

Femininity in Focus: Representations of Women's Wage Labour in Canadian Newspapers, 1939-1945

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Abstract

This article explores the significance of femininity in framing women's wage labour in Canadian newspapers during the Second World War. Women's participation in the paid workforce more than doubled in Canada during the war, creating a situation that could challenge the sexual division of labour that traditionally placed women in the home and men in the workforce. Through content analysis, this article explores coverage of women's wage labour in commercial and labour newspapers during the war, examining articles and photos in the general news, editorial and women's sections, as applicable. This enabled an understanding of how gender roles were constructed, given the public-sphere roles that the Canadian government called on women to assume during the war. Applying a feminist media studies theoretical lens, this paper argues that, despite the massive mobilization, social necessity and political economic impact of women's wage work, newspapers prioritized gender, not labour. It considers the ways that photographic coverage, discursive frames and story topics in the news coverage foregrounded femininity and subordinated and objectified female labourers. In the end, wartime newspapers remained a site where the sexual division of labour was structurally and ideologically entrenched, resulting in coverage of women's wage labour that reinforced and perpetuated gender stereotypes.

Keywords: feminist media studies, gender roles, wage labour, media representations of women, Second World War, Canada.

Introduction

On September 10, 1939, Canada entered the Second World War. Men enlisted for active duty overseas, creating labour shortages on the home front and a need for the federal government to mobilize women to join the war effort. Women's labour force participation in Canada more than doubled throughout the war such that, by 1944, a woman filled one out of every three jobs (Final Report 1944: 8).

Women offered the only solution to the nation's labour shortages throughout the war (History of the Wartime Activities of the Department of Labour, Part I: Employment of Women ¹: 29). This critical need for "womanpower," as then Canadian Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King called it, created a situation that had potential to challenge the sexual division of labour which operates according to a male-female dichotomy and hierarchy that keeps women in the private sphere of the home and out of the public-sphere workforce (1942: 5). A sexual division of labour is essential to maintaining a patriarchal social order and any deterioration of this division, such as women's wartime entry into the traditionally-male paid workforce, inherently threatens the patriarchal status quo.

During the Second World War, government leaders found themselves in a predicament—to recruit women into the workforce without disrupting this patriarchal norm. In 1942, King declared in a radio address calling women into the workforce that "[i]t must, however, not be forgotten that a total war effort is needed to protect everything we hold dear, including the family and family life; and that the employment of women is essential to a total war effort" (Ibid. 9). The government communicated the critical need for women to 'back the attack' by taking up employment, while simultaneously reminding or, rather, reassuring Canadians of women's traditional connection to the home. The influx of women into the wartime workforce created a tug-of-war between traditional notions of a woman's relationship to the home and the simultaneous need for women's workforce participation.

¹ Referred to as "Wartime History of the Employment of Women" hereafter.

The Second World War is an ideal historical period to study news media portrayals of women in non-traditional roles—such as wage labourer—that challenged the sexual division of labour and the gendered norms it protects. As main instruments of public opinion, newspapers had the potential to play a key role in bringing about a change in public opinion toward women and, more specifically, women’s paid work (Chafe 1972, 1991). However, there exists limited scholarship and, thus, a limited view, on how Canadian media generally and (even less so) news media specifically represented women’s wage labour during the Second World War. Some Canadian studies have relied on advertisements, fiction or consumer-oriented women’s magazines as objects of study or, if researching news sources specifically, the empirical evidence includes individual newspaper articles taken as representative of broader trends, but none of these latter studies are based on a systematic, quantitative content analysis.² This presents a methodological and knowledge gap in the literature.

Through content analysis, this paper explores coverage of women’s wage labour in commercial and labour newspapers during the war period, examining articles and photos in the general news, editorial and women’s sections, as applicable.³ Specifically, it explores the significance of femininity in framing women’s wartime wage labour in newspapers. Applying a feminist media studies theoretical lens, the paper argues that despite the massive mobilization, social necessity, and political economic impact of women’s wage work, newspapers prioritized gender, not labour, emphasizing “femininity” over the more significant labour impact of the massive mobilization

² See Battaglini 1996; Forestell 1989; Keshen 1997, 2004; Korinek 1996; Nash 1982; Pierson 1977, 1986; Prentice et al. 1988; Smith 2008.

³ This article is drawn from the author’s doctoral dissertation, “Women in the Margins: Media Representations of Women’s Labour in the Canadian Press, 1939-1945,” which analyzed representations of women’s labour (domestic, volunteer and wage, with a focus on wage labour) in the commercial and alterative (labour) press. This dissertation is cited in the list of references (see Moniz 2012). An earlier version of this paper was also published in official conference proceedings of the 2014 II International Conference on Gender and Communication at the University of Seville, Spain (see Moniz 2014 in the list of references).

of female workers. This article considers the ways that photographic coverage, discursive frames and story topics in news coverage foregrounded femininity and subordinated and objectified female labourers. In the end, wartime newspapers remained a site where the sexual division of labour was structurally and ideologically entrenched, resulting in coverage of women's wage labour that reinforced and perpetuated gender stereotypes.

Historical Context

To contextualize the discussion, this section reviews two areas of historical background: women's wartime participation in the waged workforce during the Second World War, and the role of propaganda in shaping the relationship between the Canadian government and news media during the war.

An Overview of Women's Participation in the Wartime Workforce

When the Government of Canada declared war in 1939, Canadians were still recovering from the Great Depression, with about 900,000 unemployed (Prentice et al. 1988: 297; Pierson 1986: 9). To take inventory of its "manpower" for military service and work in wartime industries, the Canadian government held a National Registration in August 1940 of all single men, aged 19 to 45, and male widowers without children in the same age group (Canada Year Book 1942: 98). The National Registration of 1940 did not include women. As historian and feminist scholar Ruth Roach Pierson (1986) noted, in its mobilization of the workforce, the Canadian government viewed women as "a large labour reserve" to be drawn into the paid workforce only as the male "labour pool dried up" (22). This happened in 1942 when demand for war production and in the armed forces left industry "almost entirely dependent upon women workers as a means for expanding employment" (Wartime History of Employment of Women: 80). In May 1942, the federal government created a Women's Division of the National Selective Service (NSS), with the recruitment of women into the labour force as its primary mandate (Ibid. 6).

The labour pool from which to draw these women totalled approximately three million just before the war began—two million married women and one million single (Final Report 1944: 7). The government first recruited young, single women, but by 1943, rising war production needs meant extending recruitment to married women for part-time work and eventually full-time work, and then to married women with children for part-time work and finally full-time work (Pierson 1986: 22).

When war broke out, about 600,000 women worked for wages (Wartime History of Employment of Women: 8). This represented about 17 per cent of the labour force (Pierson 1986: 9). By November 1943, the number of working women doubled to 1.2 million and, of this, 260,000 were employed in war industry (Final Report 1944: 7; Prentice et al. 1988: 298). This total figure does not include part-time workers or the 800,000 women working on farms (Pierson 1986: 9). In the end, 600,000 women (who were not working pre-war) joined the full-time workforce. Furthermore, only about 85,000 of these women were unemployed and looking for work just before the war began, which means that over 500,000 new female workers were “drawn into the ranks of the employed” by late 1943 (Final Report 1944: 8).

With the need for ‘total manpower’ subsiding near the end of the war, however, government strategies and propaganda surfaced to return married women to the home and single women back into traditional occupations such as domestic service, nursing and teaching (Pierson 1986: 23, 61). Job preference went to returning servicemen, many war industries employing women shut down, and government incentives encouraging women to work outside the home, such as the Income War Tax Act and the Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement, terminated at the end of the war (Nash 1982; Pierson 1986). According to the government, accommodations made for working women’s needs were “temporary measures, to remain in effect only so long as the nation was at war” (Pierson 1986: 22-23). By 1946, one year after the war, the female participation rate in the labour force had dropped to 25.3 per cent from a wartime peak of approximately 33.5 per cent in 1944, with many women having little

choice but to disappear back into the home (Armstrong and Armstrong 2010: 18; Keshen 1997: 246).

Women's Workforce Participation and Wartime Propaganda

During the Second World War, the Canadian government “formally entered the propaganda business” by establishing its first full-scale wartime ‘information’ agency or, rather, propaganda agency with the launch of the Bureau of Public Information (1939-1942) and the Wartime Information Board (which succeeded the former from 1942 to 1945) (Young 1978: 1). The government’s ‘information’ strategy to mobilize women into industry involved “recruiting campaigns, planned and publicized to attract women into needed work” (Wartime History of the Employment of Women: 6). The Department of National War Services (which included the Bureau of Public Information/Wartime Information Board and the National Film Board of Canada) served as “the government’s cheerleader,” ensuring “high morale and patriotic fervour” via propaganda that made its way into wartime motion pictures, government news reels, radio broadcasts, magazines and newspapers (“Democracy at War” 2003).

Government campaigns recruiting women into the paid workforce appealed to “patriotic duty and the necessity to make sacrifices for the nation at war. Women’s *obligation* to work in wartime was the major theme, not women’s right to work” (Pierson 1986: 23). For instance, the National Film Board produced a number of short wartime and post-war films related to women’s paid labour. According to M. Teresa Nash (1982), reflected in these films were four major “strategies of interpretation” used by the Canadian government to “explain women’s involvement in the war effort” (82). The films communicated (1) that patriotism was “the major motivating factor which led women to work outside the home during the Second World War;” (2) that the sexual division of labour remained intact, with jobs held by women positioned as secondary and less important than the jobs held by men; (3) that “women would not lose their femininity by their involvement in war work;” and (4) that a woman’s ‘proper place’ remained in the home (Ibid. 85, 107). As Nash argued, these strategies “offer[ed] reassurance that the

patriarchal ideology was not seriously threatened during the war, and ... reinforce[d] that ideology after the war was over" (Ibid. 85).

News media were an important part of the government's mobilization efforts: "The co-operation of the press, radio, magazines, National Film Board and other media of publicity was to be sought and kept active in the interests of the recruiting and employment of women" (Wartime History of the Day Care of Children: 8). By 1942, when war labour needs were most acute, the federal government consulted with publishers and radio directors to "impress [upon them] the immediate need for presenting war industries to women as a patriotic and acceptable type of work" (Wartime History of the Employment of Women: 9). Magazine editors were asked to devote an issue to war employment of women, and pictures of women working on machines and of war workers in uniform as well as articles on women's accomplishments appeared in magazines (Ibid. 9). Urban newspapers publicized the employment 'crisis,' publishing news releases from the NSS about the labour problems as well as articles that localized the issue and appealed to women (Ibid. 9). The Canadian Press and the British United Press even suggested topics for NSS news releases (Ibid. 9). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and independent local stations were "made available most generously for presentation of the problems concerning the employment of women"—for instance, by nationally broadcasting a series of dramatic plays written for the NSS around the theme of 'women war workers' (Ibid. 9). Local press representatives joined local recruitment campaign committees set up by the NSS Women's Division (Ibid. 21). Cooperation between the press and the government was the wartime norm, as media took on the function of building domestic support for government activities, including women's recruitment: "'Propaganda' was not a term of opprobrium when it was patriotic to 'do your bit' for the war effort" (Lang 1999: 231).⁴

⁴ For research that suggests a general consistency between government and media agendas during war, see Baroody 1998; Boyd-Barrett 2004; Carruthers 2000; Covert 2001; Hallin 1997; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Keshen 2004; Lasswell 1972; McLaughlin 2002; Robinson 2004; Ward et al. 2006; and Yang 2000.

Women and War through a Feminist Media Studies Lens

Feminist media theory considers how gender relations shape journalistic practices and institutions and how gender discourses are encoded in media texts, arguing that both the “production and content of media are gendered” (McQuail 2010: 123; Carter, Branston and Allen 1998; van Zoonen 1994, 1998).

Gendered realities are embedded in news work practices, where male ownership and control of media remains the norm and where women have remained historically and comparatively invisible or marginalized—relegated to the women’s pages and limited from progressing professionally by the persistent ‘glass ceiling’ (Carter, Branston and Allen 1998). Historically, topics in the news reflect the gendered nature of news journalism, with ‘masculine’ topics including politics, crime, finance and war and ‘feminine’ topics revolving around the “Four F’s—family, food, fashion and furnishings” (van Zoonen 1998: 36). This reflects a hierarchical division between ‘hard’ news (serious and important) to be covered by male journalists for a male readership, and ‘soft’ news (trivial and insignificant) to be reported by female journalists for a female readership. Paul Rutherford (1978) argued that despite the range of subjects and global reach of the women’s pages in Canada, it was “predicated upon the assumption that there was a woman’s sphere with a routine and a rhythm quite distinct from the concerns of society at large,” reinforcing the “Victorian myth of the separate natures of the sexes” (60). The distinction between the perceived news needs of men and news needs of women was a product of the naturally “different and commonly held situation [of men and women] in the social world” (Ibid. 181).

Similarly, research on representations of women in mainstream media reflects in large part the work of feminist media scholars who argue that news media use gendered frames in news reporting that tend to undermine women or represent them in stereotypical and marginalized ways, symbolically reinforcing women’s subordinate status and preserving the male-ordered status

quo.⁵ According to Liesbet van Zoonen (1995), media representations of gender—masculinity and femininity—are expressions of dominant gender discourse and reflect a dichotomous, binary and hierarchical definition of gender. She characterizes representations of women with the terms “underrepresentation, family context, low-status jobs, no authority, no power, related to others, passive, emotional, dependent, submissive and indecisive,” and she qualifies representations of men with the terms ‘overrepresentation,’ ‘work context,’ ‘high-status positions,’ ‘authority,’ ‘powerful,’ ‘individual,’ ‘active,’ ‘rational,’ ‘independent,’ ‘resistant’ and ‘resolute’ (320).

These gendered divisions are heightened in times of war.⁶ Elisabeth Klaus and Susanne Kassel (2005) described the symbolic construction of the male-female dichotomy as ‘gender logic’ and argued that it connects war and the military with traditional constructs of masculinity: “bravery, aggressiveness, power, rationality, physical prowess and discipline” (339). Femininity stands in stark opposition. One result is that news media have largely and historically excluded women from war narratives, and when women are depicted, it is in stereotypical ways that conform to patriarchal definitions of women—women as objects and symbols—and that serve propagandistic ends, boosting support for war.⁷

Filling in the Gaps

The Second World War brought women out of the home and into the paid workforce (and overseas to war zones too), challenging the battlefield-home front, public-private, masculine-feminine divide that upholds a patriarchal social system and, within that, the war system. Canadian scholarship on women’s participation in the paid workforce during the Second World War feeds into this larger discussion about

⁵ For supporting scholarship, see Barker-Plummer and Boaz 2005; Byerly and Ross 1999, 2006; Kumar 2004; Lemish 2005; Nash 1982; Smith 2008; van Zoonen 1994, 1998.

⁶ For supporting scholarship, see Barker-Plummer and Boaz 2005; Goldstein 2001; Halonen 1999; Hunt and Rygiel 2006, Kumar 2004; Lemish 2005; and Thompson et al. 2007.

⁷ For supporting literature, see Barker-Plummer and Boaz 2005, De Pauw 1998, Halonen 1999, Kumar 2004, Keshen 2004, Lemish 2005, and Smith 2008.

the war's impact on the social construction of gender and the status of Canadian women in wartime society. This debate gained momentum with Pierson's 1986 book, *They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, where she explores (by analyzing wartime files of the Women's Division of the NSS) the "context of women's wartime employment and ... the degree to which [government] attitudes towards women's proper role in society changed during the war" (1977: 125). Pierson concludes that while women crossed sex/gender boundaries during the Second World War, the "war's slight yet disquieting reconstruction of womanhood in the direction of equality with men was scrapped for a full-skirted and redomesticated post-war model" (1986: 220).

Ensuing Canadian studies have considered popular media coverage of women's labour in analyzing the question of the war's impact on the social construction of gender and the status of women in wartime society, often similarly concluding that "pre-war definitions of femininity, [which] exclude[ed] women from paid labour, were reinforced throughout the war despite propaganda praising and encouraging women's participation in the workforce (Smith and Wakewich 1999:74).⁸ Many of these studies have relied on advertisements, fiction, factory newsletters, general interest magazines, or consumer-oriented women's magazines as objects of study. The limited research that considers newspapers specifically suggests a more progressive view of the war's impact on social change for women, with empirical evidence based on individual newspaper articles as one among other primary media sources analyzed. To this end, Jeffrey Keshen (1997, 2004) argued that, although newspapers and magazines conveyed restrictive stereotypes about women during the Second World War, they also relayed "inspirational accounts of female strength and skill in numerous unprecedented roles outside the domestic sphere" and that, in the end, too much had happened during the war years for life to return to the pre-war status quo (153).

⁸ See Smith and Wakewich 1999, p. 74, for an overview of Canadian studies on popular media representations of women's war work. See also Forestell 1989; Keshen 1997, 2004; Korinek 1996; Nash 1982; Pierson 1977, 1986; Prentice et al. 1988; and Smith 2008.

This paper seeks to extend the dialogue by systematically analyzing newspaper coverage since, among the existing contributions, there is no longitudinal content analysis of Canadian newspaper representations of women's wage labour. This results in a narrow view of how Canadian newspapers negotiated gendered ideals of femininity amid a shifting social and political economic landscape that demanded women step beyond traditional gendered roles.

Methodology

In response to this methodological and knowledge gap, research comprised a content analysis of representations of women's wage labour in newspapers published in Canada during the Second World War, analyzed through a feminist media studies lens to understand the social construction of gender in news of women's wage work.⁹

The stratified random sample for the content analysis comprised 342 newspaper issues published from September 10, 1939 to September 2, 1945: 216 issues of the commercial press and 126 issues of the labour press. In three commercial newspapers (*Toronto Daily Star*, Ontario; *The Hamilton Spectator*, Ontario; and *The Halifax Herald*, Nova Scotia), I surveyed the general news pages, editorials and women's pages. In three independent labour newspapers (*The Labour Leader*, Toronto, Ontario; *The Labor News*, Hamilton, Ontario; and *The Citizen*, Halifax, Nova Scotia), I surveyed general news and editorials (as these newspapers did not publish a women's section). The *Census of Canada 1941* ranked Toronto, Hamilton and Halifax among the nation's major urban centres, along

⁹ As a limitation, this article does not focus on issues of race and social class, given that the newspapers analyzed generally focused on the experience of the (largely) white, middle-class women recruited en masse into the military-industrial complex during the war (Copp 1974:44; Palmer 1992). This leaves the experiences of women of different races and women on the low end of the socioeconomic ladder—many of whom were already employed—absent in the news and in this article, even though women did participate in the workforce prior to the wartime recruitment, particularly in the two decades prior and particularly among the urban working class (Copp 1974: 44; Palmer 1992).

with Vancouver and Montreal.¹⁰ Analyzing both newspaper types can, first, determine whether the invisibility and marginalization of women in commercial news media, as posited by feminist media theory, persisted in mainstream newspaper coverage on women's wartime wage labour and, second, determine if it existed in the labour press which had an explicit mandate to cover issues related to labour, labourers and trade unionism (as indicated by the mastheads in the labour newspapers analyzed) and which, as a form of alternative "critical media," might be more apt to question and challenge dominant social relations, including gendered relations (Sandoval and Fuchs 2010).

Across the sample, the study looked at content by newspaper type (commercial and labour) and, within each, coded for the variables *placement*, *form*, *discursive framing* and *story topic*. The analytical categories for each break down as follows:

For *placement*, the categories comprised the general news, women's pages and editorials, as applicable to each newspaper type. This enabled an analysis of whether the hard-soft news divide persisted in coverage of women's wage labour, with 'hard news' found in general news and editorials and 'soft news' as the domain of the women's pages.

For *form*, the study considered whether coverage fit into the category 'article' or 'photo' to understand 'ways of seeing' female labourers and their work. Although text (words) and photos both represent 'ways of seeing,' photographic coverage appeals to the eye and, applying John Berger's (1972) argument about art, women are treated as objects of the male gaze and men are the spectators surveying women's femininity.

Discursive framing involved analyzing the language used to describe or 'frame' female workers and their labour. This enabled an understanding of whether newspapers upheld or challenged

¹⁰ As a limitation, the scope of this study reflects the nature of historical evidence available. I did not include Vancouver and Montreal in the sample because there are no independent labour newspapers available in these two cities for comparative analysis with their commercial counterparts.

gendered constructions of women and femininity. The analytical categories comprised: 'labour,' 'work(er),' 'womanpower,' 'service,' 'temporary' (words that emphasized the wartime-limited nature of women's place in the workforce), 'gendered descriptors' (language that emphasized gender and/or femininity), 'other' and 'not applicable.'¹¹

Analyzing *story topic* offered a way to understand what news media deemed 'newsworthy' about women's wage labour. The coding categories comprised 'hiring and/or recruitment,' 'first woman to ...' story framework (reporting on a 'first' for women in the wartime workforce), 'firing' (women being fired, laid off from or encouraged to leave their employment), 'government policy and/or action,' 'labour strikes,' 'performance' (women's aptitude or proficiency on the job), 'circumstances of employment' (conditions or issues surrounding women's wage work such as housing shortages, wages and trade unionism), and 'other' subjects to include coverage that may fall outside these categories.¹²

Archival research, largely of original government documents and reports, further contextualized or supported the data obtained in the content analysis.

Results: Women's Wage Labour through a Feminized Lens

Despite women's massive mobilization into the workforce and the necessity of their labour, newspaper coverage prioritized gender, not labour. The newspapers analyzed consistently portrayed employed women in private-sphere, gendered roles, regardless of their public role as wage labourers and the impact of their labour. This trend

¹¹ These discursive frames were developed through empirical evidence and supporting secondary research. Before embarking on the full-scale content analysis of the three commercial papers and the three labour papers, a pilot study was conducted on the sample of Toronto newspapers to test the time range, sample size, coding schedule and clarity of coding guidelines. This pilot study resulted in a co-authored paper presentation at the 2011 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences (see Moniz and Mazepa 2011 cited in the reference list).

¹² This list evolved from primary and secondary research on the historical context of women's participation in the wartime workforce as well as a shortlist of common topics that emerged from an earlier pilot study (Moniz and Mazepa 2011).

persisted in the labour press as much as in the commercial press, which demonstrates that women's massive mobilization into the wartime workforce was not enough to challenge the gendered representations entrenched in mainstream mass media, nor was it enough to prompt the labour newspapers (which, as a working-class press, inherently crossed class lines) to cross gender lines by questioning gendered relations and advocating for female labourers. This may reflect in part the reality that labour has historically been conceived of as "a largely male enterprise" and, hence, the "male norm" or men's experiences as labourers were presumed "the universal standard" (Palmer 2010: 211; Baron 1991: 10; Cuthbertson 2012). This left 'labour talk' to men, which meant that the discussion became largely about men. This, in turn, may reflect a persistent 'glass ceiling' in the production of labour newspapers too. As Wendy Cuthbertson (2012) noted: "Women, in spite of all the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] pronouncements of inclusiveness and equality, were not well presented at the CIO's senior levels, despite the union's organizing thousands of [Canadian] women workers during the war" (95-96).¹³ This filtered down into the union press and, as this study revealed, the independent labour newspapers analyzed whose mastheads listed only males.

Joan Sangster (1995, 2008) argued that women's ambition was "socially constructed, shaped by what was seen as possible and probable for young women, by the economic and social structure of the local community and by the imperatives of the family economy" (1995: 251; 2008). Females are, thus, wives, mothers and homemakers, while males are labourers and breadwinners, and this sexual division of labour dominates and persists because it is entrenched structurally and ideologically. While many Canadian women did remain on the home front during the Second World War, millions did not remain in the home. Many traded the 'hearth and

¹³ See Wendy Cuthbertson's *Labour Goes to War: The CIO and the Construction of a New Social Order, 1939-45* (2012) for an overview of the role of the labour press during the Second World War (see pp. 82-86), including with respect to female workers (see pp. 92-97). While much of this discussion focuses on and cites union presses specifically (while this research focuses on the independent labour press), the broader context is of interest.

home' for slacks and salaries and also served overseas with the Canadian armed services, rendering the workforce and the battlefield no longer an exclusively-male domain. Despite this, wartime newspapers remained a site where the sexual division of labour persisted, resulting in coverage of women's wage labour that reinforced and perpetuated gender stereotypes. We see this in photographic depictions, discursive framing and story topics—all of which foregrounded femininity, subordinated and objectified female labourers, and confined them to gendered roles.

Through the Male Gaze: Gendering Story Forms

Curtailing the challenge that women's wage labour posed to traditional public-private divisions, news coverage objectified female labourers, placing them on visual display—literally via photographic coverage¹⁴ and most prominently for male readers in the general news pages of the commercial press.¹⁵ In the commercial newspapers analyzed, the general news pages housed more than double the photographic coverage on women's wage labour than did the women's pages—69 and 31 per cent, respectively.¹⁶ As Carolyn Byerly and Karen Ross (2006) argued, most mainstream media production has been oriented to a male audience. Berger echoed this in his 1972 book, *Ways of Seeing*, asserting that women are treated as objects of the male gaze. Van Zoonen (1998) agreed, noting that “the dominant visual economy is still organized along traditional gender lines: men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at” (103). Furthermore, this “traditional structure” persists because of

¹⁴ In the commercial press (N=121), coverage divided into 69 per cent articles and 31 per cent photos. In the labour press (N=62), coverage divided into 84 per cent articles and 16 per cent photos. The fact that coverage on women's wage labour took the form of articles foremost (over photos) in both the commercial and labour press is expected, given that newspapers generally contain more text than photos.

¹⁵ By default, photographic coverage in the labour press occurred in the general news pages because the labour press comprised only an editorial and a general news section (no women's pages), and editorials did not include photos. Coverage on women's wage labour in the general news pages of the labour press (N=62) comprised 84 per cent articles and 16 per cent photos.

¹⁶ This is out of 121 total articles on women's wage labour in the commercial newspapers analyzed.

the “patriarchal will to maintain power”—a will that is especially pertinent in times of war (van Zoonen 1998: 103; Goldstein 2001; Halonen 1999).

The series of ‘War Worker’ beauty pageants commonplace throughout the Second World War offers an example of this. These contests and the resulting news coverage objectified women—literally put their physicality “on parade” (“Red-Headed,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 1942: 3). What appeared on the surface as a public celebration of proud ‘women workers’ representing their companies and proud companies supporting their ‘women workers’ was actually just another way to marginalize women as wage labourers by reducing them to a spectacle—hyper-feminine objects for the male gaze—and embodiments of wartime propaganda. Sarah Banet-Weiser (1999) described the beauty pageant as a “highly visible performance of gender, where the disciplinary practices that construct women as feminine are palpable, on display, and positioned as unproblematically desirable” (3). Told alongside news from the battlefield, the *Toronto Daily Star’s* near full-page news coverage of the 1942 Miss War Worker and Miss Toronto pageants heralded the winners and the runners up as role models for all female workers. One article, “Miss War Worker Makes Own Beauty,” describes Miss War Worker herself, Dorothy Linham, as “a pretty 19-year-old brunette” and knitter-turned-assembly line inspector at Research Enterprises Limited who “‘eats right’ to keep healthy” and, thereby, productive on the job (3). On the side, Linham also operated her own private beauty parlour to “make herself pretty,” as the article proudly quoted her mother saying (Ibid. 3). This “beauty queen” cooks too and “looks after the house” and her mother at the same time as she works to drive the war effort forward (“Red-Headed” 1942: 3; “Miss War Worker” 1942: 3).

Banet-Weiser further explained beauty pageants as “a profoundly political arena, in the sense that the presentation and reinvention of femininity that takes place on the beauty pageant stage produces political subjects” (1999: 3). Politically, the War Worker pageants and the ensuing news coverage subsumed all employed women under a single, common identity—feminine, patriotic war

workers who worked outside the home solely and explicitly to further their nation's 'total war' effort. Smith and Wakewich (1999) argued, through their study of representations of women in an Ontario factory newsletter, that the "celebration of women's decorative value in the workplace" (in their case via front-page pin-ups) served the "wartime purpose of maintaining men's morale on both the home and battle fronts" (86-87) and, more broadly, it "functioned as a mechanism for the ideological continuity of women's prescribed position as objects to be looked at by men" and "icons of the private interests and obligations for which soldiers were fighting" (88). This mirrors Joshua Goldstein's (2001) argument that, in war, women serve to reinforce soldiers' masculinity in various ways, including through their embodiment of 'home' because "men's participation in combat requires the psychological construction of a nurturing 'feminine' domain ..., a place to return to, or at least to die trying to protect—a place called home or normal or peacetime" (301). Newspaper representations of women's wage labour during the Second World War offered no exception.

Femininity First: Gendering News Discourse

Working in tandem with the visual objectification of women in the news was discourse that foregrounded female gender roles (and its corresponding focus on femininity) in coverage of female wage earners and their labour, and this was consistent when analyzing discursive framing across the commercial and labour press as well as within the general news, editorials and women's pages of the commercial press and within the general news and editorials of the labour press.

As Table 1 illustrates, a common way to refer to female workers in the commercial and labour newspapers was to either use the term 'worker' or 'workers' with the feminizing adjective 'woman' qualifying it—as in "woman workers"—or then to use another gendered descriptor that emphasized femininity and reinforced stereotypical roles for women ("Reception," *Halifax Herald*). For example, with respect to gendered descriptors, news coverage referred to female labourers as "women wage-earners" (general

news, labour press), “girl recruits” (general news, commercial press), “plane factory beauties” (women’s pages, commercial press) and “war-working mothers” (general news) (“State Control,” *Labour Leader*; “Girls from West,” *Toronto Daily Star* 1942: 2; “Plane Factory,” *Toronto Daily Star* 1942: 17; “Quebec and Ontario Families,” *Toronto Daily Star* 1943: 6). As Table 1 also shows, women were rarely called “labourers” and their work was rarely called “labour.”

DISCURSIVE FRAMING	Commercial Press (N=136)	Labour Press (N=65)
Labour(er)	0%	2%
[Woman] Worker/[Woman's] Work	21%	37%
Womanpower	4%	3%
Service	10%	9%
Temporary [Labour(ers)]	13%	17%
Gendered Descriptors	21%	17%
Other	8%	6%
Not Applicable	23%	9%

Table 1: Discursive Framing, Distribution by Newspaper Type, Commercial and Labour Press.

Instead, newspaper coverage of women’s wage labour emphasized, as Smith and Wakewich (1999) found in the context of an Ontario factory newsletter analyzed, “the so-called naturalness of women’s domestic and familial roles and decorative duties” (96). Coverage reminded readers that female wage workers were still women—that is, essentially feminine—and that the workplace duties they were called on to perform were merely an extension of their domestic roles. The article “Do War Job, Home Job, Too; Women Busy and Keep Fit: Many Women Doing Men’s Work and Their Own Along With It,” published in the women’s pages of the Apr. 27, 1943 issue of the *Toronto Daily Star*, further illustrates this in its discussion of how women handled their ‘double-duty’ with domestic and wage labour. The article begins: “The war workers who make me want to stand up and cheer are the women who are successfully putting in full time at some essential industry in addition to running their homes and bringing up their children. Having to do double work isn’t bothering these women. It is making them spruce up! All they want to know is

how to keep fit and keep their figures” (24). Here, the news reassured readers, once again, that women who entered the labour force would not lose their femininity to the toils of the double duty of home and the workforce. In essence, women would remain pretty to look at—in spite of the factory slacks and head scarves.

The emphasis on femininity in wartime society was further reflected in the feminizing of traditionally-male industrial tasks performed by women during the Second World War—in government, in industry and in the press. Government and industry organized workers into a hierarchy of skilled male labour and unskilled female labour and positioned ‘natural’ feminine attributes that complemented homemaking as ideal for the industrial work women were called on to do.¹⁷ Newspapers followed suit, with coverage that aligned ‘feminine’ attributes with the repetitive or operational tasks women were needed to perform in manufacturing industries. As one front-page news item that ran on November 27, 1942 in *The Labor News*, Hamilton, stated: “This war job needs the feminine touch in many operations where deftness and delicate precision are of prime importance” (“Lace and Frills”). This ultimately devalued women’s paid work and served as a way to accommodate women in the factory “without upsetting the traditional assumptions governing the sexual division of labour and the established patterns of patriarchal authority” (Nash 1982: 82).

Extending this connection between women’s domestic and workplace roles, language in commercial and labour newspapers also emphasized the temporary nature of women’s presence in the workforce, as Table 1 demonstrates. Moreover, this emphasis was also consistent across the news, editorial and women’s pages of the commercial press (as Table 2 demonstrates) and the news and editorials of the labour press (as Table 3 demonstrates). News discourse positioned working women as patriotic “replacements” for men whose temporary and tenuous presence in the workforce was second tier to that of men, even though many women worked in traditionally male-dominated industries and in jobs typically

¹⁷ See Kealey, Frances and Sangster 1996; Klausen 1998; Sangster 2010; Stephen 2000; and Sugiman 1994.

performed by men, such as in shipyards, factories and munitions plants (“Women Replacement,” *Labor News*). Yet, women were not allowed to fully appropriate their workplace roles. News coverage reminded readers that women were always still doing “men’s jobs” and that women had no inherent right to this domain (“A Man Talks to Women,” 1940, *Toronto Daily Star*). This focus was especially prominent in editorials, and this is telling because, as Elisabeth Le (2010) explained, “each editorial defines at a given time how media construct their socio-cultural environment and where they position themselves in it” (xi). In this view, media play a political role through their editorials, with editorials serving as “official expressions of a media position on an issue” (Ibid. 3).

DISCURSIVE FRAMING	General News (N=80)	Women’s Pages (N=42)	Editorials (N=8)
Labour(er)	0%	0%	0%
[Woman] Worker/[Woman’s] Work	24%	19%	25%
Womanpower	2%	7%	0%
Service	12.5%	7%	0%
Temporary [Labour(ers)]	12.5%	10%	37.5%
Gendered Descriptors	19%	24%	37.5%
Other	9%	7%	0%
Not Applicable	21%	26%	0%

Table 2: Discursive Framing, Distribution by Placement of Coverage, Commercial Press.

DISCURSIVE FRAMING	General News (N=61)	Editorials (N=4)
Labour(er)	2%	0%
[Woman] Worker/[Woman’s] Work	38%	25%
Womanpower	3%	0%
Service	10%	0%
Temporary [Labour(ers)]	16%	25%
Gendered Descriptors	16%	25%
Other	7%	0%
Not Applicable	8%	25%

Table 3: Discursive Framing, Distribution by Placement of Coverage, Labour Press.

Women's supposed sphere was the family home, and so they never strayed far from it in news and editorials about their wartime work. This may reflect the fact that women's recruitment into the military-industrial complex was met with government concern that it might lead to a breakdown of the sexual division of labour. As Nash (1982) noted, the Canadian government explained women's place in the paid workforce during the war (and prepared the way for their dismissal from it near its end) by emphasizing the importance of a woman's role as a homemaker. Again, this preserved traditional conceptions of womanhood at a time when women were breaking out of them like never before. Given the influence and control that the government had over the media in wartime, news coverage followed suit, reaffirming that women were still feminine and domestic and that the workforce was still male domain. Women's participation in the paid workforce did not threaten the dominant patriarchal ideals that perpetuate a sexual division of labour.

Framing War Work: Gendering Story Topics

Story topics on women's wage work reflected the gendered nature of news content and production. With respect to content, women's performance on the job was a notable topic, particularly in the commercial newspapers (as Table 4 shows) and particularly within its women's pages, at a proportion of 45 per cent of topics analyzed (as Table 5 shows).

TOPIC	Commercial Press (N=136)	Labour Press (N=65)
Hiring and/or Recruitment	27%	15%
First Woman To ...	3%	2%
Firing	9%	9%
Government Policy and/or Action	18%	35%
Labour Strikes	0%	2%
Performance	26%	12%
Circumstances of Employment	6%	19%
Other	11%	6%

Table 4: Topics, Distribution by Newspaper Type – Commercial and Labour Press.

TOPIC	General News (N=81)	Women's Pages (N=40)	Editorials (N=8)
Hiring and/or Recruitment	36%	17.5%	0%
First Woman To ...	4%	2.5%	0%
Firing	11%	7.5%	0%
Government Policy and/or Action	17%	10%	37.5%
Labour Strikes	0%	0%	0%
Performance	18%	45%	25%
Circumstances of Employment	4%	2.5%	25%
Other	10%	15%	12.5%

Table 5: Topics, Distribution by Placement of Coverage, Commercial Press.

In terms of performance, the women's pages ran stories about women's double duty with work and home life, their need to maintain health for better industrial production, workplace absenteeism and neglect, gossip and emotion at work, and women's workplace strengths with an eye to likely post-war employment opportunities for women in traditional areas such as youth education. For example, one column that appeared regularly in the women's pages of the *Toronto Daily Star*, "A Man Talks to Women," criticized women's emotional behaviour in the workplace in its December 13, 1943 write-up. The columnist, George Antheil, scolded women's petty behaviour (namely their gossiping) and their inability to separate their work and home life as detrimental to workplace morale and, more importantly, to their own productivity at work. This, Antheil chastised, ultimately hindered war production and the war effort. He wrote:

You take your home to work with you, and that is a bad emotion for your efficiency. You are easily hurt when you think people are slighting you [e.g. of breaks] when maybe you are merely too busy to stop [working]. You are deeply hurt because the boss scolded you for a mistake and you harbour a grudge. Men are conditioned to work with each other, to take orders from bosses, to see things of which they disapprove but ... their emotions are trained to not interfere on the job. (23)

This column plays on stereotypical characteristics associated with femininity, including women's overly emotional 'nature' and frivolousness. Furthermore, this offers a literal example of male infiltration in and influence on the content of the women's pages, given the sex of the columnist.

The story topics analyzed also reinforce the hard-soft news divide in journalism and, with it, the second-tier status of women and their journalism in the profession. For instance, as Table 5 demonstrates, in the commercial press, the women's pages did not discuss 'hard news,' such as government policy and/or action or the circumstances surrounding women's employment (such as their wages, for example), in a meaningful way—at least not to the extent that the editorials, which were written by the men heading the newspapers, did. As Tables 5 and 6 illustrate, editorials in both the commercial and labour press, respectively, focused on government policies and related actions surrounding women's wage labour, particularly as it concerned topics surrounding working mothers (such as the Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement). This only further defined women labourers in terms of traditional notions of motherhood. The general news pages (written largely by men and for men) of the commercial and labour press alike also emphasized women's mobilization ("recruitment and/or hiring") into the paid workforce—the main priority of the government and, following from it, industry with respect to women during the war. As such, the politics of labour and other 'hard news' angles, including the circumstances surrounding women's employment (such as wages and unionism) remained male domain in the press.

TOPIC	General News (N=61)	Editorials (N=4)
Hiring and/or Recruitment	16%	0%
First Woman To ...	2%	0%
Firing	10%	0%
Government Policy and/or Action	36%	25%
Labour Strikes	2%	0%
Performance	11%	25%
Circumstances of Employment	16%	50%
Other	7%	0%

Table 6: Topics, Distribution by Placement of Coverage, Labour Press.

Final Thoughts

This paper examined representations of women's wage labour in Canadian newspapers during the Second World War. A content analysis of the general news, women's pages and editorials of commercial and labour newspapers (as applicable to each newspaper type) revealed a consistent trend across representations of female labourers and their wartime wage work—that 'gender' and its associated qualities of femininity were prioritized in the news above the labour impact of the massive mobilization of female workers. Via photographic coverage, discursive frames and story topics, the newspapers analyzed repeated the Canadian government's wartime rhetoric communicating that the sexual division of labour remained intact, that war work would not strip women of their femininity, and that a woman's 'proper' place was still in the home. In the end, gendered ideals about women and femininity served as a filter through which to communicate news of women's wage labour, resulting in news coverage that minimized and marginalized women's workforce participation.

As Carolyn Kitch (2001) argued, journalists have told stories in a way that "treat women as supporting rather than primary actors," even though women have played key roles in these stories (27). This argument takes on particular relevance when thinking about the Canadian women who worked for wages during the Second World War and the quality of news coverage this generated. Even

though more women joined the labour force than ever before in Canadian history, news coverage did not reflect the magnitude or political economic and social significance of women's wartime wage labour. But, just because women were marginalized in the newspapers analyzed, this does not mean that women were not part of Canada's war story. Future research can strive to capture more progressive coverage of women's wartime experience as labourers in Canada by analyzing other types of news coverage such as sources geared to working women or other working-class publications. For these scholars, this paper has demonstrated the significance of gender and, specifically, femininity for understanding how news media covered women's wage labour during the Second World War. This paper has also illuminated how women's wage labour, in fact, served as a provocation for historical gendered, public-private divisions of labour.

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