



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

SARAH VAN VUGT

MA (York University, 2008)

BA (York University, 2007)

**“Beauty on the Job: Visual Representation, Bodies, and Canada’s
Women War Workers, 1939-1945”**

Department of History

Monday, August 29, 2016

9:00 A.M.

University Centre

Room A207a

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Lynne Marks, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Rachel Cleves, Department of History, UVic (Member)

Dr. Annalee Lepp, Department of Gender Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

Dr. Helga Hallfrimsdottier, Department of Sociology, UVic (Additional Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Patrizia Gentile, Department of History, Sociology and Canadian Studies, Carleton University

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Anita Prest, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes visual representations of Canadian women war workers during the Second World War, examining the intersections of labour, gender, beauty culture, bodies, media, consumer culture, advertising, class, whiteness, and sexuality featured in these images. It argues that without considering each of these themes, it is impossible to fully understand wartime representations of women workers. In examining these intersections, the dissertation highlights the power of visual representations and demonstrates the key roles of beauty culture and heterosexuality in munitions plants. By comparing images of women war workers in nationally-circulated magazines and advertisements, locally-produced newsletters from three southern Ontario war plants, archival photos, and newspaper coverage of the Miss War Worker beauty contest, this study shows that the beautiful woman war worker was a visual icon who symbolized the tensions, worries, and hopes around labour, beauty, and femininity, in wartime as well as in the postwar period, when war workers' presumed next step into white motherhood was of particular importance to the national project. Women workers were constantly encouraged and pressured to engage with beauty culture and participate in self-fashioning. Probing the relationship between how war workers were depicted and what they experienced points to the power of images as well as the opportunities women had to exercise agency by pushing back against visual ideals as well as by emulating them.