature of women's relationship to the paid labour force and questioned whether these changes were positive or negative developments for women, and for society as a whole. An article entitled "The Modern Trend" in the 14 October 1944 issue pointedly addresses paradoxes in the meaning and value ascribed to women's labour in the home and the paid labour force. Noting that work done inside the home may be considered drudgery, and "old time slavery," but that similar tasks in a factory or an office are often referred to as "the new freedom for women" or women's emancipation or liberation, the article expresses a concern that women who are successful in the labour market

⁸⁹See, for example, *Aircrafter*, 26 August 1944; 4 November 1944; and 27 January 1945, 4.

⁹⁰*Aircrafter*, 16 September 1944, 4. This tension around women's clothing comes through in our oral history interviews in which some of the women plant workers express envy at the secretaries' freedom to dress in a more decorative and feminine style. Ironically, the regulation to wear pants is not necessarily understood by the plant workers as a sign of "freedom" or as a privilege denied the secretaries. In the interviews we explore how women in the different parts of the workplace, i.e. plant floor versus secretarial staff, viewed and related to one another.

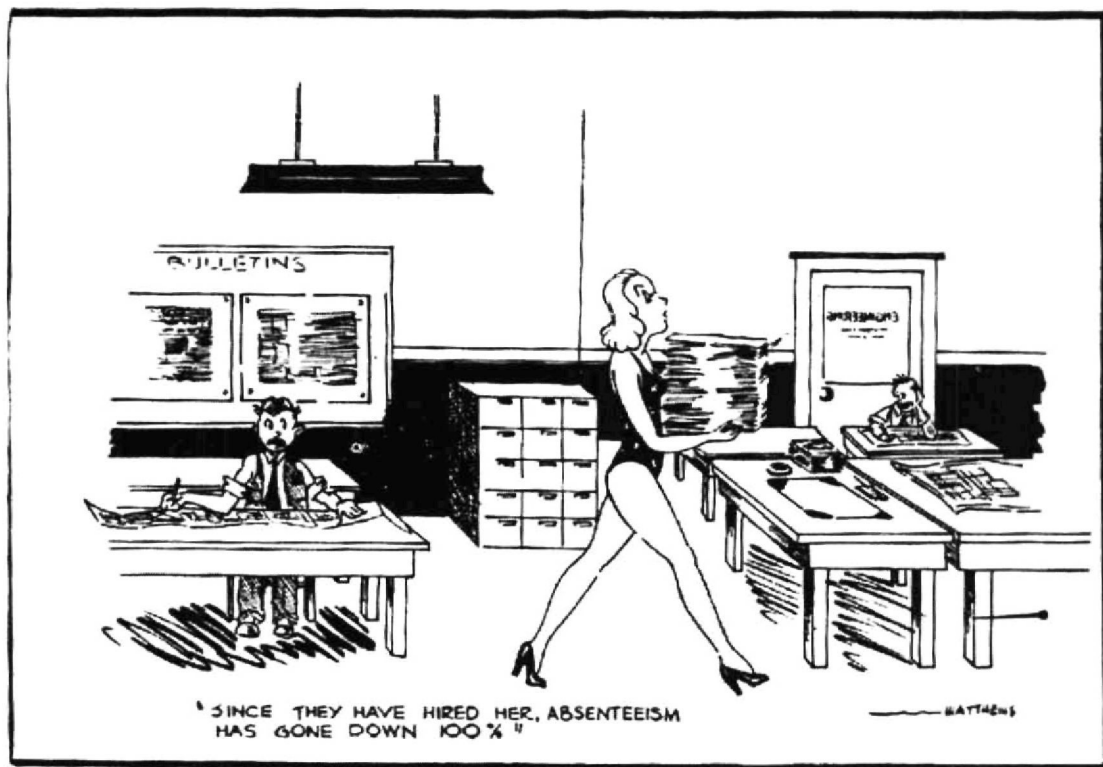


Figure 7. On the "Feminine Touch" page, Can Car's own cartoonist again uses a scantily clad female employee solving absenteeism. *Aircrafter*, 16 September 1944.

are more likely to remain single and not pass on the qualities that have made them successful to future generations.⁹¹

As the number and proportion of women war workers grew, articles signalling growing anxiety and debate about appropriate post-war roles for women workers began to appear. For example, in the 25 November 1944 issue, a feature under the "What's New from the Library" column included a summary of an article from *Business Week* magazine discussing contradictory attitudes toward post-war jobs for women. The article begins with the recognition that this is potentially a problem of significant magnitude, noting that "twice as many women are employed today [1944] as in 1939. [And] Even if half of them retire from the labour market, at least 20 thousand post-war jobs must be found for women workers."⁹² The article points out the importance of women's contribution to the war effort, and perhaps recognizes the irony that it is the success of this very effort which places women in a problematic position. As the article states:

She [the woman war-worker] is frequently assured that her energy, ability and perseverance have made Canada's production miracle possible. But with the rapid approach of victory, the future of the girl in overalls has come to be an important national problem.⁹³

It is noted that there appear to be two contradictory positions on the resolution of this problem:

[O]ne school of thought which foresees no difficulties, and cheerfully predicts that the woman war-worker will quietly return to her 'domestic duties' . . . [and] others who see the national heroine of today as the national menace of tomorrow, a selfish woman grabbing at the job that rightfully belongs to a returned veteran.⁹⁴

The author takes no explicit position on the debate, reporting it simply as "news"; but the tone of the article seems to suggest some critical awareness of the dualistic images of women being presented. In one instance women workers are viewed as quiet, passive, and keen to return to domestic duties; and in the other, they are vilified as national menaces selfishly stealing jobs meant for men.

Conclusion: Preparations for Post-War Gender Roles

On Friday 17 August 1945, "more than 3,000 Can Car Employees lost their jobs. All were promised a week's pay in lieu of notice" Only 3 women floor plant workers were left at Can Car of the 1,200 who were still there in early August. One of the 3 women, Alvena Boldt, "remained at work as one of Can Car's best welders

⁹¹ *Aircrafter*, 14 October 1944, 4.

⁹² *Aircrafter*, 25 November 1944, 4.

⁹³ *Aircrafter*, 25 November 1944, 4.

⁹⁴ *Aircrafter*, 25 November 1944, 4.

for 37 years."⁹⁵ Even though by early spring of 1945, Can Car was already working on what would be its post-war contract for building buses, right up to its final issue in August 1945, *Aircrafter* declared women's work as essential — but only to the war effort, not to the post-war era. Can Car management presumed a largely middle-class image of femininity and depicted a female workforce whose members would prove themselves team players, as the soldiers returned, by "going back" to their proper places — whether as domestic housewives or in low paying, female-designated jobs. Of the two roles required of women in the warplant — worker and decorative morale booster — post-war ideology would demand that they were duty-bound to drop the first and continue with the second from within the "containment" of the house to ensure that returning soldiers safely reintegrated into their peacetime roles as the family breadwinner.⁹⁶ Indeed, the post-war era revitalized the Depression anxiety that "femaleness itself was a potential cause for suspicion in the workforce"⁹⁷ and strove "to return to an altogether mythical pre-war state of gender stability."⁹⁸ The same government regulation of public information that had encouraged women to take on war work, now "reinforced traditional gender roles" so that "full-time motherhood was continually lauded as women's natural choice."⁹⁹ As with the rest of the Canadian government and media propaganda,

⁹⁵Burkowski, *Can-Car*, 96.

⁹⁶Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York 1988), 14. In her influential study on the family as shaped by the larger political culture of Cold-War America, May argues that state containment of subversive forces was paralleled by a form of "domestic containment" situated in the home. In this way, the potential for a radical reshaping of gender roles and family structures offered by the Depression and World War II were contained by a battery of post-war ideological rhetoric reinforcing the male breadwinner and female homemaker as the moral weapons needed to destroy various Cold-War evils.

⁹⁷Hobbs, "Equality and Difference," 212.

⁹⁸Mariana Valverde, "Building Anti-Delinquent Communities: Morality, Gender and Generation in the City," in Joy Parr, ed., *Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-1980* (Toronto 1995), 20. Valverde builds upon May's arguments in *Homeward Bound* in her study of Canadian post-war regulation of sexual conduct among urban young people. Like May, she argues that post-war images of a comfortable conformity masked an enormous social anxiety concerning deviant morality in relation to such social realities as the actual increase of women in the labour force. The plethora of public information concerning the gender ideal of male breadwinner and female homemaker reflected the fears that such an ideal might not exist rather than the comfortable satisfaction that it did. The common purpose of the articles presented in *A Diversity of Women* is in fact to demonstrate that just as war-time rhetoric masked the diversity of women's work experiences, so too did post-war rhetoric hide the immense variation among women's lives due to their particular circumstances. As Joy Parr notes in her introduction, "[d]omestic metaphors, which in the late 1940s and early 1950s proclaimed the promise of peace, cloaked all women's activities."

⁹⁹Joan Sangster, "Doing Two Jobs: The Wage-Earner Mother, 1945-1970," in *Diversity of Women*, 102. Sangster also noted the post-war barrage of literature and media representations

Aircrafter's positive representations of women's skilled work was merely a temporary gloss over the pre-war depiction of women which resurfaced in full force after the war without ever really having gone away.

The 12 May 1945 issue of *Aircrafter* contained a news article entitled "'Your Next Job' Discussed on Air" which informed the Can Car employees of a radio show that would "assist Canadian women in their choice of a vocation."¹⁰⁰ While the article does suggest the possibilities of women looking for a long-term career rather than temporary work, it is very specific about which jobs women would be encouraged to enter in the post-war era, none of which involve the industrial/mechanical skills developed while working at Can Car. Indeed, it is reported that part of the radio series is directed at those women in "men's" jobs who must shift to "women's" jobs in the post-war era. Any difference in pay between male- and female-dominated jobs, and the impact that might have on women's post-war career "choices," is not mentioned in the article.

Looking forward to the post-war, speakers will present practical facts regarding requirements and opportunities in various careers such as that of stenographer, salesgirl, social worker, household worker, beautician, nursery school worker and doctor. A programme is

reinforcing the domestic housewife and mother as the norm and any deviation from this ideal was not only abnormal but dangerous to the stability of the Cold-War state. Mothers in the paid labour force were caught in the same debates that raged during the Depression — another example of ideological continuity. Susan Hartman describes the enormous range of literature and media coverage concerning the American government's need for women's purely domestic role in the post-war era in her article "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans," *Women's Studies*, 5 (1978), 223-239. She argues that in response to the social instability and anxiety following the war, a mass of literature was published dictating women's obligations to sacrifice their work skills developed during the war to fulfill the higher moral code of morale boosters for the returning soldiers. In fact, such literature argued that the success or failure of post-war society rested on women returning to their natural place in the domestic sphere where their role as decorative moral boosters would transform soldiers into stable breadwinners. In his article "The Amateur, the Housewife and the Salesroom Floor: Promoting Postwar US Television," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1 (1998), 129-142, William Boddy argues that the entire post-war marketing strategy for selling televisions was built upon the assumption that women spent their days at home and were responsible for family consumption. "The figure of the female homemaker as consumer of daytime radio programming would provide an important rhetorical marker in the postwar debates over commercial television." (133) Joy Parr discusses the tensions between women's lived experiences and the post-war Canadian marketing assumptions about women as compulsive buyers in her article "Shopping for a Good Stove: A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market," in *A Diversity of Women*.

¹⁰⁰ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1945, 8.

devoted to both women in industry and women in the trade unions. The series includes advice on choosing your job, making your job and holding your job.¹⁰¹

Again, a very mixed message is sent by including on the same page a news item entitled "Emancipation for Chinese Women" which celebrates the improved status of women in China brought about by the war. Ironically, it lists as examples improved job opportunities which are certainly not included in those recommended for Canadian women. The article highlights the role of Chinese women as the breadwinners for their families. The subtle message here may be that this item does not present an ideal for Canadians to emulate but rather functions as a wondrous story of the bizarre "other" concerning how a foreign war-torn country has shifted from the evil days of female servitude to the days of female equality. Both circumstances are presented as alien to a more civilized Canadian society with middle-class values — a representation of the "exotic oriental," who went from one extreme to the other, wrapped up in egalitarian rhetoric of sexual and racial equality.

In the old days, as the Chinese saying goes, a woman depended on father when young, on husband after she married, and on sons after her husband died. Today, however, Chinese women have stepped out of their homes and have walked through hitherto closed doors for education, for career and for fresh experiences. Concerning women, the war in China has brought about one fact — that the Chinese women of today want to work and to work on an equal footing with men. . . .

Twenty-year old Chang Teng-feng, who, although supporting herself, her mother and younger brother by working as a clerk for the Ministry of Finance, spends her evenings studying for her B.A.

Peng Tze-kang, foremost of Chung-kings 10 women newspaper reporters, who supervises her home and the upbringing of her year-old child in addition to handling a man-sized job.

Thirty-year old Li Shu-ping, woman judge of a district court. Her home responsibilities consists of seven children, aged mother and mother-in-law.¹⁰²

All of the *Aircrafter* issues contain the same ambivalent mix of egalitarian rhetoric and anxiety around gender, race, and class destabilization. As demonstrated in this analysis, the mixed messages can be identified in a close reading of the varied components of individual *Aircrafter* issues, as well as through a detailed review of the continuity of themes throughout the newspaper's run. Despite the seeming diversity of textual, discursive and visual styles and content — whether front-page news, fashions on the women's page, or cartoons — there is a consistent, mixed message that celebrates women's war work while at the same time trivializing their work by depicting them as incongruous with the traditionally masculine workplace. As Pierson points out the positive representations of women's war work "do not give the whole picture. One needs to place them alongside of other more conven-

¹⁰¹ *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1945, 8.

¹⁰² *Aircrafter*, 12 May 1945, 8.

tional representations, for even at the peak of the war effort, mobilization propaganda and war time advertising were delivering another message, less subversive of pre-war gender relations."¹⁰³ Thus, in response to Montgomerie's query, we have argued that the pervasive mixed message in a warplant company newspaper such as *Aircrafter* is one of the mechanisms by which pre- and post-war ideological continuity of women's work and identities were both promoted and maintained in the northwestern Ontario context.

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¹⁰³Pierson, "'They're Still Women After All,'" 215.

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