

# WORKING WOMEN IN(TO) RHETORICAL HISTORY

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Feminist scholars of rhetoric have long been interested in women's rhetorical interventions into civic arenas, where deliberative rhetoric on matters political has traditionally been seen as the most significant form of rhetorical performance (Campbell; Portnoy; Southard; Zaeske; Zboray and Zboray). At the same time, feminist inquiry has also been marked by a methodological imperative that continually seeks to question "what counts" as rhetoric (Glenn; Hogg, "Including"; Mattingly, "Telling"; Royster; Shaver), expanding our conceptions of where a rhetorical performance takes place, what it looks like, how it may be deployed and evaluated, and who may be a rhetor at all. This imperative elicits a welcome discomfort for feminist scholars, encouraging us to look beyond traditional arenas for evidence of women's rhetorical contexts, practices, and goals.

In *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor*, we, along with our contributing authors, shift attention from women's rhetorical engagement with civic concerns to work-related ones. In particular, we invite readers to explore how women have fought for wider work opportunities and better working conditions, how they have expanded understandings of what work is, and how they have contended with dominant perceptions of the kinds of work women may do and the kinds of workers they may be. This volume thus seeks to examine both the rhetorics that have defined and circumscribed women's work and the ways women have exercised rhetorical strategies to navigate them. Collectively, through these investigations, we attempt to gain insight on how work, labor, and professionalization are gendered via rhetorical means as well as the implications of this gendering process. We assert that drawing attention to women's rhetorical relationship to work is critical because work determines so much in people's lives. Indeed, to be able to argue for how, why, and on what terms one works is critical to human existence. Work affects one's sense of independence, quality of life, daily sustenance, individual and familial sur-

vival, intellectual engagement, personal happiness and fulfillment, innovative thinking, and entrepreneurial spirit. Furthermore, to couple questions of work with questions of gender reveals the special and significant challenges women have faced as they have attempted to understand and intervene in the conditions of their labor.

As we and our contributors take up this project, we join a growing number of researchers who have initiated a robust conversation about gender, rhetoric, and work. Scholars such as Risa Applegarth, Heather Branstetter, Jessica Enoch, David Gold and Catherine Hobbes, Jordynn Jack, Lisa Mastrangelo, Roxanne Mountford, Liz Rohan, Carolyn Skinner, Janine Solberg, and Susan Wells have considered women's rhetorical relationship to work across diverse sites of labor, as they have examined the rhetorical negotiations women have made as anthropologists, sex workers, teachers, scientists, preachers, secretaries, clerical workers, and physicians. Communication scholars such as Mary Boor Tonn and Mary E. Tiece have examined the rhetorical dynamics of women's labor activism, and feminist scholars in composition and rhetoric such as Michelle Baliff, D. Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford, Susan Miller, and Eileen E. Schell have examined the gendered constructions of both the field itself and work within it, along with providing insights for managing its complex terrain. This emergent feminist rhetorical research has been emboldened by historiographers in various fields who have long attended to women's activities in the workplace, such as Ava Baron, Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Thomas Dublin, Faye E. Dudden, Nancy Schrom Dye, Philip S. Foner, Sharon Harley and the Black Women and Work Collective, Sonia Hernández, Jacqueline Jones, Alice Kessler-Harris, Jean Marie Lutes, Rebecca Sharpless, and Lara Vapnek.

A primary goal of *Women at Work* is to add depth and breadth to this body of research. The collection includes fifteen scholarly interventions that explore a range of subjects, cultural sites, and historical moments that cover a period from the antebellum era to the World War II years, from nascent mass industrialization to mass communication. The women rhetors studied here worked as millworkers, inventors, clerks and secretaries, seamstresses, factory and farm laborers, blues singers, and star athletes. They were ex-slaves, communist leaders, photographers, and fashion magnates. They wrote newspaper and journal articles, novels and memoirs, meeting minutes and news releases, diaries and letters. They responded to representations of themselves in the popular press and government propaganda, built businesses and fought for labor rights, sought professional alliances and forged intimate friendships, lived lives private and public. The chapters herein thus add to the growing scholarship within feminist rhetorical studies that attempts to understand the

rich diversity of work that women took up from 1830 to 1950 and the arguments they made within these many contexts.

## THEORIZING WOMEN AND WORK

While *Women at Work* adds to our understandings of the kinds of work women performed and the arguments they crafted, our interest in women's work goes beyond coverage. Our main concern is to explore how work creates unique rhetorical challenges and opportunities for women worker-rhetors. In line with this concern, *Women at Work* responds explicitly to the call of Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith for feminist rhetoricians to attend more carefully to "work-related rhetorics" and to take on studies that see work "as a historically situated, rhetorically constructed, materially contingent concept" (201); for by doing so, scholars have the opportunity to "unearth woman's struggle to choose her occupation and all that that entails" (206). This struggle is of particular importance to this volume's contributing authors, as they examine how questions of class, race, sexuality, domesticity, embodiment, and religion have inflected working women's lives.

As the scholars in this volume investigate work-related rhetorics, they make another significant contribution to feminist rhetorical studies in particular and rhetorical studies writ large. Each chapter identifies and meditates on the unique rhetorical strategies women workers developed and/or contended with. Thus, the contributors here do indeed take up what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch call the "3Rs" of feminist historiography, "rescue, recovery, [and] (re)inscription" (20). Critically, though, as they work through these "Rs," they also add a "T": they theorize. In each chapter, the authors discern and name the distinct rhetorical practices deployed by the subjects under study. Readers will learn about such innovative concepts as rhetorical branding (Shaver), rhetorical emulation (VanHaitsma), rhetorical failure (Hallenbeck), exhibitionist rhetoric (Adams and Barrett-Fox), re/appropriation (Fleckenstein), epideictic embodiment (Applegarth), emotional labor (Wilde), recruitment rhetoric (Smith), and more. The theoretical frameworks and terminology these contributions offer chart new paths in rhetorical scholarship and hopefully help to propel new projects further forward, embracing Royster and Kirsch's call to "fin[d] innovative ways to engage in an exchange with [historical] women both critically and imaginatively in order to enable a more dialogic relationship between past and present" (14). For scholars as well as students interested in feminist inquiry, the chapters in *Women at Work* serve as a valuable introduction to the rhetorical strategies women workers have used and theories scholars can develop as they meditate on the interanimation of gender, rhetoric, and work.

## RHETORICAL SITES AND STRATEGIES

Though the chapters in the volume proceed chronologically, they are linked by common and overlapping themes: almost all take up concerns of visibility and voice as their subjects speak, write, labor, organize, advertise, and advocate to make themselves heard, crafting means of persuasion in the face of often-severe rhetorical constraints. The volume is near evenly split between treatments of working-class and professional-class women, considering the distinct rhetorical choices available to factory workers, educators, domestic workers, sex workers, labor activists, entertainers, athletes, teachers, office workers, entrepreneurs, and businesswomen. Regardless of their workspace or status, most of the women studied in this volume challenged, appropriated, or deployed various iterations of domestic rhetorics that have long undergirded women's discursive and embodied relationship to labor. Three chapters in particular treat the special rhetorical constraints and resources available to African American women (Wilde, Pittman, Keohane); three women's relationship to and use of technology (Hallenbeck, Fleckenstein, Greer); three entrepreneurship (Wilde, Fleckenstein, Greer); four organized labor activism (Wan, Poder, Keohane, Woods and Lucas); six various permutations of visual, spatial, and ecological rhetorics in framing women's work and agency (Hallenbeck, Fleckenstein, Adams and Barrett-Fox, Applegarth, Greer, Smith); and seven participation in male-dominated work environments or industries (Hallenbeck, Fleckenstein, Poder, Applegarth, Greer, Shaver, Smith). In total, these chapters cover a broad spectrum of action from the individual to the collective, revealing the rhetorical choices and strategies available to women in specific historical sites and spaces.

The volume opens with a little-known but key site of labor activism in the early nineteenth century, the Lowell mills, where women employees faced not only difficult industrial working conditions but also a rhetorical environment that denied the harsh realities of their working lives and posited instead that these women were happily engaging in wholesome and healthful labor. In chapter 1, "Republicanism, Religiosity, and the Rhetoric of Women's Labor Reform in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1830–1850," Amy J. Wan examines efforts by the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA) to challenge misrepresentations of their work as they advocated for labor reform. Framing their arguments "less as employee demands and more as necessities for a moral life and healthy republic," LFLRA members "both spoke against and took advantage of paternalistic attitudes toward them," asserting, for example, that their working conditions left little time for religious reflection and had dele-

terious effects on their femininity. Wan suggests that at a time when strikes, work stoppages, and other forms of direct action were largely unavailable to women workers, the LFLRA's appropriation of "gendered expectations" served as an important early reform strategy, albeit one most available to white, native-born women in an era of republican motherhood.

Much work by women is invisible, and efforts to make this work visible are often met with skepticism by audiences. In chapter 2, "From Slave to Seamstress: Elizabeth Keckley's Rhetoric of Emotional Labor," Patty Wilde details the largely invisible labor conducted by former slave and successful seamstress Elizabeth Keckley, whose memoir *Behind the Scenes* recounts her labors as a slave, working free woman, and intimate of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln. Building on Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labor, Wilde demonstrates that Keckley's labors were as much affective as physical—and reveals their enormous psychological cost. Wilde argues that as a slave, Keckley was expected to "manage" her emotional expressions, contorting her affective responses for the benefit of her oppressors. But even after her emancipation, emotional labor was still demanded of her, particularly by Lincoln, who not only frequently called on Keckley to provide emotional support but also expected her to silently sacrifice her own emotional and financial needs while doing so. Wilde suggests that one reason *Behind the Scenes* was considered so controversial in its day was that Keckley violated social norms that obliged women, particularly women of color, to bear the weight of their affective efforts in silence. Wilde's chapter makes clear that Keckley's memoir is both a testament to her resistance and an important document revealing the often-invisible labor women are frequently called on to do.

As the United States continued to industrialize after the Civil War, women increasingly began to work for wages outside the home, particularly young unmarried women, who had few guides for understanding and negotiating workplace norms. In chapter 3, "Louisa May Alcott's *Work*: A New True Working Woman," Nancy Myers examines a surprisingly understudied intervention by Alcott into this emerging rhetorical environment. Set in large part outside the domestic environment commonly associated with Alcott, *Work* draws in part on the author's own experiences and depicts women in various work environments. *Work* follows the life of its protagonist, Christie Devon, across a series of occupations from domestic servant and governess to entrepreneur and philanthropist, as Devon seeks both financial independence and meaningful work in a world that often denies these to women. The novel, argues Myers, serves a model of rhetorical invention, first through Alcott's construction of a "New True Woman" character, who negotiates competing models of womanhood by "blend[ing] the social ideals of the True Woman's

feminine domesticity with the New Woman's desire for financial independence and self-fulfillment," and, second, through Christie's own inventive strategies of "resourcefulness and reflection," which she successfully deploys in a variety of workplace situations, ultimately gaining her success on her own terms. The novel, suggests Myers, serves as a rhetorical guide for Alcott's nineteenth-century readers, "demonstrat[ing] how and why young middle-class women might respond to various workplace situations in ways that conduct books, encyclopedias, and memoirs might not."

As the nineteenth century progressed, teaching increasingly became a "woman's" profession. Though the gendered nature of teaching has been the subject of much study, relatively little attention has been given to teacher professional networks or the homosocial relationships that have often sustained them. In chapter 4, "Opulent Friendships, Rhetorical Emulation, and Belletristic Instruction at Leache-Wood Seminary," Pamela VanHaitsma examines these relationships, considering in particular how the romantic friendship of two Southern white women, Irene Leache and Anna Wood, inflected their teaching at the Leache-Wood Seminary—a school they created and directed. The self-described "opulent" friendship of these teachers was animated by an erotic of passionate admiration, intellectual stimulation, and rhetorical emulation. VanHaitsma argues that this emulation in particular not only fueled their relationship but also informed their work as teachers of rhetoric—and inspired their students. Through belletristic instruction and their own behavioral example, they taught young women to emulate rhetorical models of what was "beautiful" and "best." VanHaitsma's study reveals the complex interworkings of these two teachers' friendship and pedagogy, and in so doing, her examination has profound implications for the study of same-sex romantic friendships, asking readers to consider both the "power dynamics" within and the shifting terrain of these relationships in response to the rise of modern understandings of sexuality. "As the erotic and sexual dimensions of some romantic friendships were acknowledged and pathologized," VanHaitsma asks, "how did these broader cultural shifts alter the intimate and professional opportunities available to women teachers who were opulent friends?"

Much feminist rhetorical scholarship has focused on women's rhetorical successes. But as Stacey Sheriff has suggested, it is equally important to study instances of rhetorical failure. In chapter 5, "Resituating Rhetorical Failure: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Metallurgist Carrie Everson," Sarah Hallenbeck offers just such an examination: though Everson developed an innovative and later widely used process for ore extraction, in her day, she was seen as a failure. Indeed, when other mining engineers redeveloped her method after her death, they initially did so "apparently without knowledge of her [prior]

efforts.” Complicating studies that focus primarily on the rhetor as agent, Hallenbeck brings together actor-network theory and Thomas Rickert’s concept of ambient rhetorics to retheorize the concept of rhetorical failure, situating it as emerging not from a rhetor’s body or by rhetorical efforts alone, but from a complex and dynamic network of rhetorics that all affect a rhetor’s reception over time. Hallenbeck asserts that together, these rhetorics contribute to a “heterogeneous symbolic confluence” of which the rhetor is only one part. By positing rhetorical failure in this way, Hallenbeck’s study provides insight into the case of Everson; it also enables scholars to undertake more nuanced accounts of women’s rhetorical forays into professions and workplaces, even when they are coded as failure.

Women entering new professional fields must often contend with rhetorical constructions that mark those fields as masculine; this was particularly a problem for women professional photographers at the turn of the twentieth century. In chapter 6, “Professional Proof: Arguing for Women Photographers at the Fin de Siècle,” Kristie S. Fleckenstein focuses attention on pioneering famed photojournalist and camera portraitist Frances Benjamin Johnston, examining the verbal and visual strategies Johnston deployed to assert the professional status and artistic merit of women photographers. Against cultural conventions that more commonly placed women in front of rather than behind the camera and saw women’s photographic endeavors as inconsequential, Johnston persuaded audiences that women could work as professional photographers. Taking a step further, she also asserted that women could be “outstanding” photographers, able to be “artists even as they use[d] their artistry for financial gain.” Analyzing two rhetorical performances—an 1897 photo-essay and a 1900 international photographic exhibition of 142 prints from 31 women contributors that Johnston curated—Fleckenstein argues that, in the former, Johnston used a rhetorical strategy of “re/appropriation,” in which she recodes “professional gender identities for both men and women,” and, in the latter, a strategy of “visual embodiment,” by which she “makes physically evident the artistic gifts of American women photographers.” Both efforts combined visual photographs and verbal discourse to make a case for women’s artistic and professional photographic talent. Fleckenstein’s study advances not only our rhetorical understanding of these strategies “but also our understanding of gender and professionalism on the cusp of the modern age.”

Much scholarship on women’s labor activism has focused on the public rhetorical performances of well-known labor leaders. In chapter 7, “Making Use of the Mundane: The Women’s Trade Union League’s Fight to Give Working Women a Voice,” Marybeth Poder turns to a less-visible site of rhetorical production and especially invention, the everyday meeting minutes and

other pedestrian internal documents of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), a "cross-class alliance of women industrial workers and middle-class reformers" that sought to improve the former's working conditions by enabling them to articulate their concerns and fight for greater equality in the workplace. Analyzing the league's internal documents, Poder finds that the WTUL fostered three particular habits of mind: "encouraging women to lead in sex-segregated groups, speak for themselves in mixed-gender settings, and avail themselves of the expertise of middle-class women WTUL leaders to act as their liaisons with groups outside of the working class." In revealing how this "politically weaker group us[ed] mundane texts to subvert a powerful, male system of communication," Poder underscores the importance of studying the everyday and suggests how seemingly unremarkable discursive efforts within work environments can offer muted and marginalized rhetors a voice.

Not all women's work is considered equal—or equally worthy of study. In chapter 8, "Figuring Vice: Sex, Women, and Work in Kate Waller Barrett's Exhibitionist Rhetoric," Heather Brook Adams and Jason Barrett-Fox study Progressive Era leader Kate Waller Barrett's little-examined advocacy on behalf of prostitutes. In 1914, Barrett contributed a series of articles to the *Washington Times* that responded to the proposed closure of the city's red-light district. Barrett used this series to contend with both public images of prostitutes as fallen women and a public discourse on prostitution that bordered on the prurient, seeking instead to encourage readers to "recogniz[e] prostitution as an economic, vocational, and gendered reality of contemporary urban life." Barrett does so, they argue, by deploying what they term "exhibitionist" rhetoric, a form of "deliberative *phantasia*" (see Hawhee), in which vivid imagery is deployed to "prim[e] audiences" for decision making. Barrett's exhibitionist rhetoric in this series has two main components: "metaphorical excursions that transport readers to a distant time and/or place," helping them to see parallels between their own lives and those of their less-fortunate sisters; and realistic accounts of contemporary city life that prompt readers to discern "the economic and spatial interconnectedness of its residents, including prostitutes living and working primarily in vice districts." By calling attention to the networked relationships among her readers and prostitutes in the city they shared, Barrett was able "to advocate for a new way of seeing prostitutes as humans—as women at work."

Professional women in the early twentieth century—like professional women today—faced conflicting advice about how to navigate workplaces that often demand that women "transcend" their gendered embodiment while relentlessly focusing on that embodiment at the same time. In chapter 9, "Bodies of Praise: Epideictic Figures in the *Independent Woman*," Risa Ap-



plegarth investigates the rhetorical function of bodily anecdotes about women in the workplace found in the *Independent Woman*, an important though little-studied early twentieth-century feminist periodical. Applegarth characterizes these anecdotes as instances of “embodied epideictic” rhetoric: “textual depictions of embodied behavior that invite or articulate an attitude of praise or blame,” which function in the journal as depictions of “praiseworthy and blameworthy performances by women professional workers.” Studying the periodical’s news articles, advice columns, editorials, fiction, and other features, Applegarth finds that despite the *Independent Woman’s* strong support of women’s rights, its representation of “the ideal professional woman” served to discipline women’s behavior, “invit[ing] women professionals to take up an attitude of attentiveness—even vigilance—toward their dress, hair, demeanor, and overall appearance” and forestalling opportunities to challenge workplace norms. By attending to embodied epideictic rhetoric’s power, Applegarth offers a valuable interpretive framework for scholars seeking to study material rhetorics and women’s embodied experiences.

For African American women negotiating race as well as gender constraints, the black press served as an important vehicle for conveying discourses of labor. In chapter 10, “To Labor with Dignity: Alberta Hunter’s Respectability and Resistance Rhetoric,” Coretta M. Pittman examines the rhetorical interventions of the classic blues singer as she crafted her own message regarding the labor conditions of African American performers. From the late 1920s to the late 1940s, Hunter voiced her opinions in various black-owned newspapers as well as the communist *Daily Worker*. Leveraging her hard-earned status at a time when employment opportunities for African American women were limited and the stakes for speaking out against discrimination were high, Hunter “used her writings and her voice whenever she could and to whomever would listen to change her life and the lives of the black masses.” Pittman argues that Hunter did so by employing two critical strategies: rhetorics of respectability and resistance. Hunter saw no conflict in these approaches. Rather, as Pittman asserts, Hunter “believed deeply that respect and resistance practiced by herself and members of her racial group and advocated emphatically by her rhetorical approaches would yield results that were right and just.”

While feminist scholars might tend to focus on the woman worker rather than the manager or business owner, Jane Greer offers a complex and insightful reading of such a figure. In chapter 11, “Profiting from Rhetorical Domesticity: Fashion Magnate Nell Donnelly Reed’s Discursive Seams, 1916–1956,” Greer examines the rhetorical strategies employed by this important entrepreneur as she created a work environment and public image for her business.

Though a savvy business owner, Reed downplayed her acumen and ambition and couched her success in feminine terms: defining her business success as a happy accident emerging from traditional domestic interest and casting her factory as a domestic space. Through these methods, Reed earned fierce loyalty from her largely female staff. Greer calls Reed's overarching strategy "rhetorical domesticity," arguing that it provided her with "a rich set of rhetorical resources that . . . helped her employees, her business associates, and the wider public to make sense of her entrepreneurial activities." Greer also argues, though, that while Reed's rhetoric was successful in many contexts, it limited her ability to effectively respond when her company was challenged by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union in the 1930s. Limited by her invocation of rhetorical domesticity, Reed turned to her husband to stand in as a proxy to fight the union's organizing efforts. Greer's study thus "reveals the complex innovations and compromises required of early women entrepreneurs" as they sought to situate their work within a public discourse that cast entrepreneurship in masculine terms.

Chapter 12 examines another type of entrepreneurship, that of a pioneering twentieth-century woman athlete. In "Babe Didrikson Zaharias's Rhetorical Branding: When It's Not Enough to Be the World's Greatest Woman Athlete," Lisa Shaver studies Zaharias, a gold medalist at the 1932 Olympic Games, a champion golfer in the 1940s and 1950s, and a founding member of the Ladies Professional Golf Association. Though widely celebrated in her day—and later recognized by the Associated Press and *Sports Illustrated* as the greatest woman athlete of the twentieth century—Zaharias faced a rhetorical environment that cast women athletes as "freakish" and an economic environment that offered few paths to financial independence. To succeed, writes Shaver, "Zaharias had to demonstrate that she was a gifted athlete while also demonstrating that she was still a woman." Shaver argues that Zaharias did so by developing an inventional strategy she terms "rhetorical branding." Drawing on a wide range of archival sources including popular press articles by and about Zaharias, media interviews, and Zaharias's autobiography, Shaver demonstrates how Zaharias "leverag[ed] the topic of gender, emphasiz[ed] her folksy charm, and us[ed] other attributes beyond her athletic talent" to place herself before the public eye in such a way that she could earn a living as a professional athlete.

No image better illustrates the dominant perceptions of women's wartime work than that found in the Rosie the Riveter poster created for the Pittsburgh Westinghouse plant, in which Rosie flexes her bicep and declares "We can do it!" In chapter 13, "In Rosie's Shadow: World War II Recruitment and Women's Work in Public Memory," Michelle Smith troubles the popular reception

of this image as a feminist icon, contextualizing it via a detailed study of other contemporary—and more prevalent—depictions of women workers found in posters sponsored by the Office of War Information (OWI). Smith finds that these posters collectively promulgate what she terms “recruitment rhetoric,” a form of constitutive rhetoric that “entic[es] certain kinds of individuals to particular careers by presenting them as naturally suited for that work.” Smith argues that despite their ostensible call to women to join the workplace and the war effort, the recruitment rhetoric crafted via these OWI posters deployed “conventional appeals articulating the change in women’s roles as temporary and reasserting women’s rightful and natural place in the home.” Ultimately, these posters reveal more about “how male government and industry leaders perceived women’s work than . . . how women experienced and understood that work.” Smith’s examination discerns the power of iconic visual images and cautions us against accepting them as representative, whether they are ostensibly limiting or liberating. As she notes, “No one image . . . can accurately represent the complexities, contradictions, and diversity of women’s work during World War II or any other period.”

While the World War II period certainly cast light on questions regarding white middle-class women’s work, the specific concerns of working conditions for black women often went ignored before, during, and indeed after the war. In chapter 14, “Other Peoples’ Kitchens’: Invisible Labor and Militant Voice during the Early Cold War,” Jennifer Keohane examines Claudia Jones’s 1949 essay “An End to the Neglect of the Negro Woman!” In this essay, Jones, the highest-ranking black woman in the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), attempts to convince the party to theorize black women’s role in the labor movement and to organize them into the party. Introducing the concept of “triple oppression”—and anticipating the term “intersectionality” by some forty years—Jones demonstrates how “race, class, and gender overlapped to produce interlocking forms of oppression” in both the workplace and the home. To be taken seriously by the party, however, Jones had to mask her own embodied subjectivity and instead appropriate “the conventions of CPUSA theoretical discourse: the passive voice, distance from her object of study, and militant tone.” Keohane argues for Jones as a “proto-intersectional” rhetor (see Gines), who by making visible the labor of black women was able to “push the boundaries of CPUSA class critique” and effect change in party attitudes toward African American women and strategies for organizing them.

Our final chapter returns to a familiar topic, labor action by garment workers. In 1949, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union—former foe of Nell Donnelly Reed (see Greer, chapter 11)—sent labor representative Geraldine Gordon to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula to organize workers at an

H. W. Gossard factory. These workers—white, local, working-class women who called themselves “Gossard Girls”—manufactured high-end undergarments and faced a rhetorical situation similar to that of members of the LFLRA in Lowell a century before (see Wan, chapter 1): how to contend with rhetorical constructions of gender that limited their ability to argue for themselves as workers. In chapter 15, “Gossard Girls Are Good Girls: Labor Activism at a 1949 Garment Factory Strike,” Carly S. Woods and Kristen Lucas examine how the Gossard Girls crafted their strike strategy and mobilized a four-month-long strike. When a local newspaper attacked their “good-girl image” and “attempted to discredit their labor efforts with accusations of anti-Americanism and communism,” the Gossard Girls “sought to defuse such accusations by positioning themselves as harmless housewives and girls-next-door” and by identifying “more sympathetic publications” to present their own accounts of their struggle. In casting themselves as conforming to “class and gender expectations” and engaging in playful public performance, the women devised “the cover they needed to express more pointed arguments about gender and labor.” Though their examination, Woods and Lucas thus argue for an expanded sense of what it could mean to be “good girls” engaged in labor activism.

## **REFLECTING ON LABOR**

It is difficult to compile a volume on work without reflecting on one’s own labor practices and decision making. Collaborative work is not an inherently feminist practice but it is a significant feminist practice, and to some degree still a marked one within the academy, especially as there is no universally understood standard for signaling work practices across disciplines. In the humanities, moreover, where collaboration has been traditionally less common than in the sciences and the social sciences, there is also lingering anxiety about the “assigning [of] credit,” despite guidelines by professional bodies suggesting focusing on “the quality of the results” (Modern Language Association 56–57). In 1987, the Conference on College Composition and Communication released a position statement, “Scholarship in Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans, and Department Chairs,” arguing that “collaborative work . . . should be respected as a legitimate and appropriate form of professional scholarly activity” (Conference on College Composition); a 2015 commemorative symposium in *College Composition and Communication* suggests that we still have some way to go. We agree with Mya Poe that “collaboration is an asset” (“Symposium” 510) and are troubled by David Jolliffe’s concern that “established scholars in the field can write together . . . but up-and-coming

scholars, not so much” (“Symposium” 529). Given its potential to allow complex projects beyond the ability of any one scholar, to forge interdisciplinary and intergenerational alliances, and foster mentoring, collaboration should be encouraged, not seen as a limited privilege.

To signal collaboration, some feminist scholars alternate name order between works (e.g., Ede/Lunsford, Lunsford/Ede); others follow alphabetical order; others place the junior author first. Here, as editors, we have swapped name order on the title page and this introductory chapter. We do so to signal that the editing of this volume represents a true and equal collaboration between Jess and David, our labor not so much divided as doubled up on. In responding to our contributors we read, discussed, and commented on each chapter draft—frequently commenting on each other’s comments—before jointly offering summary feedback. In all our writing, from the original call for papers to correspondence with referees to this introduction, we took multiple turns drafting throughout, frequently overwriting, revising, editing, and trimming each other’s sentences. As Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly have often said of their own collaborations, we are “both responsible for all of the work” (Roskelly; see also Benson 128). Of course, too, the collaborative work and achievement of this collection extends to and has relied upon the contributing authors. Their excellent scholarship both refined the direction of this volume and diversified its claims. In total, then, *Women at Work* signals the efforts of seventeen feminist scholars thinking together about the relationships among gender, rhetoric, and work.

We, David and Jess, want to note too our responsibility for any editorial shortcomings, and indeed we can name a few here at the outset. Even as we take pride in the diversity and quality of scholarship collected herein, we are aware of its lacunae. There is room for much more research in the field that considers the experiences of Latina, Chicana, Asian, LGBTQ, rural, and religious workers; the lives of working mothers, workers with disabilities, and other understudied workers; work in the home, field, community, and other less visible sites of labor; work in wider historical and global contexts; and more. It is our hope that future scholars will be inspired by this volume to fill these gaps—and others we cannot yet imagine.

Finally, as we conclude this introduction, we return to the binary we opened with to trouble and perhaps even undo it. The glimpse we provide here of the chapters within *Women at Work* makes clear that work and citizenship are neither separate nor opposed. Workers’ rights and their claims to the occupations of their choice are undoubtedly of civic import. Decisions made within political arenas certainly affect working people’s lives. However, by focusing attention on work in this volume, we hope that readers gain a

more nuanced sense of the various ways this duality can emerge and unfold. By bringing questions of gender into the equation, we hope readers can see how gender critically affects the ways work and citizenship merge and diverge, both historically and today.