Rosie the Riveter, Norman Rockwell: www.usmm.net/ posterbuild2.html, accessed 6/9/2005

Women and Unions During World War Two: How Social Climate Affected Women's Labor Participation in World War Two

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In American society there are images that become associated with any given point in time. The image of Rosie the Riveter represents the women workers of World War II. This image was developed as a method of convincing women to go to work; its use was highly effective. The effectiveness of this policy was due in part to the influence of the social prescriptions for men's and women's behaviors. When women went to work in the defense industries, both from other areas of the work force or from their kitchens, they were making great changes in US society, at least temporarily. The relationships women had with unions, men, and work during World War II were affected by the social constructions which were imposed upon them. There were elements of women's experiences and interactions that varied from one area, of the country or industry, to another but regardless of other factors they were all influenced by social prescriptions.

In looking at the issues that surrounded women and their work experience during World War II there are many issues that could be considered. This study will look at how women's roles were defined and affected by the social constructions of gender. It will also look at how these social constructions determined women's position in society and the work force. The extent to which these other factors influenced women's relationships with unions will also be discussed. The way women's relationships with men were also affected by the social constructions of gender will be discussed as well. There will also be consideration to other factors that effected women's workplace and union interactions, such as race and ethnicity, and how these were also restricted by social constructions.

In looking at these issues there were several areas of study to be undertaken including the works of other historians and looking at several different types of primary

source documents. In looking at all of these various forms of documents it is possible to derive a clearer picture of women's experiences with unions during World War II. The historical works published by other historians fall into two general categories: women's experiences with work, and women's experiences with unions. The first of these two categories can also be broken down into studies which look specifically at World War II and those which look at more broad time frames. This is not true of the works on women's experiences with unions because there has been very little work done which looks specifically at the experience of women and unions during World War II.

There were also various forms of primary source documents looked at in the completion of this study. These were taken from a variety of areas so they could help build a more complete picture of women's real lives. The investigation of this study looks at ads from the national news magazine: *Newsweek*, it then becomes more regionally specific by looking at a newspaper from Portland, Oregon: *The Oregonian*. The final section of the primary document investigation looks at oral histories collected from several women who worked at the Kaiser Corporations shipyards in Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington. These documents will be looked at to see the information they can provide as well as how this compares to the trends shown in the other historical works.

Historiographies

In looking at the role women were able to play in unions and the work force during World War II it is crucial to look at the work done by other historians. There are many studies that have been published on women's experiences with work. Each of these studies look at women's lives in its own unique way. Many of the studies that have been done by other historians look at women and work in the United States and

the twentieth century in general. There are also numerous studies which look at women's experiences with work during World War II. In looking at the work of these other historians, the more general studies will be looked at first, followed by those which are more specific to World War II. The final study which will be looked at is by Amy Kesselman that examines the women who worked at the Kaiser Corporations shipyards in Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington during World War II.

In studying the experiences of any group of people who shared a common experience, the use of oral histories as a primary source is a common trend. Oral histories are used as a source in many cases because they offer a perspective not available through other more traditional types of sources. There have been many oral histories conducted on women workers in World War II in the past 25-30 years. These have been done in part because of increased interest and the need for information for the various studies which have been done. The other reason many of these oral histories have been recorded is to preserve the stories and information that can be gathered from the women before the opportunity has passed. It is important to remember though that oral histories vary in their accuracy as those which are recorded closer to the event tend to be more reliable than those which are taken later. Regardless of this, they are used by many historians to delve into the experiences of individuals, and the works discussed in this study are no exception.

In *Women Have Always Worked* Alice Kessler-Harris gives a broad overview of the history of women and their relationship to work.[1] She looks at women's work in the U.S. over the past 200 years and makes the claim that women have always worked for wages in one way or another. In her discussion she looks at the changes that

1 Alice Kessler-Harris, Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981).

women's relationship to work underwent during the depression and World War II. She claims that these two events in American history enabled women to enter different areas of wage work and begin to make changes to women's position in society.[2]

When World War II started the social prescriptions of women's roles in society kept their work force participation to strictly limited areas. Wage work was based on a strict gendered division of labor.[3] With the demand for soldiers the number of men available to work, especially in the defense industries, was not sufficient to fill the demand. This created the availability for women to enter the work force in areas that had never before been open to them. Women took advantage of this; six million women who had not worked before World War II entered the work force.[4] According to Kessler-Harris, at the end of the war women were expected to return home, leave the work force permanently, and to be happy about it. This was, unfortunately, not the reality of most women's lives. Many women wanted, and needed, to continue working even after war's end.[5] For some their husbands would not return home; even for those whose husband did return home many still needed the second income. Women had to move back into lower paying jobs, such as those in the service sector, office/clerical work, and social service jobs.[6] This was where many working women were to stay for many years to follow.

Although Kessler-Harris gives a good overview of women's place in the work force, she gives very little attention to the details of the everyday woman's life. There is also no mention in her work of women's role in the labor movement. She does not

2 Kessler-Harris, 139-142.

3 Kessler-Harris, 140.

4 Kessler-Harris, 141-142.

5 Kessler-Harris, 144-145.

6 Kessler-Harris, 144-146.

discuss if women were members of unions or the exclusion they faced from men based on their gender. These areas are not covered in her book but they are also not part of her focus. As *Women Have Always Worked* was written to be a general history, rather than a specific study, Kessler-Harris has met her goal.

Dorothy Sue Cobble in her book, *Women and Unions*, looks at the role unions have played in women's lives throughout the twentieth century.[7] She looks at the way women and unions have interacted and how the unions have treated women. For the first half of the century women and unions did not have a positive relationship. American society at the beginning of the twentieth century was one in which male dominance was the norm. Women were not seen as equal to men in the eyes of most members of society. Women did have some union representation at their jobs in the years before World War II, but many unions excluded women, based solely on gender. It was in part because of this that women had established their own union locals because they recognized their need for representation.[8] Many issues that affected women were overlooked by the unions as unimportant.

Pay inequality was a common problem for women workers during the twentieth century. This was no less true during World War II. Women were routinely paid less for jobs than men, even where they held comparable positions and performed comparable tasks. Cobble discusses the War Labor Boards' investigation into this issue at both General Electric and Westinghouse factories. Although they

7 Dorothy Sue Cobble, Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1993).

8 Cobble, 5-6.

were able to clearly identify the problem of pay inequality a strategy for solving this issue had not been developed when the board was disbanded.[9]

Cobble also discusses the women's ability to use the union when they had problems that arose at work. By using the grievance procedure women had a way to protect themselves against discriminatory treatment. The problem as Cobble sees it is that not all contracts clearly define what problems are eligible for grievance and this makes it more difficult to deal with subtle or hard to prove situations.[10] Through the use of the grievance procedure unions have been able to prove themselves capable of assisting in improving working conditions for women in the late twentieth century.

Cobble also looks at the participation rates for women in unions as compared to that of men. She identifies the gender gap in union participation from the 1920's to 1980's. She shows this clearly when she states: "...until the last decade, the male work force consistently enjoyed unionization rates more than double those of female: in 1920, 26 percent of men were organized, 7 percent of women. In the late 1970s, 29 percent of men and 12 percent of women belonged to women.[11] By looking at this data it is obvious that there are clear differences in men's and women's participation. Cobble offers some explanation for this based on the negative historical relationship between unions and women. Unions during the nineteenth century were focused almost solely on white men. They had little desire to fight to improve the conditions for women or non-white men; because they felt this would only take away jobs from the white men whom they were composed of and whom they wanted to help.[12] During

9 Cobble, 97-98.

10 Cobble, 301-308.

11 Cobble, 5-6.

12 Cobble, 5-6.

the early twentieth century women began to be allowed to participate in the unions. At times they had to start their own locals so they would get appropriate representation. One area in which women have been able take larger roles was in the clerical unions.[13]

Cobble's study looks at many aspects of women's experience with unions throughout the twentieth century. She discusses how they have been able to interact and the issues they faced, both with each other and together, with the rest of the world. In the end it is evident that there were many different ways the women discussed interacted with the unions and the rest of society during World War II. The general theme of women's experiences though was the feeling of being ignored by the unions. Women did not believe their participation was wanted, and in the end the unions proved this belief to be true when they failed to protect them at war's end.

Brigid O'Farrell and Joyce L Kornbluh in their book *Rocking the Boat: Women and Unions* look at the relationships women have had with unions throughout the twentieth century.[14] They look at individual women's stories as they themselves told them. In doing this they have looked at the stories of a number of women; the story of Dorothy Haener[15] and her work with the United Auto Workers (UAW) is among them. Although her work as a union organizer was in the years after World War II the foundation of her work with the UAW was during the war years.

13 Cobble, 5-6.

14 Brigid O'Farrell and Joyce L. Kornbluh, Rocking the Boat: Union Women's Voices, 1915-1975 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

15 O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 159-183.

Dorothy Haener worked at the Willow Run Bomber Plant in Michigan during World War II.[16] Her earliest experiences with the union were positive ones. She had been encouraged to go talk to the union rather than quit her clerical job because of a bad supervisor. With the union's help she was able to transfer to a new position where she was able to be happier.[17] Although Haener had to be encouraged to go talk to the union by her older brother she was able to do this because she had always been a believer in unions.[18] This belief was given a strong foundation in her own positive experience during World War II with the United Auto Workers.

Haener was able to use her belief in the union to work as an activist an organizer. From 1952 through 1961, she worked to organize clerical workers. While she was in a clerical position she worked with others to organize over 800 clerical workers, and other positions.[19] She continued after this to work as a union activist with the United Auto Workers. One of the challenges she faced was that the majority of her positions were elected. At several points she had difficulties with men in the union who still believed there were jobs that women should not do. She did have an advantage in that she was able to be unemployed and put all of her effort into her work with the union. This was due in part to the fact that she was single and still lived in her family home.[20]

This work takes an in-depth look at the lives of the women whose stories are included; it does however lack any critical analysis of the issue of women and unions. There is very little consideration for the way women who were everyday union

16 O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 163.

17 O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 165.

18 O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 161.

19 O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 172.

20 O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 168-169.

members were treated by their unions. It looks only at the women who were able to work themselves into higher positions within the union. It would be an excellent reference for the lives of individual women or for the position of women in particular unions.

Vicki L Ruiz in her book *From Out of the Shadows* looks at the history of Mexican American women as wage earners and economic contributors.[21] In the chapter "With Pickets, Baskets, and Ballots" she looks at the generation of women workers of the Second World War.[22] These women faced numerous challenges in their lives, not only in the workplace but also in their day to day living. Their place in society was set not only by their economic position, but also by their gender and ethnic heritage. For some the oppression that surrounded them energized them to fight back.

Mexican American women workers saw problems and worked to change them. Ruiz describes the women on the picket lines, and those organizing for change with the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAW) in the factories.[23] The women worked as activists for the union to improve their lives at work and to increase their wages. They also began grassroots organizing campaigns in an effort to improve living conditions in their communities.[24] The question of bilingual education was another issue among Mexican Americans who remembered their own difficulties with education. The Mexican American women

21 Vicki L. Ruiz, From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

22 Ruiz, 72-98.

23 Ruiz, 75.

24 Ruiz, 74.

who fought for this type of education were reflecting on how their own childhoods had been, or how they could have been if there had been no social services.

Ruiz does a good job in this work with discussing the differences in the issues that women struggled with on a daily, or near daily basis. She looks at how women took action into their own hands to make changes.[25] This work is weak in its lack of detail about women's specific interactions with the unions. It mentions the name of one union, but fails to tell us specific information about Mexican American women's union activities.

Patricia Preciado Martin in *Songs My Mother Sang to Me* looks at the lives of Mexican American women and their work experiences throughout the twentieth century.[26] She discusses their experiences throughout their lives, at work, in their communities, and in their homes. One of the women was Esperanza Montoya Padilla.[27] She worked in a Goodyear factory during World War II and identified her war work as important in her life.[28] Throughout her life work was important to Padilla. Her mother had begun teaching her lessons about work and its importance when she was very young. She recalled that everybody in her household was always working.[29] The idea of doing what was necessary to get by was one she learned early. Organizing to get what was needed was another lesson she learned at a young age.

25 Ruiz, 74.

26 Patricia Preciado Martin, Songs My Mother Sang to Me: An Oral History of Mexican-American Women (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

27 Martin, 97-117.

28 Martin, 115.

29 Martin, 102-105.

She even organized a petition drive in her community to get the city to install gas lines.[30]

When women were called to work in the factories Esperanza Montoya Padilla went to work in a Goodyear factory where she worked drilling and bucking for the placement of rivets which were so prevalent on the planes being made at the factory. Padilla felt that her work during the war was one experience that changed her life. It helped determine who she was from that point on. She was able to gain confidence that she felt might not have been available had she not been able to work during the war. She also felt that her job at Goodyear was important in that she had done her part to help out with the war effort.[31]

Songs My Mother Sang to Me is a book that looks at a particular group of women over a large period of time. As a result of this it does not take a truly in depth look at any particular issue or point in time. As a general work it is able to convey a broad array of information although it does have its areas where it is lacking. The author is aware of this though and does not claim to be providing anything more than a broad overview. In achieving its goal it is successful.

Sherna B. Gluck in her book *Rosie the Riveter Revisited* looks at how women's work during World War II effected them and changed their outlooks on life.[32] She looks at the stories of individual women, as well as providing an accurate overview of women's experiences. She discusses how women were drawn into the work force in the beginning of the war through the use of effective propaganda and how they

30 Martin, 116.

31 Martin, 115.

32 Sherna B. Gluck, Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women the War, and Social Change (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).

were forced out when the war ended.[33] She also looks at and dispels many of the traditional myths about the Rosie the Riveters.

Gluck looks at many of the facts about women war workers and how these realities do not match with the common perceptions of the women who have become known as Rosie the Riveters. The women who went to work in the defense industries during World War II were not the housewives that the mythology tells us they are, as Gluck puts it: "half of the women defense workers were drawn from the ranks of women who were already in the work force before the war."[34] She also offers evidence which contradicts the idea that these women were happy to go back to their lives as housewives; she cites a Wall Street Journal survey which reported that 75% of women defense workers wanted to remain in the work force.[35] She does not, however, claim that these myths were not true for all women simply that they were not the reality for most women as contemporary culture has made them out to be.

Gluck's discussion of the individual women who worked in the defense industries during the war looks at a variety of women who worked in multiple areas, before and after the war. One of the women whose story she looked at was Fanny Christina Hill who worked at a North American aviation plant in Los Angeles.[36] Hill felt the union played a role in her ability to be happy at work when they suggested she ask for a transfer rather than quit when she was unhappy.[37] She was more emphatic though in her description of the war work in itself as liberating for her as an African American woman. She quoted her sister in her oral history as saying: "...that Hitler was

33 Gluck, 15.

34 Gluck, 11.

35 Gluck, 16.

36 Gluck, 22-49.

37 Gluck, 38.

the one that got us out of the white folks' kitchen."[38] She was clear though in that the ability of African Americans to move into new industries did not mean that their lives were free of discrimination.[39] Fanny Christina Hill did not have the same problem with losing her job at the end of the war as many other women did because she was out on maternity leave when most of the women were laid off, and she was able to return as scheduled.[40] Her experience of war work was one that, overall, was quite positive.

Gluck also looked at the life of Juanita Loveless who worked in a defense factory during World War II.[41] She went to work in defense as a result of all of the mass media propaganda and the pressure on her to do her part. She believed that for herself, and many of the women she knew, that they did all they could to help support the effort, although she felt they didn't really enjoy it.[42] When the war ended Loveless was one of the women who was glad to be able to quit working in the defense industries, she was not, however, able to quit working altogether. She worked a few odd jobs and eventually went to work as a waitress which she continued to do that until her retirement.[43] It was only during her time as a waitress that Loveless made any mention of unions or union activity. She belonged to the Waiter and Waitresses Union and felt that when they were strong, in their earlier years, they were really able to help their workers. Later though, they lost much of their strength and were not able to do as much for their members.[44] Neither Gluck, nor Loveless explained why their strength

38 Gluck, 23.

39 Gluck, 23.

40 Gluck, 41.

41 Gluck, 124-150.

42 Gluck, 135.

43 Gluck, 143.

44 Gluck, 148.

diminished. She also did not offer much information as to the extent of her personal participation.

Beatrice Morales Clifton was another war worker who shared her story with Sherna Gluck. Clifton worked at a Lockheed factory during the war, despite the pressure of those around her. She had to fight not only the social prescriptions imposed upon her as a Mexican American woman to not work, but also the disapproval of her husband.[45] This disapproval, as well as feelings of needing to be with her children, were what eventually caused her to quit, even before the war's end.[46] While she worked she was a union member, but did not feel the union was able to offer much help to the workers, because they lacked strength.[47] She was able to get various types of training while she was there during the war which helped her years later when she went back to working at Lockheed.[48] She felt that the time in her work life when she felt the most fulfilled was during her time at Lockheed. For Clifton she went to work originally in the defense industries because of the mass media pressure for her to do so, and felt in the end it was truly a life defining experience.[49]

Gluck looks at the stories of many other women who worked in the defense industries during World War II. However, there is not any significant discussion on women's union participation during this period. The stories are told in a way that draws the reader in. The overview is able to dispel many of the myths so that the realities of most women's lives can be brought to light, without claiming that these myths were not the truth for any women.

45 Gluck, 200.

46 Gluck, 212-213.

47 Gluck, 210.

48 Gluck, 215.

49 Gluck, 219.

Nancy Baker Wise and Christy Wise provide another view of women's wartime work in their book *A Mouthful of Rivets*.[50] In this work they look at women's war experiences as a whole. They discuss the different aspects of war work and the different phases of the war and how these affected women. In the completion of their study they looked at many experiences of individual women. Their work provides a good overview, although in some ways it seems to follow the contemporary mythology, of women only wanting to work for the duration, without giving credit to all women's experiences.

Wise and Wise look at how women were drawn into the work force and their first experiences with defense work. They discuss the relocation of many women to areas where work was available.[51] Wise and Wise also bring up the variety of training programs that women participated in prior to their actually beginning to work in the factories. There was great variation in the length and depth of these programs. Some were as long as 18 months while others lasted less than three weeks; some women did not even participate in formal training programs, they simply learned on the job.[52] They discuss concisely the issue of women who were trained for one job and were hired to do something completely different. This technique was discussed as a method used to prevent women from being too capable and having the ability to advance.[53]

Wise and Wise also cover many issues of the working conditions that women faced during their time in the defense industries. The conditions were not often ideal, safety regulations were neither standardized, nor enforced. Most companies did not

50 Nancy Baker Wise and Christy Wise, A Mouthful of Rivets: Women at Work in World War II. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994).

51 Wise and Wise, 13-20.

52 Wise and Wise, 27.

53 Wise and Wise, 135.

provide the breaks that would today be considered standard. The women who went to work in the defense factories were working all day long often with lunch as the only break. One woman was even quoted saying: "We didn't have the breaks that people do now. Only a lunch break. It was the war that brought about morning and afternoon breaks…When women started into the war plants, that's when the breaks started."[54] There were also many women who brought up the issues of safety regulations. Another woman recalled a co-worker losing part of her scalp to a machine. In some factories it was not uncommon for the women to swallow the rivets they were working with because they held them in their mouths.[55] It was not always a lack of safety regulations that was the problem; even in areas where they did exist the regulations were erratically enforced.

In their book, Wise and Wise also look at how women interacted with unions. This was an area where the study could have been strengthened if the authors had dedicated a specific chapter to it; instead they touch on women's experiences with unions throughout their other chapters. They discuss at several points how women felt the unions were not there to help them.[56] Women at many times felt that their membership in the unions was futile because as one woman put it: "No matter if we did have a union because it didn't stand for use because we were women."[57] Many of the women who discussed their union participation did not go into detail as to their relationships with unions during the war. Most of the women who had negative feelings about the union based them on the union's unwillingness to help them when

54 Wise and Wise, 83.

55 Wise and Wise, 139.

56 Wise and Wise, 4, 17, 169 .

57 Wise and Wise, 17, 25.

the war ended. They were basically told that the jobs were the men's and that there was nothing the union could, or would, do.[58] One woman even had problems with the union when she tried to return to her wartime job several years after the war's end. Her description of the encounter clearly outlines the problem: "I phoned the machinists' union and asked about getting back in and they told me there was, to their knowledge, no woman working in a machine shop in the city of Portland. Very coldly."[59] This experience was not any different from the responses most women got when they went to the union at the end of the war when they were trying to not lose their jobs.

Wise and Wise also discuss the relationships women had with the men they worked with. Their research shows that about half of the women who worked in the defense industries had no problems with men, while the other half faced discrimination and harassment.[60] Women had problems with men in various areas, because they were seen as trying to take men's jobs as well as simply because they were women. [61] Some women faced outright sexual harassment. One woman was told she would lose her job if she didn't have sex with her boss.[62] Women also felt at many points that they were set up for failure, or used as scapegoats when things went wrong.[63] This was certainly the case for Stella Vanderlinden Alway who recalled one time when:

> "I was working on a rudder one night that the inspector was inspecting as the whistle was blowing, and the next morning there was a red tag on it. Someone

58 Wise and Wise, 169.

59 Wise and Wise, 181.

60 Wise and Wise, 88.

61 Wise and Wise, 101.

62 Wise and Wise, 98.

63 Wise and Wise, 94-95, 100-103.

had deliberately damaged it and they had to do that for spite. No one ever admitted that they did it."[64]

Wise and Wise provide a great deal of information in their study about women's experiences at work. They look at a variety of issues which were commonly faced by women throughout the United States. They show how the attitudes held by women and the society around them affected them while they were at work and also when they were out in the community. The offer a great deal of information however they discuss it in a way that does not bring up the individual realities which were contradictory to the mythology.

Amy Kesselman in her book, *Fleeting Opportunities*, looks at the experiences of women who worked in the shipyards in Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington.[65] This work is an in depth study of a group of women who have been doubly forgotten, because they were women wartime workers, as well as because they lived in an area which has forgotten its shipbuilding past. The women who worked at the Kaiser Corporation's shipyards in the Portland/Vancouver had a variety of experiences with work, family, and society, both throughout the war and as it ended. Kesselman looks not only at the unique experiences the women in Portland and Vancouver but also their everyday experiences which could have happened to women anywhere. Her work is well written and draws the reader in so the story of this group of workers can be preserved and enjoyed.

Kesselman researched government documents, archival records and periodicals. With this research as a foundation she and other members of the

64 Wise and Wise, 103.

65 Amy Kesselman, Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver During World War II and Reconversion. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

Northwest Women's History Project conducted oral history interviews with 35 women who had worked in the shipyards in Portland and Vancouver during World War II.[66] She uses the experiences of these women throughout her text to support the evidence she finds in other documents and the conclusions she draws. The realities of these women's lives are discussed so the reader can feel a connection with them. Kesselman does this well.

Kesselman looks at the experiences of the women who worked at the Kaiser shipyards through a variety of aspects. She begins her study by discussing how women were drawn into defense work; she demonstrates the reality that not all women were new to the work force, and offers evidence of their prewar experiences. She continues her study by looking at the actual wartime experiences of these women as workers. Women's relationships with men varied depending on who the men were and what their relationship was to the women. There was no single experience that could be considered accurate for all of women workers. At the end of the war some women felt it had been a positive time in their lives, however this was not true for all.

Kesselman in her work brings to light some new innovations that occurred during World War II at the Portland and Vancouver shipyards. The government recognized that in asking women to come to work there were domestic responsibilities that needed to be attended to. In an effort to resolve this issue the government and the Kaiser shipyards set-up childcare centers at the Portland and Vancouver yards.[67] These centers were built with the latest child development knowledge taken into consideration. They were open 24 hours so that women could work whichever shift

66 Kesselman, 7.

67 Kesselman, 72-73.

was necessary and still have childcare. The teachers at the childcare centers were also well-educated in child development and well-paid. Henry Kaiser realized that if the teachers were paid less than the welders in the yards the teachers would simply switch to the better paying jobs.[68] Kaiser paid them equal amounts to ensure that his childcare workers were the educated professionals he intended them to be. The burden was also assisted by government subsidies.[69] As Nell Conley recalled the price she paid for childcare was $14 per week, and the children were fed not only while at the center, but food was also sent home with them.[70]

Kesselman discusses the relationship between women and unions in the Portland and Vancouver shipyards. There were several unions which she identified as playing a role in these factories, including the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, American Federation of Labor, Iron Shipbuilders, and others. There were significant issues in these unions with the admittance of women; they had all previously excluded women from their ranks.[71] Kesselman discusses the election that took place in the Boilermakers union. She brings up a letter that was published in *The Shipbuilder* which explained why the author, a woman, believed the men would vote to continue to exclude the women, because: "Those boys seem mostly to figure like this: Gosh if we let women into the union now, they'll take out jobs away from us after the war."[72] Kesselman points out that the author never claims that the women have the right to be union members, she did conclude her letter though with a plea to the

68 Kesselman, 77-78.

69 Kesselman, 82-83.

70 Kesselman, 83. Nell Conley, interview by Amy Kesselman and Sarah Cook, tape recording and transcript on file at Oregon Historical Society. Portland, Oregon, 3 April 1981, 6-11.

71 Kesselman, 17.

72 Kesselman, 18.

men, exclaiming: "WE'D RATHER BE SISTERS THAN SCABS!"[73] The results of the election were not conclusive, as there were not a high enough percentage of ballots cast. In the end the International headquarters decided that to maintain their strength and to keep the war effort going that women would be admitted, on a temporary basis. Kesselman also brings up the legislative issues the women and unions had to contend with in Oregon law. The law as late as October, 1942 prohibited women from carrying more than 15 pounds or lifting over 25. This law had to be abandoned for the duration of the war because it was seen as being a potential impediment to the war effort.[74]

Kesselman also looks at the experiences of women in defense factories throughout the United States. She does this to offer a point of comparison for the experiences of the women in Portland and Vancouver. She also discusses the experiences of women at the end of the war and during Reconversion. She conducts a thorough study which leaves little to be answered. There are areas of her book where more information could be offered, however, none of these are so significant that they detract from the overall quality of her work.

In looking at these historical studies there are many similarities that can be seen between the experiences of women and the conclusions drawn by the historians. There are also aspects of the various studies which have clear differences and demonstrate alternate viewpoints. These studies offer much insight into the way women have interacted with men and the work force throughout the twentieth

73 Kesselman, 18.

74 Kesselman, 19.

century and during World War II. Studies specific to the experience of women and unions during World War II have however been left out.

These studies do show trends in women's experiences during World War II. How women were drawn into defense work, either from other areas of the work force, or through the very effective propaganda which was put out by the government and companies is a common element. The variations in how women were treated by the men they worked with is also brought up in all of these studies. They all discuss how some women had positive experiences with the men they worked with, while others were harassed. In looking at these works together it becomes clear that there are many women who had experiences that were similar, regardless of which aspect of the defense industry they worked in.

These studies also show that there were areas in which women's experiences were very different. Race and ethnicity played a role in many women's experiences. There were many aspects of American society which were still held captive by racist ideology. For some the role it played was so great it was all they could focus on. The way race and ethnicity were handled in a time of national crisis was discussed throughout these studies.

The interactions between women and unions were discussed in some of these works, but none of them were specific to women's experiences during World War II. While there are several of these studies which make only passing mention of women's experiences with unions. The majority of these studies make mention of women's experiences with unions only as a part of the discussion of other issues. The books, *Women and Unions*, by Dorothy Sue Cobble and *Rocking the Boat: Women and Unions*, by Brigid O'Farrell and Joyce L Kornbluh are the exception to this, although

neither of them is looking specifically at World War II. Despite the differences in coverage of women and unions these works seem to show that many women felt the unions did not serve their needs. Even in Cobble's study of women and unions throughout the twentieth century the exclusion of women from unions, and the extent to which they felt unaided by their membership was discussed at many points. Throughout these works it seems as if the role unions have played in most women's lives if it was positive was minor, and many times their interactions left the women feeling highly unsatisfied. For many women in nearly all of these studies the only experience they remembered having with the union was negative.

Primary Documents

There are several types of primary documents which can be useful in a study of this sort. These include media sources such as mass circulation magazines and local newspapers. Oral histories are also of great value when trying to discern the experiences of a group of people. In this work examples from each of these various types of sources will be looked at. Photos and other official documents will also be examined for the information they can reveal about women workers in World War II.

The social construction of women's roles can be seen by looking at the mass media from the era. In the United States during World War II the mass media showed these social prescriptions on both national and local levels. The societal expectations of women are visible in national magazines and in the local newspapers. They can serve as the reflection of how society feels about itself.

The weekly newsmagazine *Newsweek* will be looked at in this study. This was chosen as a source in part because of its nationwide circulation. *Newsweek* is also a magazine which appeals to a large audience, it is not directed specifically at men or

women; this played a role in its selection because it shows ideas that were presented to a general audience.

The newspaper *The Oregonian* which is the local newspaper from Portland, Oregon will also be considered. This is the same area in which the women whose oral histories will be looked at lived and worked during the war. This local newspaper was also chosen because it is a source for articles that were considered newsworthy at the time, and major events that occurred in a particular geographic area. The classified ads in a particular paper show a great deal about the job market in an area. They can also demonstrate the extent of sex segregation in the various workplaces in a region.

The primary document investigation in this work will then conclude by looking at the oral histories of several women who worked in the shipyards run by the Kaiser Corporation in Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington. These oral histories are used to show the experiences of women's daily lives, as well as experience with unions, and the greater community around them. The interviews offer information into these women's lives which could not have been gathered from any other source and present ideas about women's experiences from the participants themselves.

Newsweek is a national magazine that can be used to see the pervasiveness of the social constructions of gender in the United States. By looking at copies of *Newsweek* which have been preserved, trends in the national mass media can be seen. Although the majority of the articles were related to the war and the efforts throughout the country and abroad, the advertisements show much of the contemporary ideology which dictated women's position in society.

Women in the *Newsweek* ads are shown as war workers and doing their part for the war effort. This was part of the propaganda to draw women into the work force. Women were also encouraged to do things for the war effort beyond work, including buying war stamps and bonds, and straining grease for bullet manufacturing. The mass media was a tool used by numerous companies throughout the war to dictate expectations women.

Newsweek, 29 March 1943 pg. 47 Newsweek, 1 February 1943 inside cover Newsweek, 29 March 1943 pg. 8

In a majority of the ads in *Newsweek* throughout the war women were shown working in defense industries. They were portrayed as general war workers, welders and machinists. Women were shown working alone, with other women and alongside men; they were also still shown as mothers. The idea that women were expected to be workers and mothers, doing their part was prominent in nearly all of the ads. And in all of the ads they were happy and smiling, eager to be participating.

The portrayal of women changed towards the end of the war when it was felt that their participation was going to be no longer necessary. Advertisements in *Newsweek*, and other mass circulation magazines, changed in an effort to prepare women for their exit from the work force. Paying some attention to women who would still need to be in the work force after the war, ads encouraged women to prepare for changing work environments. One *Newsweek* ad, selling Smith-Corona typewriters, showed pictures of hands and asked women: "Are yours ready for that post-war job?"[75] These ads prepared women for the idea that they would be leaving the production work and should be thinking about returning to more traditional women's jobs.

Newsweek, 2 October 1944 pg. 79.

75 Advertisement, "Smith-Corona Typewriters," Newsweek, 2 October 1944: 79.

In Portland, Oregon the local newspaper was the *Oregonian*. This was a local daily paper which is still in publication today. In looking at past editions that have been preserved from 1941-1945 aspects of life as they were portrayed by local media during the war years become evident. These include the gender segregation of the workplace, local union activities, and national actions of the unions. It also shows how each of these issues was portrayed in the local media.

In Portland there was significant segregation in the workplace based on gender. Classified ads in the *Oregonian* were listed under the categories of men's and women's jobs. Those listed as general employment even went so far as to say that women were acceptable. Even in the middle of the war there were more industrial jobs listed under the men's category than the women's. This was true for both defense and non-defense jobs.[76]

The *Oregonian* also shows some evidence of union activity in the Portland and Vancouver area. In 1942 there were strikes at several canneries in Oregon and California, led by the American Federation of Labor. The workers in this instance were striking for a wage increase. Although the wage increase asked for did cover both men and women there was a gender difference between men's and women's wages in both the current and proposed contracts.[77] The wage gap in this case was actually greater in the proposed contract than it had been previously. This case shows the differential attitudes of unions toward men versus women. The union led the workers on a strike to increase their wages, at the same time though they were advancing

76 Classified Advertisements, "Employment section," The Oregonian, 15 December 1941, pg. 14; 23 March 1942, pg 10; 6 May 1945, pg. 3,4.

77 "Strikes Close 3 Canneries," The Oregonian, 2 April 1942, pg. 1.

men's wages above women's wages. The women were left to fend for themselves, pushed further and further back behind men in pay equality.

The national union activity is evident in the stories discussing the actions and agreements made between unions and government. Agreements were reached between the War Labor Production Board and major unions, including the AFL and the CIO. These agreements effected how labor and management would deal with disputes. One major item under discussion was the issue of strikes and lockouts. The agreement was reached that there would be no strikes or lockouts for the duration of the war; this was reinforced by the availability of a government mediator to solve labor disputes if it became necessary. Although the issue of overtime pay and the possible suspension of the forty hour work week were discussed the *Oregonian* did not show any evidence of this agreement being reached.

For the completion of this study I felt it was important to do my own research into some of the oral histories that have been done. For this I chose to look at the oral histories which were done by Amy Kesselman and the Northwest Women's History Project. The transcripts of the local oral histories they collected are on file at the Oregon Historical Society. Although these sources have been used by both Kesselman for *Fleeting Opportunities* and for the movie: "Good Work Sister! Women Shipyard Workers of World War II: An Oral History" it is still possible to extract new information from them. Looking at any set of oral histories with a new set of questions offers the opportunity for the documents to reveal new answers. The oral histories would have been more accurate if they had been done in the first few years after the war, the women's memories might have been clearer. However these oral histories were conducted in the early 1980's, and with the passage of 35 years memories can fade.

Still these memoirs have the ability to offer a great deal of information, from a perspective not available through other sources.

I chose to use the oral histories of five women for my study. These women each had a story and experience that was more vivid in her recollections. I believe that although it is a small sample, it is well rounded and encompasses a majority of women's World War II experiences. The five women whose oral histories I looked at were Joanne Hudlicky, Nell Conley, Helen Berggren, Berenice Thompson, and Beatrice Marshall.

Each of these women were at different points in their lives and were doing different things before the war started. Joanne Hudlicky, who became a crane operator, had been a sales clerk at a cigar shop in Vancouver, Washington.[78] Although she did not have to relocate for her wartime job her prewar experience offered her no help in adjusting to the different work environment. Nell Conley before the war had been a housewife and stay at home mother of one, when the war broke out and her husband enlisted she went to work. She started out working in retail but went to work at the shipyard when she realized that she would not be able to support herself and her child on her retail wages.[79] Going to work was not an issue for Helen Berggren who had been working in restaurants and as a domestic worker before the war. Her entrance into the shipyards was, however, strongly influenced by her son being gone fighting in the war, she wanted something to keep her mind occupied.[80] Berenice Thompson who was also older and married felt that these factors were both

78 Kesselman, 1.

79 Conley, interview, 1-4.

80 Helen Berggren, interview by Lynn Taylor, tape recording and transcript on file at Oregon Historical Society. Vancouver, Washington, 23 May 1981, 1-12.

a challenge and a benefit to doing her job.[81] She felt she had to work harder to prove herself because of her age, at the same time she believed her age made her a more dedicated worker. Beatrice Marshall had a different experience than the other women as she was not a worker or a mother before going to work, but rather a student.[82] She had been attending college in her home state of Illinois when she was recruited for defense work. She relocated to Portland to be able to work in the shipyards, was discriminated against as an African American woman and was in the end not able to do what she was trained for.[83] The variety of experiences these women had before the war's beginning led each of them to have different perspectives on their work experiences and the Kaiser shipyards in general.

These interviews have been looked at before by other historians, primarily Amy Kesselman, yet there are questions that still have not been discussed. When reading these oral histories there are several themes that became evident. The idea of a woman's union membership and the relationship between women and their unions shows trends of women's exclusion. Another theme that comes out of these interviews is the idea of how the social construction of women's gender affected the way they interacted with the larger society around them.

While it is likely that all of the women who worked at the Kaiser shipyards in Portland and Vancouver belonged to one union or another they recalled very little about their experience with the unions. Some did not even recall which union they were a part of. Those who did remember their unions for the most part had no

81 Berenice Thompson, interview by Amy Kesselman and Sarah Cook, tape recording and transcript on file at Oregon Historical Society. Gladstone, Oregon, 20 November 1980, 3-4.

82 Kesselman, 2.

83 Beatrice Marshall, interview by Madeline Moore and Chris Poole, tape recording and transcript on file at Oregon Historical Society. Portland, Oregon, 11 June 1981, 1-13.

positive memories. These women felt they had been union members, only because they worked in a closed shop that required that all employees be union members, and therefore the union had to accept them. Nell Conley expressed this feeling clearly when she described how this trend played into her experience: "I think the union was told, you have to have so many people on the job, and there weren't that many men. So of course they had to take women."[84]

Nell Conley's recollections about her relationship with the union were highly reflective about the general trends in women's interactions with the unions. She was a member of the Builders and Boilermakers union although she never had contact with the union or any of its representatives. When asked about knowing how to file a grievance she said: "I wouldn't have known where to find the business form."[85] She was so unaware of what was going on in the union that she did not even recall a challenge that the CIO had posed to the Builders and Boilermakers which could have affected her dramatically.[86] The lack of awareness of the union and its activities was a common theme. Joanne Hudlicky when asked if she had been a union member said: "I can't even remember, whether it was – I don't even know if we did."[87] This statement says a great deal about the union contact with women, the lack of influence and importance the union had in women's lives, as well as how little women's impact was on the union.

Women also had a relationship with the union based on their participation in union training courses. Women could join the union to get training for the positions

84 Conley, interview, 15-16.

85 Conley, interview, 15-16.

86 Conley, interview, 15-16.

87 Joanne Hudlicky, interview by Amy Kesselman and Sarah Cook, tape recording and transcript on file at Oregon Historical Society. Vancouver, Washington, 20 April 1981, 7.

that were available, or in order to be able to get a job. Women could also get trained in other ways; such as through the National Youth Administration (NYA), or at independent training facilities. Helen Berggren, who was originally a sweeper, had to join a new union so she could change jobs. She was able to join the electricians union (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) and one year later she had acquired journeyman status.[88] Berggren was unclear as to if she had been working for that first year or if she was in full-time training the whole year. The women seemed to accept that union membership was simply part of getting a defense job, whether they became members before or after getting hired or trained.

Women's experiences with unions did not change significantly at the end of the war. Nell Conley put her experience succinctly when she described her leaving the shipyard after victory: "...we no longer had jobs, we no longer were members of the unions, we turned in our union cards along with our welding equipment, and we were without jobs."[89] Although Conley remembers and describes the lack of presence of the union at the war's end not all women who worked at the Kaiser shipyards had such vivid recollections. Joanne Hudlicky, when describing what happened at the end of the war said: "The shipyard just closed down completely, and I took an office job..."[90] The union's position was so non-existent for Hudlicky that it wasn't even worth mention. Although the women were not protected they, at times, justified their abandonment explaining that they were ready to go home and be with their families.

The unions at the Kaiser shipyards in Portland and Vancouver, like unions all over the country, failed to help their women members when the war ended. The idea

88 Berggren, interview, 1-12.

89 Conley, interview, 20.

90 Hudlicky, interview, 7.

that women were expected to be temporary workers was so pervasive that even unions were not exempt. Unions also failed their female members when they had such little contact with them that they were unaware of the women's true desires. If the unions had communicated with their female members, even a little, they would likely have known that not all of their members were happy or satisfied. There were many women who reluctantly returned to the more traditional types of women's jobs when the war ended and they left the shipyards.

World War II was not just a time of opportunity for women; rather it was a general opening of job markets for minorities as well. With the passage of Executive Order 8802 President Roosevelt banned discrimination in defense industries because of "race, creed, color, or national origin."[91] Although, as this study will demonstrate, EO 8802 was not always enforced it was able to open jobs for many that had previously been closed. This order was also able to open up non-defense industry jobs to minorities because of the demand for workers. As a result of the demand for workers by the defense industries and the loss of workers who were overseas fighting many positions were left vacant and needed to be filled.

Gender was not the only problem with the unions faced by some women who worked in the shipyards in Portland and Vancouver, for some race played an even bigger role. Beatrice Marshall who was trained by the NYA to be a welder and riveter upon arriving in Portland was not able to get a job in either of these positions.[92] She

91 Executive Order 8802

92 Marshall, interview, 13.

was offered a job as a sweeper or a painter's helper.[93] When she asked the personnel office about getting a placement doing what she had been trained to do she was told:

> "'There's nothing I can do. I'm just doing my job. This is the rule and I have to go by the rule.'... that they would not hire Black – 'Negro' was the word they were using then – in the machine shop. There was just certain jobs Negroes were not allowed to hold, and the machine shop was one of them."[94]

She attributed this discrimination to the union as it was a closed shop, and believed it was union policy rather than one of the company. She did not feel this was a problem faced only by African American women, but felt this was a policy which affected men as well.[95]

Marshall felt that Portland was the first and only place she ever really faced racial discrimination.[96] It was the discrimination at work, and her resulting misery, that eventually led her to leave her job and move out of Portland.[97] Marshall had no problem describing her anger at the union's lack of support for her as an African American. Her experience was best summarized when she said: "...I left there – left Indiana and came to Portland and didn't get the job I was trained for (all laugh). I was real mad."[98]

Racial discrimination was not a problem that affected all Kaiser shipyards to the same extent. In looking at documents from other Kaiser Corporation shipyards it becomes evident that this is not a problem in all locations. Photos from the Portland and Vancouver shipyards show the work force as primarily Caucasian; this is not true of Kaiser shipyards in Richmond, California. Documents from the Kaiser Corporations

93 Marshall , interview, 14-17.

94 Marshall, interview, 19-20.

95 Marshall, interview, 19-20.

96 Marshall, interview, 25.

97 Marshall, interview, 1-13..

98 Marshall, interview, 33.

shipyards in Richmond, California contain photos and ID cards that show African American women as welders.[99] The investigation of these documents shows that regardless of the legal prohibition of discrimination it did still exist in some areas. They also reveal that there were differences in discrimination based on the region in which an individual lived.

Welders from the Kaiser shipyards in the Portland/Vancouver area. From Oregon Historical Society Photo Files.

99 Photos online at http://www.mishalov.com/Rosie_the_riveter.html, accessed 6/9/2005; www/vahistory/org-WWII-nara-thumbnails-small/ww2255af-amer/jpg/files, accessed 4/24/2005.

Welders from the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond, California. www/vahistory/org-WWII-nara-thumbnails-small/ww2255af-amer/jpg/files, accessed 24 April 2005.

The women who were interviewed as part of the Northwest Women's History Project also demonstrated, in the telling of their stories, how society's construction of their roles effected their lives. Women were encouraged to go to work in the defense industries for the duration, but they were still expected to fulfill their traditional roles. Although the women felt their experiences at work were positive overall, the Project also showed that this was different for individual women and that there were many factors that influenced the women's satisfaction with going to work in general. All the women whose interviews were looked at showed some reflection of the social prescriptions placed upon them.

For some of the women the social constructions forced upon them included going to work, whether they wanted to or not. For many the idea of going and doing

your part was enough to get them to go to work. Nell Conley described her vision of her entrance into shipyard work believing she was going to be there until the war was over saying "...we were going to do whatever we could."[100] This did not change the fact that some women still saw what they were doing as "taking men's jobs."[101] This was an idea that was pervasive not only in how the women saw the work they were doing but also in how their work was seen by men.

Women who worked at the Kaiser shipyards were also influenced by the idea that there were things that they could not do, or were not supposed to do. Berenice Thompson's husband tried to force ideas about women's behavior on her that she did not agree with. She described his feelings and her reaction when she said: "He didn't think women knew anything, so I showed him."[102] Helen Berggren had a problem of a different sort with trying to figure out what she should be doing while working at the shipyards. Having originally gone to work as a sweeper out of economic need, she was only able to quit and seek a better job when her son told her she deserved better.[103] She needed to be encouraged by an outside source to make the changes to improve the conditions she worked in as well as her happiness while at work.

The social construction of women's position in society was also determined by their roles as mothers. Women were expected to be able to go to work and still take care of the children. This was not just the expectation of society at large but also of the women themselves. Nell Conley described this feeling while she was talking about which shift she chose to work, and how the Kaiser shipyards did try to make

100 Conley, interview, 4.

101 Hudlicky, interview, 5.

102 Thompson, interview, 4.

103 Berggren, interview, 1-12

accommodations for the working mothers they employed. She said: "...they did try to make it possible for women to work without too much discomfort, and it was easier for women to work during the day because you have your children's schedules to consider, too."[104] Some women, like Helen Berggren, even left the work force to be able to spend more time with their children.[105] For some the conflict between work and family was too much and family usually won out. This phenomenon, known as the double-shift is one which has plagued working women since their entrance into wage work and still affects many today. The idea of the double shift is one where women go to work for an entire shift, and then come home to pull another shift in caring for the children and house. This has not only been a common experience for wage-earning women throughout the twentieth century, but was especially prominent during World War II because many more women were working outside of the home than in the pre-war years.

The way women were viewed in society played a part in how women interacted with men around them. Some women's experiences were positive; they felt they were treated well by their male co-workers. Nell Conley felt the relationship she had with the men she worked with was one of respect "The men I worked with, we, it was a matter of mutual respect. They knew their job, I knew mine."[106] Some women felt that the shipyard not only opened up opportunities that would not have been otherwise available, but also that the treatment and even pay of men and women was equal. Joanne Hudlicky recalled her experience and how she viewed it as unique in the larger context of society: "I got the same pay as the male crane operators. I think

104 Conley, interview, 5.

105 Berggren, interview, 13-29.

106 Conley, interview, 12.

the shipyard was the only thing that was equal...because if you got out of the shipyard, it wasn't that way."[107]

Not all of the women felt their job experiences were positive or that they were treated equally. For some, this was because they faced harassment from some of their male co-workers. Berenice Thompson felt the men she worked with were nasty in their treatment of the women workers. At the same time she justified their actions saying: "They were just jealous, I think, to think we could do as well as they could, and better. We did better."[108] It was not all the men she worked with that she had problems with. When some of her male co-workers harassed her she was given support by one of the lead men who she worked with, he suggested: "'if anything happens like that Berenice, just take your welding rod and hit it like that. Give 'em a few blasts in the eyes.'"[109] Some women who had good relationships with the men they worked with faced harassment from others in the community. Nell Conley's problems came from the men she rode the bus with, while her relationships with her co-workers were positive.[110] She believed that the reason some men had problems with the women defense workers was that the men had never been able to get beyond the traditional ideas of a sex segregated workplace. She did not see the problem as being one of the younger generation of war workers, but rather one of the older generations.[111]

Whatever women's experiences with the men they worked with they were all affected by the social prescriptions as to how they should act. The position of women in society gave men an excuse for treating women poorly at work. Women also took

107 Hudlicky, interview, 5.

108 Thompson, interview, 3-4.

109 Thompson, interview, 5-6.

110 Conley, interview, 12.

111 Conley, interview, 12-14.

their position in society and used it to be able to be at work if they wanted to be, or be at home if that is what they felt was necessary. The jobs women performed and their relationships with men were all affected by society's ideas of what women should and should not have been.

Analysis

Women's role in society has very often been affected by the social constructions which have been imposed upon them. The social construction of gender, or how men and women should behave according to society, is based in large part on the ideals of womanhood or manhood at the time. These constructions change over time but are always present and play a role in how men and women behave in general as well as how they interact with each other. Women in US history have often been constrained by the societal prescriptions; they have not been free to follow their own desires. The ideas men have held about women have impacted the social constructions which influence women's behavior, this has been especially true because of men's dominant position in society. This was no less true during World War II than in any earlier time period.

The social construction of gender had a very large impact on women's lives at the beginning of World War II. Women who had before fought for changes slowed their struggle in the wake of the depression. When the US entered WWII women were asked by their government and society to go against the prevailing social prescriptions and go to work. They were not however given the luxury of being absolved of their other responsibilities. The ideal woman was one who could go to work to help with the war effort and was still able to be the perfect mother and wife at

home. Although women were being asked to do things outside of their normal realm of duties they were still expected to maintain their femininity.

The way women were seen by society was also highly influenced by the social constructions of gender. When the media said women were needed to leave their homes and go to work they listened, what went unseen was that the women were not all the housewives they were thought to be. It was because of this view of women war workers as housewives that many were able to justify the treatment they received at the end of the war. The social constructions said women were temporary workers and so that was how society viewed them. Amy Kesselman put it succinctly when she wrote: "Research has demonstrated that while the wartime labor shortage created opportunities for women, lasting change was inhibited by the government, unions, and media, and management."[112]

These social constructions also affected how many women saw themselves. Women who felt they didn't want to be at work, or only wanted to be there for the duration were women who listened to the social prescriptions and followed them in their own behavior. Many women believed what was said about their roles without listening to themselves. It is important to note though that there were women for whom the social constructions were true. They didn't want to work after the war's end; they really did want to go back to being housewives. Despite this they did not fit the lives of all women, and they did play a large role in how women were treated.

Regardless of the social constructions women have always played a role in the economy in one form or another. When the Industrial Revolution began it altered the face of the work force, it did not, however, change the lives of women directly until the

112 Kesselman, 3.

demand for workers began to change. In the early years of the industrial period women were able to work, assuming they did so within the constraints of societal prescriptions. Women's work force participation was expected to last only as long as they weren't married. For the majority of women though even if they were not part of the formal work force they still played a crucial role in the economies of their households.

The economic trauma of the great depression had a new effect on the attitudes of society, the view of women changed. Many men who had been out of work, because of high unemployment rates were no longer confident in their ability to be the family providers. Men had been forced to accept their wives positions as providers; there were times when women were able to work, and men did not have the opportunity. After the depression ended men felt the need to reassert themselves as the primary providers. Doing this required sending women back to working in specific women's industries, or out of the work force all together. There were also great efforts taken at making women as unhappy as possible when they were at work.

When World War II started and women were asked to go to work, it was in the context of a country still economically weary because of the depression. As white men had been the unions primary focus during this time it was very difficult for them to think about working for the rights of women workers. Women needed to work and the country needed them to work but efforts were made to make sure women didn't feel too comfortable. Women's rapidly growing position in the traditionally male dominated fields was not expected to outlast the war, and that is exactly what happened.

Women's entrance into the work force during World War II was brought about through the use of many methods. The government and companies used propaganda to convince women to go to work. Women were drawn into their participation through effective campaigns to get them to buy war bonds, go to work in the defense industries, and follow the guidelines as determined by war need. There was no limit to the ways in which women were shown doing their part for the war effort. Women were told that it was their patriotic duty to participate, and that is what they did.

The propaganda campaign encouraged women to go against the social prescriptions that had been laid out for them in the years before the war. They were asked to go to work, and work their hardest, as it would take the efforts of all US citizens to win the war. The propaganda also told women that in doing all of these tasks that had before been off limits to them, they still needed to maintain their feminine image.

Rosie the Riveter was one image that was used to instill the idea of a woman's role during to war in the minds of the public. It was designed by an artist hired by Westinghouse for the War Production Coordinating Committee. The image of Rosie the Riveter shows a woman who is able to work and participate, but her lipstick is still perfect and every hair is in place. This was a very powerful image which was used to implant the idea of defense work in the minds of the average American woman. In the

Rosie the Riveter. Westinghouse, online at: www.usmm.net/ posterbuild2.html, accessed 6/9/2005.

years since World War II this image has also come to represent to many the very idea of women who worked in the defense industries during the war.

Propaganda was used to manipulate women so they would do what was needed of them. By having the images used still reflect the traditional feminine values women would be more ready to step back into their pre-war roles, at wars end. The effective use of propaganda helped maintain the social constructions which had been so strongly enforced before the war and ensured that they were not totally lost. There was a strict balance applied in the development of propaganda which would serve to keep women precariously balanced between being full participants in the work force and trapped in their roles as housewives.

There was a change in the propaganda message put out as the war was coming to a close; it showed a different view of women. Women were given the idea that their service, like that of the soldiers, was coming to an end. Women were removed from ads showing war workers, and the portrayal of women as capable workers ended. The message that was put forth for women who would still need to work was that they would now be able to return to the women's work which was so much better suited for them. There was no consideration given in the propaganda or media to what women wanted to do when the war ended. Regardless of the ideas women themselves had about what they would do at the end of the war, the ideas put forth by the media propaganda had a much greater influence on society and individual women.

One of the issues women had to contend with, which had never before been encountered, was the way the women interacted with men. These relationships

changed throughout society because of women's entrance into new areas of the work force, and as a result their changing position in society. The relationships women had with men varied from woman to woman. There were men with whom the women were able to have positive relationships, ones where women felt valued. This was however not always the case as there were a nearly equal number of women who were harassed by their male coworkers. There is no one experience that can stand as an example of how all women interacted with men throughout the course of their war work. The relationships between men and women were influenced by a number of factors including the social constructions of gender, the role of the propaganda, and the life experiences of the individuals involved.

Some women were able to feel like they had positive relationships with men in general. They felt their coworkers treated them fairly and with respect, at least for their position. Women who felt their wartime experience with work to have been positive were supported by men in working with unions and companies in getting what was best for them.

There were also women who had positive relationships with the men they worked directly with. Women whose coworkers treated them well, and did not feel like they were treated differently because of their gender. Some women, like Joanne Hudlicky, were able to feel their work was valued equally while they were working in the defense industries, even if they did not believe this would have been true in non-defense work. Some women also had men who they worked with who encouraged them to stick up for themselves when they were harassed by other men in the shops. For many women there were men with whom their relationships were positive, even if this was not the case with all of their male coworkers.

Many women who had negative relationships with men were able to see that the cause of the problem was not their own. Women realized that men treated them badly because they felt threatened by them for various reasons, including their admittance into, and performance in, the workplace. This was true of some men they worked with directly as well as some supervisors who women worked under. Women were sexually harassed, with some having their jobs directly threatened if they did not perform sexual favors. Some women also faced intimidation from male coworkers. The men harassed the women in efforts to decrease the women's satisfaction while at work. Men believed the social prescriptions about women's behavior and let these beliefs affect the interactions they had with women.

Some women also had negative experiences with the men in their communities. There were men who felt that the women who worked in the shipyards and other defense industry factories were taking jobs away from men, even if they themselves didn't work with the women. Some attributed these men's attitudes to their experiences with the depression. Men of the generation who had been workers during the depression were more often concerned about the potential for losing their jobs. These men were concerned with being able to maintain their jobs, their dominant position in society, and with maintaining the status quo in the social prescriptions for women's behavior.

The relationships women had with unions were affected by the social constructions of women's behavior and beliefs of the larger society. The influence social prescriptions had on both men's and women's behavior and interactions also influenced the relationship between women and unions. The goal of unions for many years had been to organize the white skilled male workers; this had often been at the

exclusion of other groups of workers including women and minorities. There were several factors which were influential in the experiences women had with unions during World War II. While there were some women who had positive experiences with unions, there were also a significant number of women whose experiences were non-existent or negative.

The effects of the great depression left some unions feeling like they were unable to help women during World War II; this was due in part to the feelings of needing to be able to provide for their male members. The depression scar left both men and women terrified that they would not be able to work. Unions responded to this by trying to do everything possible for their male members. Even if this included refusing to help a large sector of the work force. Women simply did not fit into unions' target group of employees. Unions also had concern about what might happen to men if women were accepted, and there were to be another economic crisis. Unions believed it was more important to provide support for men in case the depression was to reoccur.

Most women who worked in the defense industries during World War II were members of one union or another. Which union the women were members of depended on where they worked and what they did. Many women became union members upon hiring; others however would join the unions to get training and job placement. Despite their increased membership over earlier times many women still did not feel they received adequate support from their unions.

Women had a variety of experiences with their unions during World War II; many women felt their experiences were very negative, however there were some women who felt their World War II experiences with unions were positive. The

majority of positive experiences women had were during the war, although it did happen, it was rarely the case that women had positive experiences at the end of the war. The social constructions of women's behavior affected how they were viewed by the unions. There was also the tendency among unions, as viewed by the women, to see them as they were portrayed by the propaganda and media; the women themselves had very little contact with the unions.

Some women felt like they were able to receive assistance from the unions when they had problems during the war. Dorothy Haener was prepared to quit her job at the Ford Bomber Plant at Willow Run because she was so unhappy with her position when her brother and other coworkers told her to go talk to the union. She was able to use the union to get a transfer to another position. She was satisfied with the outcome and felt the union had helped her when she needed it.[113] Women at a Ford plant also felt the union helped them when women were asked to leave their jobs voluntarily at the end of the war.[114] The union, in this case the United Auto Workers, told the women that they didn't have to give up their jobs. These women felt the union was able to help them to protect their legal rights.

Some women had positive experiences during the war when they were able to use the union to get jobs in the defense industries. Women were able at times to join the union and get higher, better paying positions than they had been able to get on their own. Women were also able to get trained for their work in the defense industries by becoming union members and attending union training programs. Some women would start their own local branches which were intended for women

113 O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 165.

114 Wise and Wise, 74-76

only. Women's only locals were able to work with their affiliated men's locals to the benefit of both. There were also unions where the problem of gender was not as great as in other areas. Individual women's experiences changed depending on the industry, region, and various unions. The successes in these few cases was only a small piece of what unions could have done for women, unfortunately though the greater proportion of women's experiences were not as positive.

There were many women who felt their overall experience with unions during World War II was rather negative, or non-existent. They felt they were ignored by unions, and that even if they had tried to get assistance they would not have known how to. Women believed they were union members because they were needed for the rolls, rather than because the unions believed they needed organizing. Many women's experiences were so negative that they recalled very little if anything about them. Most women believed that their experience at the end of the war was when the unions failed them. Women lost their jobs in record numbers and in very short period of time.

Some women felt that the union did not stand for them.[115] When the war ended and the soldiers started coming home many shops started letting women go arbitrarily. As Kessler Harris put it: "...they were unceremoniously let go."[116] When these women, dues paying union members, would go to the union the response they got was one of apathy. Women were told that the unions felt as though they couldn't do anything. Some women, like society, did not see the need for unions in their lives; Helen Struder was one of these women. She was a riveter/inspector at Douglas

115 Wise and Wise, 4, 17.

116 Kessler-Harris, 141.

Aircraft in California, who believed from the beginning that she was only going to be a temporary worker.[117] In reality women were meant to be only temporary workers. This was true for the unions and for the employers. Women were called to war work out of need for their labor, but once they were there they had very little contact with the structures which would today surround any unionized worker. Even during the war there was very little contact, if any, between not only women and their unions, but also between women and their employers. The unions and employers believed the propaganda and rhetoric of the government that women wanted to go home. Companies also promoted the propaganda about women's post-war desires, as was shown by the *Newsweek* advertisements. Unions in this area failed their women members because they were denied any communication or decision making power as to the circumstances of their individual situation.

There were many issues women faced with their increased entrance into the work force during World War II. Government and industry drew housewives out of their homes as the need for labor increased; when the crisis was over they sent them back. The propaganda campaign used by government and industry was so strong that women were not able to utilize all of the structures of the work world; they were simply excluded from full and equal participation. The general belief in the message being put forth by government and the media affected every aspect of women's experiences with unions, work, and men. Women had new experiences in each of these areas and the role of the social constructions of women's position in society is evident in each encounter. Women in general were not able to use their experiences with unions to better their positions, although they were able to participate in the work

117, Gluck, 192.

force in new areas. The changes however were to be temporary as most women would not be able to maintain them at war's end. Overall, women did feel that their experiences with war work and unions changed their perspective on life.

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