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Women's Entrance Into the Fire Department: A Theory of Collaboration and Crisis

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**WOMEN'S ENTRANCE INTO THE FIRE DEPARTMENT:
A THEORY OF COLLABORATION AND CRISIS**

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN'S ENTRANCE INTO THE FIRE DEPARTMENT: A THEORY OF COLLABORATION AND CRISIS

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This dissertation builds on recent feminist rhetorical scholarship of women's entrance into the workplace by considering women's fire department contributions across the twentieth century, from ladies auxiliaries, to volunteer firefighting, to career firefighting, taking up the call to examine "larger histories of gender" to explore re/gendering in different times and places of professions, labor, and workspaces (Hallenback and Smith 201-202). Expanding Lindal Buchanan's theory of collaboration by bringing in sociology research on crisis, I offer a framework for understanding gendering and women's movement into and out of foreground fire department service: during the crisis of fire, if there are insufficient responders, gender roles flex and women are welcomed into the "man's work" of firefighting, at least briefly until the crisis is resolved. This model explains women's acceptance into temporary and volunteer firefighting positions, and the continued resistance to women as career firefighters; in the career fire department, staffed by full time employees, there are always enough responders, and so gendering is rigid. The career fire department continues to be characterized by gender antithesis, which "continually figure[s] men's bodies as strong and women's bodies as weak" (Jack 290). Women have continued to move forward, however, gaining and maintaining careers through transferring a range of literacy practices into the fire department, and eventually building collaborative networks with each other.

Viewing women's workplace experiences through the interaction of gendering, collaboration, and crisis creates a rich approach applicable across professions. A quick survey suggests this framework would be productive for theorizing women's entrance into professions during World War 1 and 2, as seen in research by Jordynn Jack, Jessica Enoch, and in the edited collection *Women and Rhetoric between the Wars* by Ann George, Elizabeth Weiser, and Janet Zepernick. Additionally, by taking a "long view", this project recovers and re-values fire department ladies auxiliaries and contributes to feminist rhetorical studies of working women, a current gap in scholarly knowledge. The lens of collaboration and crisis of women's workplace contributions reveals the history of complexities in re/gendering a profession, as well as providing a way to look forward.

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CHAPTER I

**COLLABORATION AND CRISIS: AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S FIRE DEPARTMENT
PARTICIPATION ACROSS THE 20TH CENTURY**

Firefighting has long been considered a prototypically masculine profession, requiring bravery, strength, and stoicism. In the United States, this popular conception reaches back at least to the 1600s when men joined exclusive volunteer social groups to patrol their communities at all hours, watching for smoke; the wood-based construction materials of the era made buildings particularly vulnerable. Fires were extinguished through laborious “bucket brigades” and later, in the 1700s, hand-pulled manually-pumped water engines. By the mid-1800s, newspaper accounts made firefighters into heroes, and Currier and Ives began circulating iconic images of the “American fireman” rescuing the damsel in distress, like the one below; Figure 1 by Currier and Ives, entitled “American Fireman: Prompt to the Rescue,” which shows a firefighter carrying an unconscious young woman from a room filled with smoke and fire. The fire was a crisis that demanded a response, and the assumption was that the responder would be a man. Firefighting has long been associated with masculinity through its value of rationality, physical dominance in manual labor, the control of nature, and competition (R. Cooper; Hall et al.; Pacholok; Simpson; Tracy and Scott; Yarnal et al.). Images like that of Currier and Ives have reified this firefighter stereotype and kept it alive even today.



Figure 1. "The American Fireman: Prompt to the Rescue," 1858 (Currier & Ives)

Despite the persistent gendering of firefighting as "men's work," women were essential to fire department work as well: a close look shows that women were always there. Community protection has been a family project for most of our country's history, especially in more rural areas, with particular skills and knowledge passed down from generation to generation (Simpson 17). For much of the twentieth century, where my work is focused, this family participation has been characterized by fathers and sons contributing as firefighters in the foreground, and mothers and daughters contributing in support roles in the background. Women entered the fire department through collaboration with men,

often working together harmoniously through rhetorical performance that mirrored traditional gender roles. I focus on women's fire department service by examining their backgrounded collaborative roles in ladies auxiliary organizations, and then charting their movement into foreground volunteer firefighting positions in the mid century, closing with their struggle to gain paid firefighting careers near the century's end¹.

Women's first fire department roles were as members of department ladies auxiliaries, originally comprised of firefighter wives, where they built up department *ethos* through fundraising and community networking, but also by helping at the scene of the fire, providing drinks, food, first aid, and firefighting assistance when needed. Such auxiliaries were especially important for supporting volunteer fire departments, which had less external funding than the career fire departments². Women were always there, ready to step in; they were prepared through their regular presence and observation of the equipment and strategies. Eventually when the emergency required more bodies to respond, women answered, transitioning from background auxiliary roles into foreground firefighting roles. During World War 2, for example, when the "man shortage" posed a serious threat to community safety, women were welcomed into firefighting roles. Lorena Ann Olmstead reported to the field's technical publication, *Fire Engineering*, on this topic in March 1942, recounting the success of her town's women volunteer firefighters: "Any day

¹ I do not include "combined" fire departments in my study, which are comprised of volunteer and career firefighters, given the disparate nature of those departments; it would be difficult to identify patterns of women's participation across these departments, which is the goal of this project.

² Ladies auxiliaries were most commonly founded to assist volunteer fire departments, though some career fire departments had auxiliaries too. Over time, ladies auxiliaries have dissolved (more on this later), especially from career fire departments. Now they primarily exist for volunteer fire departments, and the membership is generally open to people beyond firefighter wives, though auxiliaries remain majority women.

in the year, the fire department siren may send forth its call. When that happens, the women drop whatever they are doing, whether it is the weekly washing, baking a pie for dinner, or cleaning the house” (Olmstead). Otherwise engaged in conventional women’s work, by this account, these women volunteers were ready at a moment’s notice when they were needed. In the moment of crisis, gender norms flexed as local safety superseded gender role maintenance in the community’s priorities. Women stepped into the foreground to extinguish the fire, then stepped back once the crisis was resolved.

Women gradually crafted their own *ethos* in firefighting by demonstrating their capabilities, and were increasingly accepted into volunteer firefighting positions in the latter half of the century, performing the same work as men firefighters during staffing shortages. Originally just meant to “fill the gap” while men were at work or away, over time women began volunteering during all hours, performing the same work as men, alongside men. Some of these volunteer fire departments had formal shifts, where the volunteers would come into the station to wait for a 9-1-1 call, but other volunteer departments relied on any available bodies to drop whatever they were doing to respond, like described in Olmstead’s account above; in addition to volunteering as a firefighter, that person may have obligations at work or at home that must be immediately set aside when the call goes out. The town bell or siren that Olmstead mentions was replaced by a pager or a radio in the latter part of the century, but this model still exists. It requires communal prioritization of emergency response, as regular local activity comes to a halt while the crisis is addressed; it is a mutual agreement to uphold community safety over business, home life, and conventional gender roles.

It appears that without such a threat to the community, the status quo gendering persists, and the Currier-and-Ives conventionally masculine firefighter is still the norm. Many communities with volunteer firefighters, usually in more rural areas, had exigence to move away from such gender rigidity because they needed more firefighting bodies, regardless of gender, to be safe. Communities with career firefighters, usually in more urban areas, do not have the same exigence; fire does not pose the same threat of devastation to the community, since in these areas, there are paid bodies standing by at all hours to respond. Instead of firefighting as a community commitment, firefighting is someone else's job. There is no mutual agreement, no communal shift in priorities to accept women. These firefighting jobs are competitive, with more applicants than available positions, and so the status quo default preference for hiring men prevails. Since the 1980s, fire departments have faced lawsuits citing discriminatory hiring practices, testing procedures, firehouse sleeping arrangements, and more. The generally close-knit cooperative model of the volunteer fire department seems alien.

It is clear that there is no steady trajectory, no grand narrative, that will adequately explain women's entrance into the fire department. Instead, local efforts provided for community safety based on available resources, and the impact that has on fire department gendering. I propose that to best understand women's fire department participation across the twentieth century, it should be viewed through the lenses of collaboration and crisis. Collaboration illuminates the ways men and women worked together to accomplish fire department goals, maintaining department *ethos*. In the early twentieth century, men and women collaborated in the fire department as husband-firefighters and wife-ladies auxiliary members; these cooperative efforts by firefighter families kept the community

safe and allowed women to enter exclusive departmental spaces from which they were otherwise barred. By focusing on the process of collaboration, the ways that men and women share work to maintain community safety becomes visible, most notably the changes in collaborative roles as women step into direct firefighting positions when more bodies were needed. The fire is the crisis: when the fire will likely overwhelm available resources, there is pressure to take dramatic action to reduce risk. The collaborative systems already in place allowed women to smoothly transition between background and foreground roles, to step into frontline firefighting and then step back into ladies auxiliary work. The crisis provided the exigence to adopt gender role fluidity, and the whole community adjusted, from the fire department, to the volunteering families, to the local residents.

While the volunteer fire department adopted a model of gender fluidity, the career fire department has continued to be gender rigid. My findings suggest that this is can be understood through close consideration of collaboration and crisis: in volunteer fire departments that rely on family and community collaboration, crisis motivates transformation of collaborative roles, at least temporarily, regardless of conventional gendering; in career fire departments, the fire was still a crisis, but there were already adequate designated resources and paid male bodies for responding. Women had decreased access and acceptance to career firefighting positions because there was no need for more bodies to step in, unlike with volunteer firefighting positions. Gendering remained rigid in the career fire department; without the exigence of crisis, the collaborative spectrum along which women could slide between background and foreground roles, was not available.

This is not to say that women do not make progress in acquiring desirable fire department positions. As women stepped in and out of firefighting roles based on the crisis of the fire, their successful performance challenged assumptions that firefighting was inherently masculine and slowly paved the way for women's movement forward. Even if those early ladies auxiliary members only acted as firefighters temporarily, or briefly, it made an impact. Their success created a ripple effect, felt by the women after them, and the women after those women, continuing on to the present. They have shown that firefighter masculinity is a rhetorical performance, meaning that the profession is discursively constructed as "men's work." While it has been constructed in this way again and again, the same rhetorical gendering that has excluded women has also created slippage; if gender is constructed, it can be constructed differently, as seen in volunteer fire department communities. Olmstead's account from 1942 shows that even the conventionally feminine housewife can become a capable firefighter. Rhetorically regendering firefighting is a long and slow project, but this dissertation demonstrates that with great persistence and endurance, the most male-dominated and masculine-gendered institutions can be unsettled. I give a more complete framework of collaboration and crisis later in the chapter, and then I thread it throughout my following chapters, charting the choreography as women balance gender roles and workplace opportunities in the fire department through the twentieth century.

As a former woman firefighter myself, I come to this project with insights and access to the internal workings of the fire department, which enables me to create a fuller sketch of women's experiences in that field. I focus on women in east coast mid-Atlantic fire departments, from North Carolina to New York, for three reasons: my geographic location

in Virginia, regional similarities in these fire departments, and my own familiarity as a former firefighter in Maryland. I look at historical records from these states to create a roughly chronological sketch of women's navigation of gendered barriers entering the fire department first as ladies auxiliary members early in the century, then as temporary and volunteer firefighters starting in the middle of the century, and finally as career firefighters in the last quarter of the century. In doing so, I engage in scholarly conversations centering around gender, particularly in collaboration, feminist rhetorical historiography, and women in the workplace. Next, I outline these conversations and my contributions, followed by my theoretical framework, closing this chapter with an overview of the proceeding chapters.

Guiding Conversations

This project centers on questions of gender: people as gendered, work as gendered, obstacles as gendered, spaces as gendered. I examine how women gain entrance to male-dominated fire department spaces, overcome barriers to perform "men's work", and maintain firefighting careers despite exclusionary standards. My study intersects with three scholarly conversations within feminist rhetorics in which I engage as I attempt to answer these questions: feminist historiography, women in the workplace, and collaboration. Each of these conversations is rooted in the study of gender from a feminist rhetorical perspective. Gender is a culturally constructed role imposed upon a body based on perceptions of its sex; neither gender nor sex manifest as binary, though dominant narratives render them as such, man versus woman, male versus female. As a social category, gender is often understood as a performance, the embodied effect of living according to prevailing norms and niceties. Judith Butler describes gender as "an identity

tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (140). Through this repetition, gender binaries become so deeply embedded that they become naturalized: there are boys’ toys and girls’ toys, men’s clothing and women’s clothing, masculine work and feminine work. These distinctions rely on public standards of appropriateness, rather than the particular needs and abilities of that individual body.

Gender is culturally constructed, and it is constructed to privilege men over women. Gender is not just about assigning roles; it is about power. Since Western antiquity, gender has positioned men as unquestionably superior. Leading scientists and philosophers over the past 2000 years “have argued that women not only differ from men but are not as equipped mentally and physically to function in the spheres of society in which men predominate” (Epstein 2). The devaluing of women and their contributions has resulted in incomplete records and the loss of women’s histories, absences that feminist rhetoricians conducting historiographical studies are attempting to address. Recent feminist rhetorical scholarship has turned a critical eye to gendering and regendering throughout history, considering exclusionary biases within the rhetorical tradition (Glenn), the canon of delivery (Buchanan *Regendering*), the schoolhouse (Enoch “A Woman’s Place”), the factory (Jack “Acts”), the pulpit (Mountford) and sports (Hallenbeck). Consistently by maintaining gendered boundaries, the status quo is preserved. Gender as a rhetorical performance, in Butler’s conception, is not a choice – we do not freely choose what gender identity to perform – but rather it is collectively culturally assigned, with institutional policing at the margins.

The rhetorical figure of antithesis bolsters gendered boundaries by positioning men and women as opposites, reinforcing the gender binary. Jordynn Jack argues that

antithetical logics “continually figure men’s bodies as strong and women’s bodies as weak”; such exaggeration of the differences between men and women situates them in diametrical opposition “where a sliding scale might be more apt” for true representation of many traits, such as height, weight, and strength (“Acts” 290). For example, antithetical logics frame men as strong and women as weak, but of course all types of bodies can be strong or weak, no matter the gender; there are strong women and weak men, with most bodies existing closer to the middle of the strength spectrum, regardless of gender. Recent studies by Jordynn Jack on women’s entrance into factories during World War 2 and Lindal Buchanan on women’s entrance into submarines over the past 15 years illustrate the ways antithesis is employed to privilege men as superior workers by institutions. Characterizing women’s bodies as incompatible with the workplace, as either too fragile or too distracting respectively, holds women in a subordinate position. The institutions of the factory and the Navy sustain the gender binary, citing reasons of practicality, expense, and physiology; rhetorical gendering is deeply embedded into the fundamental organization assumptions, not easily overturned.

Antithetical logics are prevalent in the fire department too, operating at the institutional level from the basic gendered expectations of men and women as different. My archival findings indicate that women have proven themselves capable over and over again, from women occupying temporary roles like Lorena Ann Olmstead, to women who regularly participated in emergency response as volunteer firefighters, to those women who earned paid firefighting positions, even rising through the ranks to hold leadership positions. Nevertheless, the general sentiment has remained: an outstanding woman could be a good firefighter, but the average man could do it better. Women step in during crisis,

but once the crisis is resolved, institutional gendered barriers are re-imposed, and women return to background roles, like traditional ladies auxiliaries work of providing food and drink or into medical work of offering first aid. Such divisions of labor that mirror conventional ideas of men's work and women's work perpetuate the antithetical logics that exclude women from firefighting roles. Even when women enacted firefighting roles only briefly, though, it had an impact: women began establishing an *ethos* through their reliability and success at the fire scene, slowly earning greater responsibility and access. The impact becomes visible by taking the long view: women were not paid firefighters a century ago, but today they are; women were not fire chiefs two decades ago, but today they are.

Regendering is happening, but slowly. Antithesis has persisted in the fire department, despite legal protections and policies meant to reduce and eliminate discrimination in hiring and harassment of women in the department; legislation meant to punish and reform the individual perpetrators has not reformed the institution-at-large. In fact, women career firefighters are still facing great obstacles now in the 21st century: firefighting has become hypermasculinized after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, particularly evident in department-endorsed popular media depictions. The *New York Times* reported shortly afterwards, in an article titled "The Return of Manly Men": "In contrast to past eras of touchy-feeliness (Alan Alada) and the vaguely feminized, rakish man-child of the 1990's (Leonardo DeCaprio), the notion of physical prowess in the service of patriotic duty is firmly back on the pedestal" (Brown). The article cast firefighters as "brawny, heroic, manly" and "working class men, stoical, patriotic" who were "not on Prozac or questioning their gender" (Brown). This is just one

example of many newspaper reports praising firefighters' "manliness." Woman firefighter Therese Floren observed, in the October 2001 newsletter of the women firefighters' professional organization, that the words "firemen" and "fireman" had become prevalent in the media once again. She wrote: "Reporters haven't simply forgotten the word 'firefighter' exists. 'Firemen' is the perfect word to use when you want to say, 'All (real) firefighters are men.' It is a deliberate rejection of the gender-neutral in order to define heroes as male" (Floren). The continued circulation of "terror" rhetoric since 2001 has reified the historic antithetical framing in the fire department, upholding the masculinity of "firemen." Women firefighters have responded by uniting to protest exclusion and erasure, creating new forms of collaboration to support each other and prepare the next generation of women firefighters.

Floren is pointing to the power of the word "fireman" in reifying the popular Currier-and-Ives type image. Considering <fireman> as an ideograph, using the common notation, reveals the ideological underpinnings that normalize gender antithesis in the fire department. Coined by Michael McGee, ideographs are the manifestation of ideology in discourse, these everyday terms represent "the normative, collective commitments of the members of a public, and they typically appear in public argumentation as the necessary motivations of justifications for action performed in the name of the public" (Condit and Lucaites xii-xiii). Jessica Enoch argues that for feminist scholars, considering gendered ideographs gives "a sense of the ways members of a culture make, remake, and revise gendered ideology" ("There's No Place" 440). The reappearance of <fireman> in the media in 2001, Floren suggests, is to connect the public mind back to the normative and collective values, to justify the elevation of men to heroic status.

Ideographs “expand and contract” over time, based on usage, according to McGee (10), but there are “discernible limits to how an ideograph can be employed in public argumentation” (Condit and Lucaites xviii). Enoch traces the way <home> expanded to include childcare centers during World War 2, in aid of working mothers, and then contracted afterwards, pressuring those mothers to give up their jobs. In the fire department, <fireman> expanded to include fire women in times of need, giving rise to “firefighter”, but contracted when “manly men” were deemed necessary for confronting terrorist threats. <Fireman> had expanded to its maximum, as women entered firefighting careers in the 1980s and 1990s, and the events of September 11, 2001 marked the limit: the ideograph immediately shrank, deployed in its narrowest sense as the ideology of gender antithesis became prominent again. McGee explains, the deployment of ideographs often “warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable” (15). The return of <fireman> in public discourse reinforced antithetical ideology and guided the community towards upholding the prototypical image of a firefighter as a strong, tall, white man.

While <fireman> culturally constructs firefighters in a particular image and naturalizes antithetical gender ideology, women of all shapes, colors, and sizes have made important contributions to the field, as ladies auxiliary members, temporary and volunteer firefighters, and career firefighters. My dissertation recovers these contributions and retheorizes what counts as firefighting work to consider the rhetorical gendering within the fire department. One of my goals is to bring these insights back to the fire department, to participate in the *regendering* of the profession. To be a good firefighter ultimately does

not require incredible strength, exceptional height, or porcelain skin; it requires great training, extensive practice, and deep investment. These actual requirements exist along a spectrum, not a binary, and can be equally developed in any person – regardless of gender.

My dissertation charts women’s entrance into the fire department by overcoming these gendered barriers, working in collaboration with men at first as ladies auxiliary members and volunteers, and then pulling on personal resources when collaboration failed at the career firefighting level. I engage closely with the academic conversation surrounding collaboration, and its ties to work on feminist rhetorical historiography and women’s entrance into the workplace. Here I detail key scholarship and concepts from the rhetorical study of collaboration that are central to my work and the ways that I expand upon them, beginning with the field of feminist historiography.

Feminist Historiography

Feminist rhetorical work in historiography studies women’s experiences in the construction and use of discursive systems, with particular interest in dynamics of gender and power relations, focusing on identifying gender-based discrimination and revising rhetorical history. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell is credited with starting the critical conversation on feminist rhetoric, advocating “writing women in” to the history of rhetoric; she notes in her 1989 publication *Men Cannot Speak for Her* that men’s speeches and writing have been extensively studied, but “women have no parallel rhetorical history” (2). Women have always been there, contributing to rhetorical production, but their work has been overlooked because for many centuries it happened outside of the classical rhetorical genres and forums, which were only accessible to men. Feminist rhetoricians have shown that despite limitations and restrictions, women developed unconventional means to

participate as rhetors from antiquity to the present, though their work has been devalued and gone unacknowledged. Exploration of the archives and their gaps, and the researcher's role therein, have become central in feminist historiography.

I build on previous feminist research on archival studies that calls for work to address silences and challenge absences, core elements of Cheryl Glenn's argument for feminist research methods. My research has been characterized by silences and absences; like much of "women's work," women's contributions to the fire department were undervalued by history, particularly contributions of ladies auxiliaries' members whose service was correlated with "wifely duty". I contribute to the field of feminist historiography by participating in these traditional goals of recovery and retheorization of women's work. My dissertation brings attention to women in an under-explored realm and asserts that their work was significant at that time, creating an impact that still echoes today. Additionally, by recovering and retheorizing women's fire department service, my dissertation contributes to the growing body of feminist research on women who have lives outside of the university; as Carol Mattingly observed in 2002, feminist rhetoricians have "appreciated those historical figures who most resemble academic feminists [...] at the expense of others worthy of our attention" (101). My dissertation recovers and retheorizes fire department women's lives by looking beyond silences and absences, employing feminist archival methods to expand our knowledge of women experiences.

I also align my work with the ethnographic moves in feminist historiography, like those made by Jacqueline Jones Royster, by acknowledging my "passionate attachment" to my work (280) while still employing the research methods of my academic community. Additionally, I respond to Royster's call for "attention to ethical action" (280) and

“commitment to social responsibility” (281). I contribute to the field through the development of a “bridge project” model, which I use to “bridge” academic and firefighting communities by bringing my academic research back to the fire department; this model, which I return to in the conclusion chapter, has potential for application by other feminist researchers. As feminist rhetoricians increasingly “extrapolate rhetorical theory from non-rhetorical texts,” as Krista Ratcliffe suggests (2), I believe the opportunities to engage with communities beyond academia will increase and will become more accessible, already apparent through work like Ratcliffe’s on listening, Glenn’s on silence, and Carol Mattingly’s on dress. As the field moves forward in this way, Jessica Enoch draws attention to new ways of practicing feminist historiography in rhetoric by “releasing hold” of recovery and retheorization, pointing to the rhetorical process of remembering and the rhetorical process of gendering (“Releasing”). Through this project, I turn my attention to rhetorical processes to theorize re/gendering of the workplace through collaboration and to disrupt the established patterns of memory that have erased and excluded women’s fire department contributions.

Women in the Workplace

My research also builds on an emerging area of interest in feminist rhetorical studies: women’s entrance into the workplace. In their recent *Peitho* publication, Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith call for feminist rhetoricians to build on past feminist workplace research to theorize “work” more fully, turning an eye to “the rhetorical positioning of work itself” to understand its rhetorical construction and value, suggesting the topoi of duty, education, and technology (200). Much research has been done on women’s professional rhetorical performances, especially in teaching (Enoch “A Woman’s

Place”), public lecturing (Buchanan *Regendering*), preaching (Mountford), medicine (Wells, Skinner), and in the sciences (Jack *Science*, Applegarth). Such studies have established a history of women’s professional lives: women’s entrance into the workplace and their development of agency in their occupations. A focus on work-related rhetorics highlights women’s work that might otherwise be invisible, develops our knowledge of the “rhetorical process of gendering” (Enoch, “Releasing” 68), and expands our analytical scope beyond text to material components like bodies, dress, space, and time (Jack “Acts”). Studying women in the workplace reveals the maintenance and disruption of gendered boundaries that have a powerful hold on everyday life.

Feminist rhetoricians are already engaged in the study of work-related rhetorics, particularly in their own occupation: teaching rhetoric and composition. Hallenbeck and Smith point to research by Susan Miller, Eileen Schell, and Donna Strickland on labor-related issues in the English Department, like the increase in contingent faculty and the historic devaluing of (women) composition instructors’ work (201). Expanding beyond this familiar workplace enriches our understanding of women’s rhetorical lives as a whole, and contributes toward correcting a “classed blind spot” (Hallenbeck and Smith 206). As the field has grown, it has become increasingly inclusive of non-academic and working class women, studying women’s experiences outside of schooling and club participation. This research includes women’s entrance into factories during wartime (Enoch “There’s No Place”, Jack “Acts”) and women’s recent entrance into submarines (Buchanan “A Few”). The work and the workplaces are distinct from that of academic women, and are also notable as intensely “masculine” gendered, yielding rich studies of gendering in the workplace.

My dissertation contributes to the growing area of feminist research on gendered workplace rhetorics by considering the rhetorical gendering of work over time and women's navigation of gendered workplace barriers. Taking the long view on women's entrance into the fire department illuminates labor that has previously been overlooked, particularly non-career service that might otherwise be discounted as wifely or national "duty". Hallenbeck and Smith point to time as an area of inquiry in feminist workplace rhetorical studies to reveal the construction and contestation of gender and work: "careers, workspaces, and work tasks are differently gendered in different times and places" (202). My dissertation contributes to research on women and the workplace by looking across time to reveal that overlooked auxiliary and volunteer work has an impact on women's entrance into career firefighting jobs. The theoretical framework that I offer of collaboration and crisis may be applicable for study of women's entrance into other workplaces, particularly highly masculinized workplaces. Additionally, my findings suggest that other workplace researchers may benefit from exploring connections between volunteer and workplace contributions.

Collaboration

Feminist rhetoricians have argued for the recognition and inclusion of collaborative approaches in the history of rhetoric, highlighting women's rhetorical contributions that may otherwise have been overlooked. Lindal Buchanan theorizes rhetorical collaboration as "a cooperative endeavor involving two or more people that results in a rhetorical product, performance, or event," placing equal emphasis on the process and the product (*Regendering* 134). Studying rhetorical production in this way draws attention to *foreground* or productive contributions, like two people writing an article together by

taking individual responsibility for different sections, and also *background* or supportive contributions, like caring for children or handling business to enable someone else to write an article. These forms of collaboration exist on a continuum, and by moving along the continuum to exchange roles, the collaborators have “the most inventive options for creating and delivering discourse in resistant surroundings,” particularly important for women rhetors (*Regendering* 135). Buchanan illustrates the fluidity and complexity of rhetorical collaboration with the example of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, who alternated between forms of collaboration over their fifty year partnership: they both made direct contributions to research, writing, and editing in the campaign for women’s voting rights, and made indirect contributions by providing childcare and household management to each other to balance ideological constraints of “women’s roles” and their professional work (*Regendering* 152-154). Examining Cady Stanton and Anthony’s process, in addition to their product, reveals the intricate working relationship and highlights the crucial supportive work that enabled them to be outspoken leaders while maintaining their “feminine” ethos.

Collaboration provides a theory for valuing work that has been taken for granted and viewing contributions that may otherwise have remained invisible. While the collaborative lens has most frequently been applied to conventional rhetorical sites of writing and speaking, it has also proved fruitful more broadly, for example in Jessica Enoch and Pamela VanHaitsma’s recent study of digital bilingual archives built in collaboration with U.S. guest workers. The applications of collaboration are multiplying as a way to understand complex working relationships; across sites, rhetorical collaboration offers marginalized groups access to rhetorical process and production, as well as a research lens

for theorizing this wide range of contributions. My dissertation contributes to the expanding conceptualization of collaboration by exploring women's movement between foreground and background roles to navigate gendered barriers to their fire department participation. Women first formally entered the fire department as firefighter wives forming ladies auxiliary organizations that ostensibly performed chiefly supportive functions, maintaining traditional gender roles even at the scene of the fire by providing food and drink. Men and women worked together at the fire to protect the community, and this meant that traditional gender roles were unsettled at times to prioritize emergency response; women moved between foreground and background roles flexibly, with approval of the fire department and community. Collaboration afforded women critical means to the spaces of firefighting, where they learned firefighting techniques and operations, which prepared them to move into more productive foreground roles. The collaboration between men and women benefitted the fire department by maintaining department *ethos* – women could step into firefighting roles as needed to handle emergencies, upholding the department's reputation – and benefitted the women by creating greater access to an exclusive field.

I add to the scholarly conversation by proposing a theory of collaboration in moments of crisis, suggesting that crisis creates exigence for the emergence of new collaborative forms through gender role flexibility in rhetorical production. I expand on our current understanding of collaboration by creating a model to explain how these gender roles flex, bringing in sociology literature. During fire crisis, those who are capable are called in for immediate response, regardless of gender. Male bodies were preferred for firefighting, but when men were unavailable, the community accepted women taking on

that role, prioritizing local safety over gender norms; antithetical logics were suspended. Ultimately, women's success in temporary positions opened up greater opportunity for them in the fire department. My theory of crisis and collaboration points to the benefit of opening the aperture for greater consideration of the rhetorical situation of collaboration. This model is productive in understanding movement from the margins of a community towards the center, particularly useful for studying women's roles and gendering in the workplace in relation to institutional powers. In my research, exploring crisis-motivated changes in the fire department exposes the artificial construction of gender and highlights the background supportive work of women. I also apply this model to explore the dissolution of collaborative processes once work shifts from the family and community spheres of the volunteer fire department to the paid career fire department.

Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework for this project builds on concepts of collaboration and crisis. Collaboration, as explained previously, provides an analytical lens for understanding the range of ways that people work together in the process of creating a rhetorical product. I borrow crisis theory from sociology, where crisis is considered an event that "threaten[s] the most fundamental goals of an organization" (Weick 305). Crisis can unsettle the status quo by requiring stakeholders to "respond in dramatic ways to control risks" (Newswander 560) and these disruptions to established routines "produce a fluid environment" (Newswander 572). In this fluid environment, through dramatic responses, collaboration changes: conventional roles and patterns morph to control risks. Crisis is an exigence for new collaborative forms. Applied to the fire department, fire is a crisis that requires a dramatic response, creating a fluid environment where conventional patterns of

collaboration shift. Most significantly for my work, a change in collaboration occurs between men and women, where women move from background supportive roles as ladies auxiliary members to foreground productive roles as volunteer firefighters. The crisis creates an exigence, and the majority of the community accepts this movement. The fluid environment of the crisis produces gender role fluidity, disrupting the status quo of gender role rigidity with its antithetical positioning of men and women. With paid full-time firefighters ready to respond at any time, however, the crisis did not create gender fluidity in the career fire department; instead, antithetical gendering became increasingly entrenched in institutional and public attitudes.

Women entering the fire department in any capacity faced a complex navigation of gendered barriers. First, their presence at the scene of the fire alone was controversial, an obstacle those women confronted by organizing as ladies auxiliaries to perform the gendered role of firefighter wife assisting her firefighter husband. To step into direct firefighting positions required fire crisis. When insufficient numbers of men were available to respond, women were welcomed from the margins to the center; they transitioned from background supportive collaborators to foreground productive collaborators, in temporary and volunteer roles. In short, mirroring the definition given above, fire (or its threat) constituted a crisis for a community when it challenged local response capability, leaving the community's existence at risk. When fire threatened the community at such a fundamental level, it was a crisis. The crisis and its threat were most pressing in more rural areas with volunteer-staffed fire departments (Simpson 26-27), fostering a shared understanding that having some firefighters to address the crisis was better than having none, even if the firefighters were not the masculine "ideal". In more urban areas with

career-staffed fire departments, however, men were paid to be available at all hours: firefighting was a job, not a community responsibility. There was a specially-trained competitively-selected crew ready to respond at all times. Fire always poses a threat, but with the preferred masculine bodies available, opportunity did not open up for women. There was no urgent impetus to move away from the default firefighter image of “manly” men that gave rise to fire department gender role rigidity. With no shortage of male firefighters in times of crisis, there was no fluid environment and women had to navigate the gendered barriers to gain and maintain firefighting careers by turning to their personal resources.

My theoretical framework for understanding women’s movement into and out of firefighting positions, in accordance with gender fluidity or in spite of gender rigidity, builds on crisis theory. Crisis occurs when fundamental values or structures are at risk. In response, everyone is required “to think and act differently by being preoccupied with failure” (Newswander 558). In the fire department, thinking and acting differently to avoid failure gave rise to gender fluidity: women were welcomed into firefighting roles as productive collaborators, especially in temporary and volunteer capacities, while men were unavailable. For example, during World War 2 when many men were away from home, women stepped from ladies auxiliary roles into unpaid firefighting roles as productive collaborators, stepping back when men returned home. When men were available, men were the default firefighters: the cultural assumption of firefighter masculinity reigned. But every time women performed direct firefighting work, even temporarily, there was an impact; through collaboration, women were able to transition between fire department roles. While the crisis-spurred motivation for the community to accept women as

firefighters faded with men's return, women left an imprint in the collective memory of their success, which eventually led to greater opportunity.

Women make progress particularly in volunteer fire departments, usually in rural and suburban areas, where there were fewer bodies. With the rise of modern work habits and the decline in family farming in the mid-twentieth century, men's daytime fire department participation was restricted: men were away in the city at work, not close to home and not available for emergency response (Fifield). The threat of fire crisis loomed large, and required the community to adjust traditional gender role expectations, to think and act differently. Out of crisis, new structures emerged that help prevent future crises. Crisis may expose weaknesses in an old system, pointing the way towards a new and improved system; during the crisis, "new forms, structures, procedures, hierarchies, and understanding emerge, giving a new form to the system, often at a higher level of order and complexity" (Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer 272). In the volunteer fire department, the threat of fire crisis was reduced by including women as firefighters and expanding the number of people available for emergency response. By adopting a gender fluidity that enabled women to move into long-term volunteer firefighting positions, the volunteer fire department model was sustained.

By the 1960s, women were increasingly filling daytime firefighting shifts. Volunteer fire departments reached out to women, soliciting women who were full-time mothers with school-age children and women who worked part-time. In a 1973 report, the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control recommended to all volunteer fire departments "that communities train and utilize women for fire service duties" based on the success of firefighter wives responding to daytime fires in lieu of their husbands in

Florida and Ohio (20). Bodies were needed to respond to crises, and women were available; the community adopted a gender fluidity that began shifting the local ideal from firefighter masculinity to firefighter capability. Evidence of women's firefighting capabilities abounds: the volunteer firefighter women, originally meant to "fill the gap" while men were unavailable for emergency response, over time began serving the community around the clock, even alongside men. These women were no longer positioned as temporary substitutes, but as volunteer firefighters in their own right. Workplace gendering persisted, but women were disrupting the prototypical Currier-and-Ives image of the "fireman." Every time women engaged in direct firefighting efforts, this image was challenged.

Despite women's successes and increasing movement into temporary and volunteer fire department roles, career firefighting positions continued to be almost inaccessible. Fire crisis did not create an exigence for women's entrance into firefighting careers because there were already ample "ideal" bodies to respond. Without this exigence, there was no large-scale shift away from the default antithetical situating of men and women, and the standard gender rigidity did not evolve into gender fluidity; without some pressing reason to hire women over men for highly desired firefighting jobs, fire departments and their communities largely maintained the status quo. Across the century, it became increasingly competitive to enter into firefighting careers, meaning fire departments could be very selective in their hiring processes – many fire departments faced lawsuits in the late twentieth century for gender discrimination in application and entry testing practices.

There was no need for a paradigm shift to ensure community safety by welcoming women, and so even as women challenged traditional gender roles by entering the

workforce, stepping into new positions and handling other types of “men’s work” during the late twentieth century, career firefighting remained firmly gendered. Women did not move into firefighting jobs in significant numbers until the 1990s. Even then, the career fire department sought to maintain their *ethos* by predominantly hiring men who fit the prototypical Currier-and-Ives image of a firefighter. Antithetical framing of men and women served department *ethos*, in fact, because it strengthened the (false) reasoning that men were strong, brave, and heroic, as compared to women, and therefore “naturally” best suited for firefighting. As fire departments reluctantly began hiring women into career firefighting roles near the end of the century, the public sentiment remained that that men were preferred for the job, that people would rather be “saved by firemen” (Davis).

In its simplest form, my findings suggest that the fire crisis motivated gender fluidity in volunteer fire departments due to insufficient numbers of male bodies, but that gender rigidity was maintained in career fire departments because of abundant male bodies. I have attempted to briefly point to some of the nuances and complexities in the application of this theoretical framework here, which I explore in more detail as I thread this model through my subsequent chapters on women’s fire department participation in ladies auxiliaries, volunteer roles, and career roles. In all of these positions, women are carrying out their work within the context of their community: serving as wives in ladies auxiliaries, taking on the responsibility of local safety as volunteers, or confronting widespread resistance as career firefighters. Fire department *ethos* and women’s *ethos* at the fire scene inform women’s participation and navigation of un/available opportunities: when crisis created space for volunteer roles women moved in and built *ethos* through collaboration with men; when there was no open space women had to challenge the gendered structures within

their communities and fire departments, struggling to gain firefighting careers, but eventually succeeding through relying on their own alternative resources and skills.

Chapter Overview

My dissertation traces women's fire department participation across the twentieth century, considering collaboration as a means for negotiating gender roles to gain entrance into the field. My findings reveal that the degree of collaboration is in correlation with the status of women in relation to men: when the traditional hierarchy is unchallenged, men and women work together harmoniously to maintain department *ethos*, including in productive forms of collaboration where women performed in foreground roles alongside men. When men's superior status was challenged by women's attempts to gain paid firefighting careers, women were relegated to backgrounded supportive collaborative roles or were denied fire department participation completely. Antithetical logics in the fire department continually have positioned women and men as fundamentally different, with men as "naturally" superior firefighters. This oppositionality may fade from view when the gender hierarchy goes unquestioned, but with the slightest disruption to workplace gendering, the figure of antithesis becomes prominent, emphasizing men's dominance in the fire department.

Chapter 1, "Collaboration and Crisis: An Overview of Women's Fire Department Participation across the 20th Century" lays out the project by providing some background, placing it in context with current academic conversations, and giving the theoretical framework. The research presented in my subsequent chapters relies on archival findings. Feminist archival methods have been central to my work: there are no traditional catalogued archives – no collections at libraries or museums – for much of my primary

sources. My research has been characterized by silences and absences, and so I have patiently cast my net widely, to assemble the fragments into an incomplete whole. Like much of “women’s work,” women’s contributions to the fire department were undervalued by history, especially pre-1970. Little record of their labor exists. Particularly for fire department ladies auxiliaries, where women’s work was correlated with “wifely duty,” documentation is sparse. My sources for creating the sketch presented here of women’s fire department contributions range from fire department histories (mostly self-reported), fire department ladies auxiliary histories (either self-reported or reported by fire departments), newspaper articles, firefighter technical magazine articles, legal proceedings, and obituaries. Building on these primary sources, I trace women’s firefighting work, from ladies auxiliary roles particularly in the first half of the century, to temporary and volunteer firefighting positions beginning during World War 2, and ending with women’s entrance into firefighting careers in the latter part of the century. I conclude with a consideration of emergent forms of collaboration between women at the end of the century and future projections, as well as further discussion of the potential for applying academic knowledge in regendering the fire department.

Chapter 2, “A Strong Leadership that Does Not Show”: Ladies Auxiliaries as Women’s First Entrance Point into the Fire Department” focuses on women’s entrance into fire department Ladies Auxiliaries, with particular attention given to the Raleigh Fire Department (NC) Ladies Auxiliary and the Arnold Volunteer Fire Department (MD) Ladies Auxiliary. These first women are firefighter wives, and they begin by providing food and drink to their firefighter husbands at the scene of the fire. From here, the organizations expanded and increased their support work by holding fundraisers and engaging in

community relations projects on behalf of the fire department. Some auxiliary women trained in first aid and offered medical services to the firefighters and victims, stepping into more prominent roles as needed. While auxiliary service primarily was in the background as supportive collaboration, it became essential to the mission of many fire departments as the women built departmental *ethos* through their crucial contributions at the fire, their financial backing of the department through fundraisers, and their engagement with the community that reflected an overall department investment in local wellbeing. The auxiliary women also built up their own *ethos* and created an argument for women's presence in these formerly exclusive spaces.

Women and men largely cooperated effectively and peacefully in this model of women's fire department participation. The auxiliary was necessarily secondary to the firefighters, maintaining the gender hierarchy, and from here, gender performance developed fluidity: women moved between more supportive and more productive forms of collaboration based on exigence. Particularly in the early twentieth century, relationships between the fire department and ladies auxiliaries were agreeable and fruitful. Ladies auxiliaries began to disband in the later twentieth century, usually because of dwindling numbers, but sometimes over power struggles with the fire department. The evidence suggests that especially for ladies auxiliaries that grew influential financially, relationships with fire departments fell apart and collaboration broke down. I highlight three cases in this chapter of fire departments seizing control or dissolving their auxiliaries at the turn of the century for monetary reasons. In these cases, the previous collaboration was replaced with hostility, and the former auxiliary women felt they had no place, not even in

supportive roles; fire department gendering became so rigid that women were excluded entirely.

Chapter 3, “‘Manning’ the Fire Department: Women Step into Volunteer Firefighting,” focuses on women’s movement into temporary and volunteer firefighting positions in the middle of the twentieth century, considering their work during World War 2 and during daytime shifts as men’s availability shrank due to the rise of the modern 9 to 5 workday and an increasing physical distance between work and home. I use publicly available oral histories from the Port Washington (NY) Fire Department to illustrate the case of the latter. In both of these instances, women were welcomed into temporary and volunteer firefighting roles, even solicited. The women, often auxiliary members or firefighter wives, were already at the fringes of the firefighting Community of Practice³ and had familiarity with techniques and strategies for emergency response. The women received formal training in firefighting as well, and quickly began performing identical tasks to those of the men, from extinguishing flames to driving the fire engine. Newspaper reports tell of the women’s successes in the field, highlighting women’s effective work protecting their communities and upholding fire department *ethos*.

Women’s movement into temporary and volunteer positions went smoothly, with little if any resistance. I suggest that this is because the fire crisis and men’s absence created dire circumstances that required immediate response, opening new positions for women where they were situated as “filling the gap” until men could resume firefighting

³ A Community of Practice is or a group of people sharing related concerns and committed to deepening the skill set to address those concerns through shared action. I will expand on this term later on.

work, either as the men returned home from war or from work. The temporary and volunteer positions offered extra staffing without challenging the gender hierarchy; because the positions were not permanent and were not paid, the women were still subordinated. Here was the highest degree of gender performance fluidity and the most productive level of collaboration. In some fire departments, women even outnumbered men. At the end of World War 2, women across workplaces were expected to return home, and men resumed their post-war roles. Some women in the fire department stayed on by moving into a new branch: emergency medical service. This work was more closely aligned with conventional women's roles as caregiver and nurturer than firefighting, opening a new avenue of collaboration within the gender hierarchy.

Chapter 4, "Collaboration Fails: Women's Entrance into Career Firefighting," focuses on women's attempts to gain and maintain career firefighting work starting in the 1970s, following Title VII legislation in 1972 that prohibited government employers like fire departments from discriminatory hiring practices. I consider in detail the experiences of three women who applied for firefighting jobs in the 1970s and went on to long careers: Judith Livers Brewer, the nation's first woman career firefighter as of 1974, with the Arlington (VA) Fire Department; Brenda Berkman, the most im/famous woman career firefighter, who applied to the Fire Department of New York City (NY) in 1977; and Beatrice Rudder, the first woman, and first black woman, career firefighter with the Washington D.C. (DC) Fire Department in 1977. These women all succeeded in their careers, rising through the ranks to occupy high-level positions, overcoming resistance, violence, harassment, and more. The women largely relied on resources and skills developed outside of the fire department to persevere: respectively, heritage literacy, legal

literacy, and intersectional literacy. Often facing outright hostility from their colleagues and the department, these women looked inward to continue forward in their careers.

Women entering firefighting careers experienced this mistreatment because antithetical gendering, the status quo, had not been overturned or unsettled, like it was in the volunteer fire department. Career fire departments attempted to exclude women through discriminatory application and hiring procedures (Ugelow 715), and once women overcame that obstacle, they faced a hostile work environment, where their male colleagues generally went unpunished for attempts to force women to quit through maltreatment (Faludi 86). Antithetical logics emerged in the media, in lawsuits, in everyday conversation and in the firehouse to defend men's superiority: men were "naturally" suited to handle emergency response because they were strong and brave, and so of course men should be hired over women according to that line of reasoning. It did not matter that women had performed the same emergency response work just as capably as men in temporary and volunteer positions; when firefighting is a job instead of community volunteers' responsibility, locals have higher expectations for fire department professionalism and protection. Women that persevered in the career fire department showed great determination, patience, and mental strength, relying on their own literacies when even the most essential forms of cooperation and the most basic human rights were denied to them.

Chapter 5, "Out of the Fire: New Collaborative Forms," offers a conclusion that maps out the rise of new forms of collaboration between women. As the number of women firefighters increased in the 1980s and 1990s, women reached out to each other for the support they were denied from the departments. Many of these women were the sole

woman in their departments. A network began to form, starting with a directory list of women firefighters across the country and a newsletter sent out in 1982, followed by the creation of a national conference, and representation on committees for technical and federal firefighting governing boards. Now known as iWomen: The International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services, the organization provides important support and resources to women firefighters, from camps for young girls to information on retirement procedures. In addition to this international professional organization, I also consider local women firefighter groups that have emerged, like the United Women Firefighters for women career firefighters in the Fire Department of New York City, begun by Brenda Berkman. These collaborative networks have become increasingly essential to women's entrance and maintenance of firefighting careers in the twenty-first century as antithetical framing has reinforced firefighter masculinity in response to "terrorist" attacks and the number of women career firefighters has dipped. Women continue to face great challenges, suggesting the incremental nature of regendering a resistant institution; I give the example of Virginia Firefighter Nicole Mittendorf's suicide in 2016 to show women's ongoing struggle for acceptance and fair treatment in firefighting careers. Women's participation in firefighting certainly has not been a narrative of linear progress towards equality, but the collaboration between women firefighters to counter institutional resistance suggests a way forward towards improved conditions.

I end the conclusion with a brief return to the feminist value of connecting our academic work with our communities of study. I consider the affordances and constraints of my position between academia and the fire department, with membership in both groups, and how this situates me to bring my academic findings back to the fire department

as a scholar-activist. My work with fire department communities to this end has taken the shape of “bridge projects”, efforts designed and carried out in conjunction with a fire department to accomplish shared academic and department goals.

Conclusion

Gender antithesis is deeply embedded in the fire department, in part because its *ethos* is built on the cultural assumption that safety and protection at the highest degree are best offered by people who are brave, strong, and heroic – conventionally greatly masculinized traits. By maintaining the status quo, privileging men over women, the fire department caters to the widespread ideal of “manly” firefighters to effortlessly preserve its reputation; when that reputation is compromised due to fire crisis, however, women are welcomed into volunteer firefighting positions. The gender performance of the firefighters and the gendered barriers posed to women are rhetorical; the gendering of the fire department is constructed, and as is particularly evident during crisis, the institution and community can construct gender differently. My theoretical framework of gender performance in the context of collaboration and crisis reveals the intricate choreography that women enact to balance workplace and gender roles as they gain entrance into a resistant field. This framework can be applied across professions, to study women’s work, gendered barriers, and the institution itself. With increasing academic interest in gendered workplace rhetorics, my method for studying gender dynamics in relation to collaboration and crisis may prove generative.

Regendering is already happening in the fire department: every time women entered the fire scene and the firehouse, they enacted an argument that women belong in that space. Every time counts. As ladies auxiliary members, women first opened up the

otherwise restricted realms of firefighting; as temporary and volunteer firefighters, women proved their firefighting capabilities; as career firefighters, women outperformed their fellow firefighters to become leaders and create support networks for other women firefighters. Women collaborated with men to move into the field, working together harmoniously in gender fluid positions that facilitated their transition between background supportive roles and foreground productive roles. When women sought paid positions, edging out men in their applications and entry tests, the fire department largely emphasized men's superiority by summoning antithesis, but women turned to their own resources when collaboration failed to challenge their exclusion from firefighting careers. Gender role rigidity and collaboration dissolution does not mean the end of workplace regendering; the impact of women's fire department work on regendering the profession is cumulative. Women leveraged their history of firefighting successes during times of gender fluidity to create a foundation from which to claim firefighting careers when they were otherwise denied. The following chapters show the interplay of workplace gendering through collaboration and crisis across the twentieth century, illustrating women's negotiation of antithetical positioning to gain and maintain access to fire department work.

CHAPTER II

“A STRONG LEADERSHIP THAT DOES NOT SHOW”: LADIES AUXILIARIES AS WOMEN’S FIRST ENTRANCE POINT INTO THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Women’s earliest entrance into the fire department was in ladies auxiliary organizations, which originally were comprised of firefighter wives. These women performed conventionally feminine work on behalf of the fire department that mirrored their wifely duties at home: the ladies auxiliaries provided sustenance and first aid at the scene of the fire, raised funds to support the fire department financially, and developed community relationships for the department. Auxiliary members met regularly to plan events such as fundraising dinners and visits to hospitalized locals, but were also ready to respond to emergencies at any time to offer support to the firefighters – to wake up in the middle of the night, to leave their sleeping children, to help at the fire for long hours. Especially in the early twentieth century, firefighting was a community responsibility instead of a paid job, taken up by resident families who banded together to protect themselves; it was almost assumed that all firefighter wives would join the auxiliary to contribute to the greater cause. While auxiliary women were dedicated and diligent in their service, their work was backgrounded and has been overlooked by history, even though it was essential to fire department success: the women built fire department *ethos* through their “strong leadership that did not show” and created access for women’s more visible department participation in the future. This chapter focuses on women in traditional gender roles in the fire department ladies auxiliary, performing as supportive collaborators to their husband firefighters and simultaneously reshaping the department’s public image.

Ladies auxiliary members and firefighters worked in cooperation in the fire department, originally enacting traditional gender roles but later fluidly alternating duties with men and handing off responsibilities as needed, usually in smooth exchange. I theorize this relationship using Lindal Buchanan's terms, viewing collaboration on a spectrum of *supportive* or indirect contributions (typical ladies auxiliary work) to *productive* or direct contributions (typical firefighting work). This lens highlights service that may otherwise be overlooked, particularly that framed as "women's work":

Because women have afforded men these supportive forms of assistance since time immemorial, a cultural misperception has ensued equating supportive collaboration with "women's work." Its feminine associations may explain why supportive collaboration typically remains invisible as a rhetorical contribution [...] (Buchanan, *Regendering* 141)

Auxiliary work often went unacknowledged due to asymmetrical power relations between ladies auxiliaries and fire departments, but their contributions had a significant impact on fire department reputation. Their work counts as fire department work, complementary to prototypical firefighting and central to fire department efforts by performing the duties outside of the traditionally masculine purview.

While the lens of collaboration has most frequently been applied to conventional rhetorical sites, such as the writing process (Lunsford and Ede) and the orator's platform (Buchanan *Regendering*), collaboration affords opportunities for the study of cooperative efforts in unconventional sites, such as the fire department, as well. By inhabiting traditional gender roles, women gained an entrance point into exclusive fire department spaces. Working in collaboration with firefighters allowed auxiliary women, similar to the

antebellum women rhetors of Buchanan's study, "to accommodate gender ideology, satisfy domestic obligations, uphold professional responsibilities, and produce and present public discourse in an unaccommodating time and place" (*Regendering* 156). Viewing auxiliary efforts through the lens of collaboration illuminates the scope of fire department work and the ways that women carved out a niche in an otherwise hostile environment; consistently "a crucial means by which marginalized groups gain access" (Buchanan, *Regendering* 133), collaboration provided auxiliary women an unthreatening avenue into the fire department.

Significantly, collaboration between firefighters and ladies auxiliary members is characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of power: despite the collegial attitude between firefighters and auxiliary members, auxiliaries were always situated as secondary to the firefighters. Collaboration offers a way in for those studying women's entrance into the workplace, particularly the highly masculinized and/or hierarchical workplace, through its theorization of the fluidity of women's movement between supportive and productive roles. Within this fluid environment of collaboration, auxiliary women were aware of fluctuating relationships and negotiations of responsibilities; through their ecological awareness, the auxiliary women were "self-critically cognizant of being part of and specifically located within a social-physical world that constrains and enables human practices, where knowing and acting always generate consequences" (Code 5). Their cognizance enabled them to find the gaps in the shifting discourse, to carefully renegotiate their place and their *ethos*. Ladies auxiliaries' contributions both built department *ethos* and auxiliaries' own *ethos*, enabling women to enter and influence the fire department despite the asymmetrical power distribution.

The histories that I have collected show that women gained access to the fire department through the very gender ideologies that restricted their participation in firefighting; ladies auxiliaries filled a gap by offering conventionally feminine skills, and these organizations gradually became pillars of the fire department. Auxiliary work constructed fire department *ethos*, a central element in the rhetoricity of firefighting: the community trusted the fire department to be effective and efficient in the case of an emergency, supporting the department financially as fire protection insurance. This was particularly true in the early twentieth century, when fire departments had less external funding from the city, state, and federal governments; these were also generally the decades when auxiliaries were most active. Ladies auxiliaries consistently crafted fire department *ethos* by portraying the fire department positively through conventional women's work: because the auxiliary provided food and first aid, firefighters could stay at the emergency longer; because the auxiliary hosted fundraising events, the department appeared hardworking as they earned donations instead of merely asking; because the auxiliary built relationships with locals and other organizations, the department seemed invested in overall community well being. Evidence of auxiliaries' success in building department *ethos* through performing women's work abounds in fire department and auxiliary records, newspaper articles, and thank you notes, some of which I will return to later in this chapter.

Ladies auxiliaries made essential contributions to creating a fire department image that yielded crucial community support; the firefighters and auxiliary members collaboratively constructed fire department *ethos*. The fire department earned community support by appearing knowledgeable, credible, and well-intentioned, by having *ethos* in the

traditional Aristotelian sense that is generally available to white masculine institutions. But these first women entering the fire department did not have such opportunities for building ethos. They had to find alternative ways to craft auxiliary reputation, to, as Stacey Waite says, “observe the available means that seem unavailable” or “to see the means that are barely visible” (76). Firefighter wives in the early twentieth century could “see” themselves at the fire scene performing wifely duties, and with each subsequent step in, with each repositioning, these women could “see” further; means that were “barely visible” became increasingly possible.

While fire department *ethos* was tested at the fire scene, it was forged year-round across venues by ladies auxiliary members, whose efforts helped departments retain their positive reputations even when fires destroyed property or life. When emergencies occurred – ideally rarely – it was essential that the firefighters gave a good performance; this is the rhetoricity of firefighting. The scene of the fire became the stage, the firefighters were the actors, and the crowd of neighbors, local officials, property and business owners, and families that inevitably gathered were the audience – and the jury. By building fire department *ethos* away from the emergency, ladies auxiliaries built the department’s reputation on a wider foundation; the department reputation no longer rested solely on firefighter performance but also on the everyday work of the auxiliary that happened quietly in the background. As the President of the Ladies Auxiliary to the North Carolina State Fire Fighters Association told auxiliary members across the state in 1953:

there is need for a strong leadership that does not show, that is if the ones out front are to do their best. This simply means that every woman must contribute to the fullest extent of her ability, and in this way letting our

husbands and the community know that we are alert to needs and are at the task UNITEDLY. (*Scrapbook* "Nov 11 1953")

Ladies auxiliary members embraced their role as supportive collaborators, intentionally serving the fire department through conventional women's work that "did not show" but simultaneously displayed their commitment to protecting their families and communities. Auxiliary work was backgrounded and feminized – and now often forgotten – but it was essential for department success and future opportunities for women; in fact, the traditionally gendered nature of auxiliary work was central to women's very entrance into the fire department. As supportive collaborators accepting the asymmetrical division of power that placed them always/already second, as the "auxiliary", to their husband firefighters, these first women gained access and claimed space for themselves in the fire department.

A Brief History of Ladies Auxiliaries and their Members

This chapter focuses on east coast mid-Atlantic ladies auxiliaries, a region stretching from New York down to North Carolina where auxiliary activity seems most concentrated. My research centers primarily upon ladies auxiliaries' most active years, from the 1920s through the 1970s, but also precedes and extends beyond this time period to include the ground-laying work that anticipated formal organization and the more recent auxiliary activity that shows the trajectory of these groups. The narratives that emerge from studying ladies auxiliaries are complex and often fragmented: given the secondary status of these organizations, primary records documenting auxiliary work are scarce. Much of this chapter is based on archival materials – meeting minutes, treasurer's records, checkbooks, bylaws, scrapbooks – from the Arnold (Maryland) Volunteer Fire Department (AVFD)

Ladies Auxiliary established in 1943, and from the Raleigh (North Carolina) Fire Department (RFD) Ladies Auxiliary, chartered in 1951. These sources are supplemented by research on 23 additional ladies auxiliaries in the east coast mid-Atlantic region, including self-reported fire department histories, ladies auxiliary histories (either self-reported or reported by their fire departments), newspaper articles (either written by the auxiliary or the newspaper staff), and obituaries. As I consider these materials more closely, I include a discussion of representation, particularly in the case of the RFD Ladies Auxiliary and its community relations. From fragmented auxiliary archives, I have created a microhistory of women's entrance through ladies auxiliaries into the local fire departments.

The ladies auxiliaries of this study were usually founded by firefighter wives, always with fire department approval and sometimes even with fire department prompting. Their mission statements were based on aid and service to the fire department (generally enacted through conventional women's work), reflective of the family and community obligation for ensuring local safety. The mission statements suggest what Hallenbeck and Smith have termed a "rhetoric of duty," free labor enacted out of a sense of responsibility to others (206-7). Examples of ladies auxiliaries established on this basis are plentiful: the Branchville (Maryland) Volunteer Fire Department was organized in September 1925 by the Fire Chief's wife upon her recognition of "the need for an auxiliary to assist the members" of the fire department (Branchville); the Dunn Loring (Virginia) Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary was established in June 1948 as "a support organization to raise money for the department and to plan recreational activities" under the leadership of a prominent firefighter's wife (Eastman); the President of the RFD organized the firefighter wives into an auxiliary in May 1951 "to extend aid and sympathy" ("Bylaws"); and as

recently as 2001, the Hawthorne (New Jersey) Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary was founded by the Fire Chief's wife to offer "many functions that aid our volunteer firefighters" (Hawthorne).

Formalizing their participation as ladies auxiliary members, instead of wives, contributed to women's *ethos* in the fire department. Much of the recent work on women's *ethos* explores positionality and identity, building on revisionist scholarship with particular interest in *ethos* "as a way of claiming and taking responsibility for our positions in the world, for the ways we see, for the places from which we speak" (Jarratt and Reynolds 52). Location and naming are central in understanding women's *ethos*. Joanna Schmertz calls this "pragmatics of naming," that "in naming my politics of location, I displace the structures from which I have emerged. I create empty spaces, and new places, from which others may speak" (88-89). By organizing as a ladies auxiliary, firefighter wives created space to participate in the fire department in an official capacity; rhetorics of duty gave them first access to the fire ground as wives, but naming themselves a Ladies Auxiliary gave them *ethos* through professionalization.

While auxiliaries are not as common today as they were decades ago – membership numbers began dropping in response to a changing social context in the late twentieth century, one in which women were no longer willing to assume unpaid, often unappreciated, supportive roles – the historical patterns are still prevalent: the majority of auxiliary members continue to be wives, mothers, and daughters of firefighters, despite today's membership policies that welcome any interested community member, regardless of gender. Through such close relationships with firefighters, women gained insight into

fire department work and culture; this insight facilitated women's later movement into temporary and volunteer firefighting roles, when men were not available.

Ladies auxiliaries arose in response to local and cultural exigencies; many ladies auxiliaries emerged alongside fire departments that were under-funded (financed solely by community donations) or over-stretched (serving areas undergoing rapid urbanization or population growth). Even within the east coast mid-Atlantic states represented here, women's reasons for organizing varied by class, race, and place. Ladies auxiliaries were most prevalent in the eastern part of these states, and were composed predominantly of white, middle class women. African American women's groups in the early twentieth century continued to campaign for civil rights and to emphasize social uplift "to construct an alternate image of African American womanhood," replacing negative stereotypes with more positive representations ("Rights"; Pittman 144). This chapter only captures a sample of ladies auxiliary members' experiences; more work is needed to understand the experiences of non-white, non-middle class ladies auxiliary members across the United States.

In the next section of this chapter, I consider archival accounts of ladies auxiliary work through the lens of collaboration, considering the ways that conventionally feminized service built fire department *ethos* and created an entrance point into formerly inaccessible spaces. Men, as the prescribed occupants of the fire department, determined who had access; ladies auxiliary members entered through collaborative relationships that centered upon such conventionally feminine skills as caring for others, cooking, and host(ess)ing on behalf of the firefighters. However, by engaging in "women's work" that mirrored wifely duty and indirectly contributing to firefighting, women also gained access to and exerted

influence in the fire department through fire ground support, fundraising, and community relations. In each of these areas, auxiliary members' labor developed fire department *ethos* as well as their own, making an argument for women's continued and increasing involvement.

Fire Ground Support

Women's fire department participation began on the fire ground, at the site of the fire. Women attended fires to assist their husband-firefighters by providing refreshments and encouragement, and later, these women organized ladies auxiliaries to improve and increase their contributions, including offering medical care. Gender ideologies both constrained and facilitated women's access to the fire ground in the early twentieth century: women were excluded from participating in the fire department because firefighting was "man's work," but women were welcomed in the ladies auxiliaries as wives performing "women's work" or acting out of "wifely duty." Through their regular service on the fire ground, auxiliary members developed an ethos of presence, to use Lisa Shaver's term: presence is an "effective rhetorical resource" (61) because by attending the fire – whenever needed, no matter the danger – the location itself became a source of authority for the auxiliary women (66), a piece in the ever-shifting rhetorical ecology of the auxiliary's *ethos*. These auxiliary members claimed space and carved out a role for themselves on the fire ground, publicly aligning themselves with emergency response and learning about strategies and equipment while they carried out conventionally feminine responsibilities that built department *ethos*. The members' *ethos* of presence justified their existence in a new space.

Examples abound of ladies auxiliaries that were initially founded in order to provide departments with fire ground support. One example of such an auxiliary is the Ladies Auxiliary of the Hilton (New York) Fire Department (HFD) organized in 1925 to maintain “what had previously been an informal way of providing food and drink at the scene of fires” (Hilton). Figure 2 shows Hilton wives on the fire ground as early as 1903, standing between two water pumpers with provisions for the firefighters.



Figure 2. Wives providing fire ground support (*Firemen Pump Water*)

Similarly, the Sandy Spring (Maryland) Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary was founded in May 1930 to continue the work of Mary Reading and Helen Beacraft, who had begun providing drinks at the fire ground after visiting firefighters one hot day at a large fire outside of town (Sandy Spring). Third, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Princeton (New

Jersey) First Aid and Rescue Squad was organized in the 1940s, as “wives of the volunteer [firefighters] began to accompany their husbands on ‘long calls’ to provide liquids and food” (Princeton). Many auxiliary women first entered the fire ground as wives. They created and provided a service so valuable that they organized to continue and improve their fire ground collaboration. This service portrayed the fire department as prepared for “long calls” and dedicated to protecting the community, which built up department *ethos*, while also giving women access to the fire ground without disrupting gender role norms.

In addition to providing fire ground refreshments, some ladies auxiliaries provided medical care for victims and firefighters. For example, in 1935, 36 ladies auxiliary members representing 8 different departments from across Prince George’s County, Maryland completed a Red Cross first aid course to offer medical care on the fire ground (“Prince Georges”). Opportunities and training for women in first aid expanded during and between the two World Wars through the American Red Cross, which even released a “woman’s edition” of their abridged textbook in 1913 (Lynch). The prevalence and frequency of fire department ladies auxiliaries offering medical care is unknown, but the Prince George’s County example documents it as a county-wide practice. Such skill broadened and improved fire department services, building positive department *ethos*, but also aligned with conventional “women’s work” in a non-threatening manner. Decades before, Skinner documents how nineteenth century women physicians “could argue that their ‘natural’ role as nurturers suited them for a career requiring caregiving and sympathy” (13); we can imagine the extension of such arguments into the twentieth century by fire department ladies auxiliary members. Ladies auxiliary members’ practice and professionalization of

first aid skills publicly aligned them with emergency response and prepared them for greater fire department involvement.

The fire ground was a starting point for many auxiliaries, and from there they took on new projects that improved their fire ground service and increased their presence in the fire department. The Ladies Auxiliary of the Solvay (New York) Volunteer Fire Department (SVFD), founded in 1898, explains: “our original purpose was to provide food and drink to the firefighters at any alarm, any time of day. We have since expanded our repertoire, and have become a major pillar in our community, becoming involved in many events and other organizations throughout our community” (Solvay). Similarly, the HFD Ladies Auxiliary, mentioned above, began fundraising in order to afford the meals, snacks, and beverages they provided on the fire ground (Hilton). While many ladies auxiliaries expanded their work beyond the fire ground, that service continued to be central for some auxiliaries even into recent years. The Floyd (New York) Fire Department (FFD) Ladies Auxiliary was providing fire ground refreshments as recently as 2010. A local news source reported: “Just like firefighters, when the [9-1-1] call comes in, [the Ladies Auxiliary members] prep and head to the scene. [At a recent fire] the Ladies Auxiliary was there every step of the way, providing water, lemonade, and whatever else was needed” (St. Meran). The auxiliary’s collaboration aided fire department service, which in turn bolstered fire department *ethos* and publicly aligned women with emergency response – the Ladies Auxiliary of the SVFD in 1898, as well as the FFD Ladies Auxiliary in 2010, were prepared to respond to any emergency at any time – just like the firefighters.

On the fire ground women were visibly aligned with the work of firefighting as active supporters of firefighting strategies and professionalized first aid practitioners,

proving the value of “women’s work” to the fire department and providing an argument for women’s increased participation. Through non-threatening acts of supportive collaboration on the fire ground, women built department *ethos* and became pillars of the community themselves. Fire ground collaboration also provided exigence for the expansion of women’s presence in other areas of the fire department, like the firehouse kitchen where, as I detail next, the auxiliary members prepared dinners for fundraising that supported their fire ground collaboration, shaping the department values.

Fundraising

Fire ground support gave auxiliary members opportunity to enter an exclusive space, and learn about the strategies and equipment used, as supportive collaborators performing conventional women’s work. The women then expanded their work to include fundraising, which enabled them to buy the supplies necessary to provide fire ground support and make regular donations to the fire department as well. This financial backing allowed fire departments to buy updated protective gear, pay the mortgage, maintain the firehouse, and more, keeping the fire department in good condition, which helped department reputation. Financial support was especially valuable to volunteer fire departments, which received less government funding than career fire departments. Ladies auxiliaries benefitted from collaboration too: recognizing the value of auxiliary fundraising, many fire departments granted firehouse space to these organizations, such as the firehouse kitchen or hall, for fundraising events. Women claimed space in the firehouse, performing wifely duties as ladies auxiliary members to build their *ethos*. Mirroring Lynée Lewis Gaillet’s consideration of the architectural function of *ethos* in moving the masculinized activity of preaching into the feminized space of home, ladies auxiliary

members entered the firehouse, a masculinized space, through women's work in conventionally feminized space; similar to Gaillet's findings, auxiliary women "created an ethical space for establishing community, and arranged boundaries and new spaces for speaking and listening" (122). Women were in the department spaces and actively participated in the conversations, especially those that pertained to fundraising and finances.

Like their first entrance onto the fire ground performing "wifely duties", women's movement into the firehouse kitchen was facilitated by the conventionally feminine connotations: cooking, feeding, and hosting all corresponded with traditional gender norms of women's work. Women's presence in this formerly exclusive space was "naturalized" by the familiar labor they performed, giving them greater access and influence with minimal resistance. Fundraising events ranged from dinners, to dances, to community gatherings, bringing in substantial amounts for supporting department development; some of the money went towards auxiliary projects too, including renovating the spaces for fundraising events. Many auxiliaries came to have ownership of the kitchen, the hall, and even the bathrooms, largely uncontested in recognition of women's industrious use of those spaces.

One example of such an auxiliary that gained access and influence through womanly fundraising work is the Arnold (Maryland) Volunteer Fire Department (AVFD) Ladies Auxiliary. The AVFD Ladies Auxiliary spent its early years raising money for the remodeling of a rundown community center into the AVFD firehouse, a joint project between the two organizations. The firehouse was not only firefighter headquarters but also a public symbol of department *ethos*: a solid, well-kept brick building better represented the department's goals of community protection than a crumbling structure in disrepair. The AVFD minutes

from their November 1943 meeting report expenditures on gravel, converting offices to bedrooms, purchasing new doors and a “water tower,” and installing plumbing (*Minutes V1* n.p.). The Ladies Auxiliary made regular donations, some specified for particular building renovations, for many years. Donations included a \$50.00 check from the Auxiliary “towards the new roof” in January 1944 (*Minutes V1* n.p.) and a U.S. flag presented at the AVFD September 1945 meeting (*Minutes V1* 82). The Auxiliary’s financial support was crucial to the remodeling of the firehouse, which became and continues to be the base for the AVFD as storage for equipment and apparatus, a central location for records and administrative offices, and the firefighters’ “home” during their shifts; a spacious, sturdy, patriotic firehouse reflected a capable, organized, reliable fire department that demonstrably shared its neighbors’ values for well-maintained residences and businesses. The firehouse was built in collaboration with the Ladies Auxiliary, whose fundraisers were essential in financing the construction of this highly visible representation of department *ethos*.

In addition to constructing positive department *ethos*, auxiliary fundraising gave women ownership over the material spaces of the firehouse – their women’s work facilitated their entrance into men’s workplaces. Many fundraising events centered around food, and auxiliary-hosted dinners were regular occurrences, giving auxiliaries primacy in the firehouse kitchen; the AVFD Ladies Auxiliary was responsible for the entire second floor of the firehouse, where the kitchen and hall were located, and where they held monthly fundraiser dinners (*Minutes V2* 168). The AVFD even refers to it as “their [Ladies Auxiliary’s] kitchen” (*Minutes V1* 143) and the women were consulted before purchases or renovations were made that could impact the kitchen (*Minutes V1* 51). For example, during

the initial remodeling of the firehouse, the AVFD found a used sink for sale that several firefighters considered satisfactory, but they only purchased it after the “women reported [the] sink would be practical for their use” (*Minutes V1* 51). The Ladies Auxiliary also financed and carried out kitchen renovations themselves, to “fix up their kitchen” (*Minutes V1* 143). The building was the AVFD’s firehouse, but the Auxiliary women exerted financial and administrative influence over the second floor space, both in terms of its use and its design.

The AVFD Ladies Auxiliary was not alone in gaining firehouse access through the kitchen; many ladies auxiliaries found the firehouse kitchen and hall as points for entrance and influence through collaboration with firefighters. The Ladies Auxiliary of the Vails Gate (New York) Fire Department (VGFD) actively contributed to the design of a new firehouse in 1958, where they wanted “a large and well-fitted kitchen, and a large hall, and a [o]unge” (Vails). Ladies auxiliaries were dedicated to their work and pursued optimal conditions, working closely with the firefighters and at times leading firehouse renovations. The Ladies Auxiliary of the Felton (Delaware) Community Fire Company (FCFC) “made an extensive remodeling project on the kitchen and restrooms” in 1975, donating \$10,000 towards the remodeling (Felton). Ladies auxiliaries regularly made generalized donations to the fire department, but these types of targeted donations helped ensure that their requests were met. The Ladies Auxiliary of the Orlean (Virginia) Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department (OVFRD) asked the department to consider a \$20,000 remodel of its firehouse kitchen in December 1982, for which the Auxiliary had already raised \$10,000 (Orlean). Two months later, the OVRFD presented plans to the Auxiliary for its approval and the construction was completed three years later (Orlean).

These three auxiliaries are a small sample representative of auxiliary influence in the kitchen to reshape firehouse spaces across the mid-Atlantic states in the twentieth century, showing the coordination and cooperation between ladies auxiliaries and fire departments. This collaboration enabled women to use conventionally feminine skills to move into and reshape the traditionally masculine space and face of the fire department.

The fundraising aspect of ladies auxiliary work continues to be central. In 1999, as reported in the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper, the Pikesville (Maryland) Volunteer Fire Company (PVFC) purchased a thermal imaging camera with \$21,000 raised by its 35-member Ladies Auxiliary for that specific purpose through bake sales, bull roasts, bingo games, and similar events over the year (Willis). The PVFC became the first fire department in the Baltimore area to have such a camera – a cutting-edge technology at that time – and the firefighters used it more than a dozen times within the first month of its purchase to locate fires hidden within walls and electrical problems (Willis). For a volunteer company to have an expensive and innovative piece of equipment before the city-funded career departments was remarkable and a testament to the Auxiliary's labor, hence the newspaper article. The article also made the camera purchase public knowledge: all readers knew that the PVFC had advanced firefighting capabilities, courtesy of its Auxiliary. The Auxiliary donation improved fire department services, and the article publicizing it built PVFC *ethos* by representing the department as technologically superior to neighboring departments.

Through their fundraising events, women gained authority over firehouse spaces, and a degree of financial independence from the fire department, though for some departments separate auxiliary bank accounts later became an issue of contention, as

detailed later in this chapter. Through supportive “women’s work” of baking, cooking, and host(ess)ing on behalf of the fire department, auxiliary women raised incredible sums that gave them influence in fire department spaces and impacted departmental values, despite the asymmetrical power distribution.

Community Relations

Ladies auxiliaries also performed essential publicity and relationship-building work that crafted department *ethos*: through their social acumen and rhetorical savvy, they constructed local networks that increased monetary and cultural support for the department. Auxiliary community projects often took the form of conventionally feminine labor, but served strategic purposes of characterizing the department as invested in the overall wellbeing of the community, even beyond fire protection, while simultaneously publicly affiliating women with the fire department. Community projects frequently included hosting free festivities at the firehouse, joining public celebrations, sending cards and gifts to the ill, and assisting other local groups. Through this work auxiliaries carved a niche for themselves as the department recognized the value of such projects and relationships, enabling women to shape department values and create a highly visible presence; the auxiliary women normalized their department participation, fostering community acceptance of their supportive collaboration in backgrounded feminized forms, which was leveraged for broader approval of women’s increasing involvement and influence in the department.

This section considers ladies auxiliaries’ community relations through the experience of the Raleigh Fire Department (RFD) Ladies Auxiliary and its representation in the city newspapers and Auxiliary records, including meeting minutes, scrapbooks,

financial records, and other archival items. I acknowledge, as Vicki Tolar Collins warns, feminist historians of rhetoric need to pay “particular attention to how publishing decisions and practices affect ethos as it functions in women’s texts and women’s readings” (546). By juxtaposing self-representations and newspaper accounts, I hope to highlight the ability of the RFD Ladies Auxiliary to create and disseminate positive accounts of itself and the fire department that both capture community-building work while simultaneously doing that work. The success of this auxiliary is particularly notable in its regional context: other women’s groups in nearby Durham and Chapel Hill repeatedly complained of their relegation to newspapers’ women’s pages, even engaging in a decade-long debate with editors in one case (Blair 34). The RFD Auxiliary, in contrast, enjoyed regular coverage in the *Raleigh Times* and the *News and Observer*, including weekly announcements on the women’s pages and events featured in the main news section, which were written up by reporters and included newspaper-funded photographs. The Auxiliary members clipped many of these items to save in scrapbooks, suggesting organizational support for these public representations. Despite a cultural climate that generally limited women’s groups’ media coverage, the RFD Ladies Auxiliary gained print prominence through locally valued projects and strategic community connections. The Auxiliary members were rhetorically astute, both in building networks and purposefully crafting departmental *ethos* by partnering with powerful constituents.

The RFD Ladies Auxiliary engaged both individuals and groups through relationship-building projects, a reflection of its purposeful approach to crafting *ethos*. Auxiliary scrapbooks are full of “thank you” letters and cards expressing gratitude for Auxiliary work, signifying the Auxiliary’s success in constructing fire department *ethos*

through displays of good will. From these notes, we know that the Auxiliary members regularly delivered by hand or by mail flowers, cards, and small gifts for birthdays, hospitalizations, sickness, holidays, and more on behalf of the fire department (*Scrapbook*). The Auxiliary's 1953-1954 *Scrapbook* includes letters from several groups acknowledging the Auxiliary's donations towards causes like the invention of a polio vaccine and cancer research, as well as gifts of clothing and jewelry to the "unfortunate women" at the State Hospital through the local American Red Cross chapter (*Scrapbook*). The Wake County Tuberculosis Sanatorium offered thanks for "remembrances on [the patients'] birthdays, the many tray favors, and all the other things which have been done to make their hospitalization more pleasant" (*Scrapbook* "Wake County Tuberculosis"). A photograph in *The Raleigh News and Observer* showed Auxiliary women making favors for the Sanatorium patients on August 4, 1953 for Friendship Day ("Friendship Day"). These letters and the newspaper photograph reflect the Auxiliary's success in building *ethos* and gaining general support for women's movement into the fire department's masculinized spaces. By caring for the community through conventionally feminine projects, the Auxiliary created an image of department investment in society wellbeing beyond emergency management, extending fire department service to include more "nurturing" projects appropriate to "women's work." By crafting these projects in a purposeful way, the Auxiliary-created department image reached the front page of the local newspapers. Conversely, the Auxiliary affiliated the work of the RFD with women, both at the scene of the fire and in media coverage. Both types of visual rhetoric paved the way for women's eventual movement into firefighting. The Auxiliary's social acumen and rhetorical savvy gave them

greater influence over department *ethos* and visibility to the community, facilitating women's reception into the fire department.

The RFD Ladies Auxiliary was deliberate in building relationships with the community and crafting a public image in the newspaper, and this consideration extended to partnership with the city government. Not only did this cooperation portray RFD investment in civic wellbeing, it also cultivated greater amiability and respect between the RFD and the City – particularly valuable for the RFD since it received some funding from the City. Auxiliary efforts garnered Department *ethos* with local officials as the women engaged in supportive collaboration through conventionally feminine labor. The City and the Auxiliary co-hosted public events, some quite ambitious, after the city asked the Auxiliary to partner with them as “the best group [in town]” (*Scrapbook*). One of these events was a back-to-school dance in August 1953, co-sponsored by the Raleigh Recreation and Parks Department and the RFD Ladies Auxiliary. According to the *Raleigh Times* newspaper, the Auxiliary “issued 5,000 invitations to Raleigh boys and girls who attend college,” inviting them and their dates (*Scrapbook*). Planning an event for up to 5,000 college students and their dates was certainly a remarkable undertaking – and it was a great success. Following the dance, the Director of the Recreation and Parks Department sent a letter to the Auxiliary to express appreciation for its work, propose co-sponsoring the dance again the next year, and share positive feedback from attendees; the Director wrote that “the program was successful from every standpoint” (*Scrapbook*). In the annual publicity report, an Auxiliary member wrote about the dance: “The ladies of the Auxiliary played a wonderful part in this program” (*Scrapbook*). The impact of the City and

community recognition is undeniable, serving to build RFD *ethos* and to ensure continued funding.

By strategically building community relationships, and inviting local newspapers to the resulting events, the RFD Ladies Auxiliary employed conventionally feminine skills to craft fire department *ethos*. Not only did these efforts create bonds with local people and organizations, but also with local government; by partnering with the City and impressing the officials, the Ladies Auxiliary fortified the relationship between the RFD and an important political and financial ally. Additionally, the Auxiliary women enacted an argument of their own belonging as they carried out work on behalf of the fire department, captured in the local newspapers. Media accounts spread the Auxiliary's reputation across the region, and this favorable image enabled women to increase their involvement and influence in the fire department. Through their social acumen and rhetorical savvy, the Auxiliary women claimed a role within the RFD, reshaping and then performing department work.

Asymmetry Exposed

The relationships between ladies auxiliaries and fire departments were generally characterized by mutual respect and harmony. Both organizations benefitted from collaboration: the auxiliary members gained entrance into the fire department in a professional role, and the firefighters gained support, fundraising, and publicity that improved their *ethos*. Despite the advantages of cooperation, ladies auxiliary and fire department interactions were not always collegial: as auxiliaries, these groups were always/already positioned as secondary and supplementary to the fire department and therefore the distribution of power was asymmetrical. The fire department was still men's

realm; ladies auxiliaries were welcomed until they posed a threat by becoming too powerful. Fire departments could exercise authority over their ladies auxiliaries, seize control or even dissolve them. This seems to have happened infrequently, and only as a response to an auxiliary action perceived by the fire department as a challenge or threat. These moments reveal the underlying structural differences between ladies auxiliaries and fire departments, but simultaneously highlight the authority that auxiliaries crafted for themselves within an exclusive space.

Ladies auxiliaries only organized with the support of their fire departments, an affirmation of the traditionally male-dominated fire department's authority over the traditionally female-dominated auxiliary. Some auxiliaries required more than local fire department approval, however; the Raleigh Fire Department (RFD) Ladies Auxiliary needed "written authorization" from the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) firefighters union when they organized in 1951. According to the IAFF's Resolution 63:

Whereas, The cooperative assistance of such ladies Auxiliaries can be beneficial and desirable only for as long as autonomy is retained by the fire fighters local involved: therefore, be it

Resolved, That no ladies Auxiliary be chartered without the written authorization of the membership of the fire fighters local. (*Scrapbook* "Resolution No. 63")

In this mandate, the IAFF expressed a fear of the potential influence of ladies auxiliaries over their fire departments. To mitigate this threat, Resolution 63 also granted unionized fire departments the ability to revoke their auxiliary's charter and disband it with thirty days' notice; in such cases, auxiliaries were offered little to no recourse (*Scrapbook*

“Resolution No. 63”). From their inception to their dissolution, ladies auxiliaries of IAFF unionized fire departments were under the purview of the firefighters. The RFD Ladies Auxiliary operated with this knowledge; there are no records of disputes between the Auxiliary and the RFD. Union rules protected the authority of the traditionally male fire department over ladies auxiliaries, a codification of asymmetrical gendered power relations.

However, not all ladies auxiliaries and fire departments managed to maintain cordial collaborative relationships, especially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Disagreements over finances became contentious for these typically gender-segregated groups, leading to arguments over how and where to spend funds, and who ultimately controlled the bank accounts. As will be seen, these disputes suggest that ladies auxiliary members in the twenty-first century were more assertive or authoritative than their twentieth century counterparts. Certainly, gender relations changed greatly over the twentieth century. In the early part of the century, women were establishing their professional *ethos* and collective agency, opening up the “rhetorical space” necessary to gain “political, economic, and cultural stature” (Johnson 1-2). Fire department ladies auxiliaries provided an avenue for this: through auxiliary participation, women gained experience and recognition that increased their public presence and influence, while aligning themselves with firefighting and building department *ethos*. Collaborative arrangements between departments and auxiliaries seem to dissolve in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, after Equal Rights campaigning and women’s eventual move into permanent full-time career firefighting positions. Some of these ladies auxiliaries, like the Arnold Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary, appear to have

faded away as Auxiliary members aged and young women joined the AVFD instead; other relationships between fire departments and their auxiliaries soured over issues of authority and agency. In these scenarios, auxiliary members (which in recent years include unrelated community members and men as well) have protested annexation by the fire department, even choosing to disband the auxiliary rather than surrender their organizations and bank accounts. This suggests that contemporary men and women are reluctant to assume traditional gender roles, disrupting a long tradition of collaboration in firefighting. Another factor in the dissolution of ladies auxiliaries and their fruitful partnership with firefighters is the changing structure of fire departments as modernizing bureaucratic and professional measures were implemented; late twentieth century changes in firefighting procedures, safety regulations, and funding closed the gap that many ladies auxiliaries had filled, sometimes rendering the auxiliary obsolete. The three cases of recent disputes between fire departments and ladies auxiliaries that I present next illustrate these tensions; in each case, the ladies auxiliary refused the new terms proposed by their respective departments and chose to dissolve rather than operate without a bank account or self-governance.

The first case involves the Clarksville (Maryland) Volunteer Fire Department (CVFD) and its Ladies Auxiliary. In 2000, the CVFD insisted that the Auxiliary turn over its bank account and file purchase orders to the CVFD for any expenses after criticizing an Auxiliary donation of \$275 in food baskets and presents to needy families over the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays as impermissible spending on an “outside” cause (Hopkins). The Auxiliary protested, stating that this annual event was a long-standing tradition that had never been met with criticism in the past and citing CVFD purchases unrelated to

firefighting, like baseball game tickets for firefighters (Hopkins). Around this same time, the Auxiliary also lost its event-hosting space after firehouse remodeling: the CVFD would have charged the Auxiliary \$1600 per day to rent the newly renovated ballroom. After attempts to negotiate, the Auxiliary chose to disband after 53 years of service rather than continue under the new arrangement. A 20-year Auxiliary member attributed the CVFD's actions to "male chauvin[ism]," while the Deputy Fire Chief called it "financial responsibility" (Hopkins).

The second case is that of the South Glens Falls (New York) Fire Company (SGFFC) and its Auxiliary. The SGFFC "restructured" its Auxiliary into a Support Group in 2009 with little explanation until months later, when the SGFFC cited "financial and membership issues, a need to rename the group to something gender neutral and a general desire to make changes to the fire company's way of doing business" (Reisman). Specifically, the SGFFC claimed that the Auxiliary had failed to reimburse them for building an Auxiliary office in the firehouse; the Auxiliary members called these claims "lies" and responded by referring back to annual audits, as well as pointing out the 1996 name change from "Ladies Auxiliary" to "Auxiliary" (Reisman). The SGFFC attempted to seize the Auxiliary bank account of Auxiliary fundraising profits, but the Auxiliary treasurer's name was still on the bank account and she arranged a donation of \$7000 to community groups other than the SGFFC (Reisman). The SGFFC Auxiliary was effectively disbanded and replaced by a department-controlled Support Group that only one former Auxiliary member joined, which the Fire Company President called "unfortunate" (Reisman).

The third case is the East Schodack (New York) Fire Company's (ESFC) dispute with its Ladies Auxiliary. After accusing them of larceny and misappropriation of funds from the

fire department, the ESFC disbanded its Ladies Auxiliary in 2010 after 51 years of service (Sanzone, McLoughlin). Over three years later, the ESFC filed a civil lawsuit against the former Ladies Auxiliary members for \$9300, claiming that the Auxiliary “secretly” transferred the funds from the ESFC bank account into its Auxiliary account (Gardinier). The ESFC acknowledged that the Auxiliary raised the money through various fundraising projects, but that as “the intended donee of any funds raised by events,” the money had to be spent on the ESFC – not as a donation to the state’s volunteer firefighter retirement community, as the Auxiliary had reportedly desired (Gardinier). The Auxiliary’s attorney responded to the ESFC, stating that in fact no money was missing from the account, such a transfer would not be illegal, and additionally, the Auxiliary had no intention to use the money for personal reasons (Gardinier).

In each of these three cases of auxiliary seizure by their fire department resulting from financial discord, the former auxiliary members were left outraged. A former member of the SGFFC Auxiliary wrote to the newspaper: “I was very proud to be a member of the SGF Auxiliary. It is still painful to deal with the situation. I feel violated as do the other members. [...] we ladies did take this personally. We were treated badly. This whole situation was terribly mishandled” (nana6). In Clarksville, a former CVFD Auxiliary member told the newspaper: “[The CVFD] at one point told us that we were no more than a social club. [...] I doubt if any of [the former Auxiliary members] would go back [...] There’s been a lot of feelings hurt” (Hopkins). Not only did these annexations cause hurt feelings, they also were sources of family conflict, as many auxiliary members were related to firefighters. In East Schodack, one of the Auxiliary members named in the lawsuit was former treasurer Jean Schweigert, mother of the at-that-time ESFC Chief and wife of the

past ESFC Chief. These individual responses highlight the complexities of fire department and ladies auxiliary relationships, and the complications that arise from gender trouble and collaboration breakdown.

These cases also raise an interesting point about the purpose of ladies auxiliaries. Not only did auxiliary members feel hurt and insulted by their fire departments' actions, they also felt "violated." The auxiliaries were *their* organizations, but after losing their bylaws, bank accounts, and events, the members no longer felt ownership. For two former SGFFC Auxiliary members, the group's membership in addition to ownership was jeopardized by the fire department-imposed changes: the fire department could remove people from the group "at their pleasure" (Francine, nana6). Jamie Smith Hopkins, reporting on the CVFD, summed it up like this: "The real sticking point is the issue of identity and control – namely, does the auxiliary exist anymore if its members aren't running fund-raisers and managing the money?" (Hopkins) The CVFD Auxiliary President told Hopkins, "[The CVFD] took away the purpose of the auxiliary" (Hopkins). If the purpose of ladies auxiliaries was to build department *ethos* through collaboration, how does the dissolution of these relationships impact that *ethos*? In each of these cases, the immediate public response to the collaboration breakdown was certainly damaging to department *ethos*: auxiliary members were framed as victims and firefighters as cold-hearted and ruthless.

While department reputation was initially jeopardized in these cases, the disputes quickly faded from public memory because many of these departments, especially in urban or suburban locations, no longer relied on public *ethos* to acquire operating resources. The fire department has increasingly become an institutionalized branch of city government in

such locations, dependent on the city instead of the community for all of its needs.

Acquiring and maintaining government support is an essentially different project from that of community support, and perhaps the value of the traditionally gendered supportive collaboration of the auxiliary does not transfer; there was no longer the same demand for fireground support, fundraising, and community relationship building, challenging the foundational work of the auxiliary and leading to the short-sighted denunciation of the auxiliary as a mere “social club.” Additionally, as today’s women rightfully expect and demand to be treated as equals, becoming firefighters themselves, perhaps the notion of a secondary always/already subordinate support organization is itself outdated. In an online newspaper forum, a former SGFFC Auxiliary member challenged the new Support Group rules that prohibited members from speaking at SGFFC meetings, running for office, or voting, asking “Why would anyone want to join an organization like that? The President just wanted 100% control over Us” (Francine).

In the larger narrative of women’s entrance into the fire department across the twentieth century, ladies auxiliary work was more than a stepping stone into direct firefighting roles; it was an end in itself for many women, who worked tirelessly to proudly provide for their communities. Before it was a job, emergency response was a community responsibility taken on by local families. Through women’s diligence and commitment, auxiliaries became powerful in their own right. As women gained greater rights and opportunities over the twentieth century, they increasingly resisted rigid gendering in the fire department: women fought for equal access to firefighting careers as well as for greater authority and agency in their ladies auxiliaries.

Conclusion

As supportive collaborators, ladies auxiliary members carved out a first niche for themselves in the fire department by performing “women’s work” to build department *ethos*. Auxiliary member work in each of these areas afforded them unique opportunities: they learned and practiced emergency response skills on the fire ground, they gained entrance and authority in the firehouse, and they earned community respect and approval. These were not just women fulfilling their wifely role of helpmate, however; collaboration was a rhetorical strategy for increasing women’s access and influence in the fire department without upsetting conventional gender roles. While conventional gender roles originally excluded women from fire department participation, women found ways to employ their feminized skills to create new spaces to inhabit.

In addition to expanding feminist rhetoricians’ understanding of collaboration and gender, this research recovers fire department ladies auxiliaries – and there is more recovery to do. Auxiliary work has been undervalued and forgotten, and with the passage of time, it will become even more difficult to retrieve. The time and effort to discover the archives I rely upon here, at the Arnold Volunteer Fire Department and the Raleigh Fire Department, was substantial, and my access to those materials hinged on my own membership in the larger firefighter community. Feminist rhetoricians have overlooked conventional conservative women, such as ladies auxiliary women, as Carol Mattingly pointed out in 2002 and Charlotte Hogg echoed in 2015; Hogg asks, “Aren’t conservative women’s rhetorical practices also worthy of study?” (392). Recovery work is not yet done, particularly for recovering women who do not resemble educated feminists.

Ladies auxiliaries’ supportive collaboration proved to be an effective way for women to access a highly exclusive masculinized field, given the asymmetrical distribution

of power. The lens of collaboration helps researchers to take the long view in studying women's entrance into the workplace, as advocated for by Hallenbeck and Smith (202), encompassing indirect contributions, conventionally feminine labor, and rhetorics of wifely duty. The fluidity of collaborative roles aids in capturing the complexities of women's entrance into the hierarchical masculinized workplace; the *ethos* that women built as supportive collaborators facilitated their movement into more productive roles. Carolyn Skinner notes that *ethos* "influences not only an individual rhetor's immediate communicative situation but also the broader context and the persuasive options available to other potential speakers and writers" (40). Auxiliary participation prepared members, fire departments and the public for the transition of women from leadership roles in the background, that "did not show", to the foreground, as pillars of the fire department and the community.

CHAPTER III

“MANNING THE FIRE DEPARTMENT”: WOMEN STEP INTO VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTING

As ladies auxiliary members, women proved their value to the fire department. Their collaboration with the fire department was beneficial to both groups: through their cooperative arrangements, the fire department gained essential support services that strengthened its *ethos* and the ladies auxiliary members gained access to new professional spaces. The auxiliary members presence in the firehouse and on the fire ground made a highly visible argument for women’s participation and normalized their presence. As auxiliary women performed conventional women’s work as supportive collaborators in fire department spaces, they also learned department inner workings: to be maximally effective, auxiliary members needed to know about firefighting strategies, techniques, and machinery, as well as department policies, structures, and management. For example, to best provide refreshments at the scene of the fire, the auxiliary learned where to set up, when their service would be in highest demand, what signs indicated that the work was coming to a close. While auxiliary women typically were not involved in direct firefighting efforts, their fire department experience expanded beyond the kitchen; the women observed and learned about firefighting to carry out auxiliary work successfully.

As ladies auxiliary members, women were part of the larger fire department Community of Practice, or part of a group of people sharing related concerns and committed to deepening the skill set to address those concerns through shared action; from the fire house to the fire ground, their presence became normalized and central to department *ethos*. Though at the edges or margins of the community, performing less

valued “women’s work”, these women were perfectly situated when the opportunity arose to move along the collaborative spectrum. As Lindal Buchanan theorizes it, collaboration happens on a sliding scale, in this case from supportive forms such as typical indirect backgrounded ladies auxiliary work to productive forms such as typical direct foregrounded firefighting work. Understanding collaboration in this way opens up the possibility for fluid movement between roles, particularly important for marginalized rhetors (Buchanan, *Regendering* 135). Firefighting was generally characterized by antithetical gendering logics that “continually figure men’s bodies as strong and women’s bodies as weak” (Jack, “Acts” 290) that cast supportive roles as feminine and productive roles as masculine; women and men were firmly situated on opposite ends of the collaborative spectrum under antithesis. Crisis, however, provided exigence for the emergence of new collaborative forms through women’s entrance into volunteer firefighting roles from their position at the edge of the Community of Practice. According to Buchanan, collaborators have “the most inventive options for creating and delivering discourse in resistant surroundings,” particularly important for women rhetors (*Regendering* 135). Fire departments found “inventive options” by turning to women during crisis. The crisis posed by fire called for dramatic and immediate response, and while men were the preferred responders, sometimes more bodies were needed. In those moments, antithetical gendering was suspended, and women moved from supportive wifely auxiliary roles to productive roles, performing “men’s work” to protect their communities. With the resolution of the fire crisis, women stepped out of the frontline to resume more conventional women’s work. This work, of firefighter wives and auxiliary

members, prepared women to move into direct firefighting and to succeed, proving themselves capable and maintaining department *ethos*.

The circumstances under which women were welcomed as volunteer firefighters varied, as did the duties that they were expected to complete. Of course, women stepped in from the sidelines temporarily when emergencies threatened to overcome the responders, but women also volunteered as firefighters in more official and sustained capacity. In this chapter, I look at two occasions when women stepped into volunteer firefighting roles to compensate for men's absence: during World War 2 and during the 1960s onward with the rise of the modern workday. Women were welcomed, even solicited, to volunteer as replacements for the depleted fire departments; the threat of the fire crisis was too great to be ignored. These women carried out the same tasks as the men, responding to emergencies at a moment's notice, operating machinery, driving fire department vehicles, and working long hours away from family. The crisis created opportunity, and women moved into more productive collaborative roles. In doing so, they began to shift the exclusively masculine connotations of firefighting.

The remainder of this chapter views women's movement into volunteer firefighting positions through the theoretical framework outlined in chapter one, which proposes that crisis motivates shifts between collaborative roles, providing exigence for women to move into foregrounded productive roles. I explore women's preparation for these new roles through their position at the edge of volunteer fire department Communities of Practice. To situate my study, I give an overview of volunteer firefighting work, including general history and department culture. Following this, I offer a more detailed description of my theoretical framework, mentioned above, before analyzing examples, drawn from archival

accounts, during World War 2 and the 1960s onward. I consider not only women's movement into volunteer firefighting roles, but also how women claimed these roles, inhabiting and changing the positions to maintain gender expectations; by reframing volunteer firefighting to include "women's work," such as medical care and mothering, women held onto department positions even beyond crisis resolution. The crisis provided exigence for women's entrance, and once there, women expanded department services in ways that proved so valuable that once men returned, women transitioned into this more conventionally gendered work – a rhetorical strategy to create space for women in emergency response. As fire department volunteers, women continued to build department *ethos* and make an argument for their inclusion.

Volunteer Firefighting

Volunteer firefighting has a long history in the United States, with neighbors joining together to protect themselves from fire crisis. The formal distinction between full-time paid "career" firefighters and unpaid "volunteer" firefighters arose in the late nineteenth century, after the first salaried department was established in Cincinnati, Ohio through municipal funding (NFPA "Key Dates"). The advent of local and federal funding for fire departments created paid firefighting positions across the country, especially in cities; today the majority of firefighters in urban areas are career and the majority of firefighters in rural areas are volunteer (NFPA "The Fire Service"). As cities expanded and populations grew, fire departments increasingly turned to career firefighters: in 1976, 91 percent of firefighters were volunteers (Jacobs 345); in 1990, 80 percent of firefighters were volunteers (Perkins 360); in 2013, 69 percent of firefighters were volunteers (NFPA "The Fire Service"). In rural settings, most volunteers were working class men with extensive

family ties to the fire department; in suburban areas, volunteers were more middle class (Simpson 26-27). Despite the distinction, career and volunteer firefighters have been subject to the same national training and operation standards under the U.S. Fire Administration since its founding in 1974.

Traditionally, especially in rural communities where volunteer fire departments were most prevalent, boys were groomed to become volunteer firefighters by their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and brothers. Volunteer firefighting was part of family identity, and the fire department culture extended to all family members, including female relatives who joined the ladies auxiliary. The volunteer fire department was a “community of practice” (CoP), or a group of people “who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 4). While broad and loose use of the CoP concept has garnered criticism (Amin & Roberts), firefighters seem to be generally accepted as an appropriate example in studies of workplace learning, as supported by Taber et al. and Lloyd. Part of the justification involves firefighter identity: volunteer firefighters widely demonstrate complete individual investment in the department’s concerns, problems, and passions, which characterizes a CoP. As new members learn and acquire the group’s culture, skills, and values, they “join” the CoP; their sense of identity is integral to their sense of belonging. New members are expected to become united with existing members in their “whole person” (Wenger 55-56) such that they recognize themselves in each other.

For volunteer firefighters, joining the CoP generally looked like this: a young man would enter the local volunteer fire department, where his father or other male relatives

were members, at the age of 18; members would vote to accept him on a probationary status, then he would have a year to complete formal training, attend meetings, and assist in a limited capacity at emergencies; after a year, he would be evaluated and voted upon for full membership (Simpson 22). At this point, he would commit to attending regular meetings and volunteering a number of hours per month for emergency response, either leaving from the fire house or from home/work to respond during those scheduled times when he was “on call” or “on duty”. He would manage department responsibilities by “limiting [his] sports time and holding to a norm in which the alarm takes precedence over sleep or family time” (Simpson 32). Over time, he would gain practical experience and complete additional training to take on greater responsibility and status. He would continue his volunteer service for his entire adulthood, with reduced hours as he aged, eventually contributing as a resource of department wisdom instead of as an emergency responder.

In this traditional typical cycle of a volunteer firefighter, there was no space for women participants. Many original department constitutions specified that applicants had to be men – and white – and the rounds of voting provided additional opportunities to exclude anyone deemed undesirable. Firefighting work has long been associated with masculinity through its value of rationality, physical dominance in manual labor, the control of nature, and competition (Cooper; Greenberg; Hall and Robinson; Pacholok; Simpson; Tracy and Scott; Yarnal et al.), an archetypical man’s domain, “seen as appropriate for workers with masculine [...] characteristics” (Brittain 424). Women’s role was in the ladies auxiliary, where she was expected to perform “women’s work” in support of her firefighter-husband and uphold family responsibilities, which did not take

“precedence” to men while they were “on call” or “on duty.” Not only was firefighting “man’s work,” parenting was “women’s work”; based on these gender expectations, if women became volunteer firefighters, they would be less capable than their male counterparts and their homes and children would be left untended during emergencies.

This powerful gendering of work based on conventional gender roles posed significant barriers to women’s entrance into firefighting; however, at certain historical moments, fire crisis provided an urgent exigence for women’s contribution as productive collaborators, for them to participate directly in typical firefighting activities. When men’s bodies were unavailable to fight fire, women’s bodies were acceptable, at least briefly. Examples abound that show that when the moment arose, women stepped in, temporarily and voluntarily. A *Boston Daily Globe* article subtitle from 1920 reads “Feminine Fire Fighters Prevent Flames From Reaching Homes” and recounts the success of a bucket brigade composed of men and women in extinguishing a fire (“Women Battle”). Outside Philadelphia, women “arm[ed] themselves with pieces of brush and bags” to battle a wildfire before the arrival of the firefighters in 1929 (“Women Fight Fire”). When crisis mandated that antithetical positioning of men and women be dropped, women stepped in and did the work, challenging fire department gendering; when the crisis was resolved, the women stepped out. Every time that women stepped in, no matter how briefly, they challenged the stereotypical “fireman” image and disrupted workplace gendering.

Anticipating crisis, some fire departments began training their auxiliary members to facilitate their movement from supportive to productive collaborative forms during crisis. The fire department still maintained asymmetrical power structures between firefighters and auxiliary members, and continued employing the figure of antithesis – women were

meant to be “back-up” and could not simply join the firefighters of their own volition – but women’s capability was increasingly recognized. It was *worth* training auxiliary members for direct firefighting. The Silver Spring (MD) Fire Department Chief explained to the *Washington Post* in 1928 that their department was preparing the auxiliary so that “women will be able by training and experience to proceed to the rescue of persons in fire or flood” (“Women Have Part”). Auxiliary members displayed their firefighting prowess in “field day” contests, where auxiliaries competed with each other in events like the “standing pumper and hook-up contest,” which tested their ability to efficiently attach a fire hose from a hydrant to the fire engine; on August 24, 1935, the Arlington-Fairfax Counties Firemen’s Association (VA) hosted 75 fire departments and their ladies auxiliaries for such field day events (“Firemen Plan”). Fire department endorsement of such events, and the expenditure of time and resources to train the auxiliary women, reflected support for women’s participation in direct firefighting and belief in women’s ability to do the work. Women were there, and they were prepared – some were even explicitly trained – to temporarily step in to active volunteer firefighting roles when crisis suspended the antithetical positioning that otherwise excluded them.

Crisis motivated gender fluidity in the fire department: fire demands an immediate response. The ideal responders are always male, but when more responders are needed, the façade of masculinity is dropped. The fires in Boston and Philadelphia mentioned in the previous section are examples of gendered barriers lowered to admit women participants, even if only temporarily, during crisis. When there were not enough men, women were welcomed; antithetical framing of men and women, and their supposed roles and abilities, was suspended, because bodies are bodies. During fire crisis, everyone – the fire

department, the firefighters, the locals – prioritized saving life and property above everyday norms of gender rigidity. This opened space for women to move from supportive collaborative positions to productive ones, engaging in direct firefighting work.

My theorization of crisis as exigence for new collaborative forms builds on crisis literature from sociology. Crisis unsettles the status quo by requiring everyone “to think and act differently by being preoccupied with failure” (Newswander 558). This creates a fluid environment where new possibilities must be considered; the famous innovator Henry Ford is attributed with saying that if you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got. Upholding conventional gender rigidity during fire crisis would not resolve the crisis. The concern with “failure” during fire crisis was powerful because the stakes were high: “failure” meant loss of life and property, which was devastating to the community in a personal sense and devastating to the fire department *ethos* in a professional sense. More bodies were needed, and women were available. Collective thinking and acting “differently” suspended oppositional fire department gendering to create exigence for women’s entrance.

Now only were women available, they were also prepared. Some ladies auxiliary members had explicit training, as mentioned in the previous section, and other women had learned through observation at the sidelines. As supportive collaborators, women were in the background, fulfilling different roles than men, but they were there, in the fire house and at the emergency scene; often, fulfilling these roles most effectively and successfully hinged upon the women’s knowledge of the men’s work. Women were already there, at the edges of the firefighter Community of Practice, and this facilitated women’s entrance into direct firefighting roles. Women knew the department culture, skills, and values; as ladies

auxiliary members and firefighter relatives, they invested in department success and built department *ethos*. In their customary supportive roles, performing “women’s work,” they were kept at the edges of the CoP: the department’s gender rigidity situated women’s bodies oppositionally to men’s, preventing the “whole person” unification that enables full CoP membership, where members identify with each other by recognizing similarities (Wenger 55-56). Nevertheless, from the edges women were prepared to move towards the center; they were positioned to move into direct firefighting roles when crisis arose.

The crisis provided exigence for women to move into direct firefighting roles as productive collaborators, regardless of the antithetical positioning that had kept them at the margins of the CoP previously. In some fire departments, women not only participated as volunteer firefighters but also found new niches to inhabit; women reshaped department image and values to accommodate them, normalizing women’s presence and creating space for themselves and future women in the CoP. Crisis may expose weaknesses in the standard ways of operating, pointing the way towards improvement; during the crisis, “new forms, structures, procedures, hierarchies, and understanding emerge, giving a new form to the system, often at a higher level of order and complexity” (Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer 272). The crisis motivates a reorganization to address the flaws that have surfaced; the emergent system ideally mitigates the threat of future crises. In the volunteer fire department, the threat of fire crisis was reduced by including women as firefighters and expanding the number of people available for emergency response. By adopting a gender fluidity that enabled women to move into volunteer firefighting positions, the fire department was strengthened and women began establishing themselves in the CoP, leading to long-term volunteer firefighting positions.

Stepping In

Next, I explore women's movement into volunteer firefighting through crisis, stepping from background supportive collaborative roles at the edge of the CoP into foreground productive collaborative roles alongside prototypical CoP members. Drawing on newspaper archives, organizational histories recorded by fire departments and ladies auxiliaires, and a collection of publicly available oral histories, I examine two times when women stepped into volunteer firefighting roles in response to the threat of fire crisis: during the "man shortage" of World War 2 and during men's daytime absence with the rise of the modern work day, starting in the 1960s. In both of these cases, women moved from the edge of the community into the center, shifting from supportive roles to productive ones. As volunteer firefighters, these women built department *ethos* through effective emergency response and they reshaped the fire department by expanding its services to include conventional women's work in the form of medical care for the community and childcare for the emergency responders. By expanding the fire department in this way, women carved out a place for themselves that disrupted antithetical positioning that excluded women from occupying direct firefighting roles central to the CoP.

Stepping In During World War 2

Spurred by the homefront "man shortage" of World War 2, the fire department, like other male-dominated professions, called for women to step in to provide emergency services and maintain departmental *ethos*. This call constituted women as volunteer firefighters, to "fill the gap" left by men. Ladies auxiliary members and firefighter wives were ready, already members at the edge of the Community of Practice, fulfilling supportive roles. A 1941 article in *Fire Engineering*, a major technical publication, asserted

that women were needed because “no fire department has the manpower to handle situations brought about by air attacks” (Sheppard, 25). The fire crisis opened opportunities for women, and women stepped in. Women’s movement into volunteer firefighting roles during World War 2 was part of a larger opening up of male-dominated professions across the country at that time, where women were welcomed into formerly exclusive spaces while men were away at war. Recent publications in feminist rhetorical studies have explored this phenomenon, including work by Jordynn Jack on women factory workers and women scientists, Risa Applegarth on women anthropologists, Sarah Hallenbeck on women inventors, as well as a recent collection on the topic edited by Ann George, M. Elizabeth Weiser, and Janet Zepernick. This section traces this thread as well, adding to it by theorizing the exigence of crisis in shifting the collaborative forms to better understand women’s movement in from the edges of the CoP.

As ladies auxiliary members, women had observed and assisted in firefighting tasks previously, but during World War 2 they stepped into volunteer firefighting roles and assumed greater responsibility. Examples of women moving from ladies auxiliary to firefighting positions at this time are plentiful; many fire departments relied on these women to maintain emergency response services and department reputation. For example, the Capitol Heights (MD) Volunteer Fire Department membership dropped by 40 members at the start of the war, and so junior members (male teenagers) and ladies auxiliary members were trained in firefighting (Capitol Heights). The women took on all firefighter duties, from fighting fires to operating equipment.

By taking on firefighting responsibilities – and carrying them out successfully – these women continued the work of reshaping the department; they proved that women

could directly contribute to departmental *ethos* through performing this conventionally masculine job. A responsibility of particular significance was equipment operation. Fire engines were heavy-duty vehicles, difficult to maneuver due to size and water weight, and complicated to control due to technical and physical demands associated with running the pump and attaching the hose. Women fire engine drivers subverted gendered expectations; during the 1940s, women drivers of any vehicle, let alone vehicles explicitly associated with “men’s work,” “may have seemed to be abandoning their proper maternal and caretaking roles” (Wosk xiii), yet women volunteer firefighters performed such work across the east coast. Six women at the Branchville (MD) Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary – Dorothy Stauffer, Mae Duval, Kitty Fortner, Katherine Kirkpatrick, Alma Caudell, and Blanche Longanecker – were trained on their Diamond “T” pumper engine, known as the Cadillac of fire engines with a 4 cylinder engine and a chain drive (Branchville). For the Pine Beach (NJ) Fire Company, ladies auxiliary members Elizabeth Schiel, Evelyn Benedict, and Reba Creamer led other women in operating the fire truck, attending drills, and responding to fires (Pine Beach). The Jonesville (NY) Volunteer Fire Department was staffed by Mary Hardey, Charlotte Sumner, and Evelyn Norton, operating and driving all of the department vehicles, including a 1925 American LaFrance pumper, which weighed one ton, and could carry two ladders, 200 to 500 feet of firehose, and twelve people (Jonesville). Due to their position at the edge of the department CoP these women were able to quickly step in to drive and operate fire engines, when crisis provided the exigence and gendered barriers were lowered. Women moved from background supportive collaborative roles into foreground productive collaborative roles, transitioning along the gendered spectrum of department work and simultaneously becoming visible as firefighters in the public eye.

Women proved that they were competent firefighters – not just last-resort back-ups – capable of building departmental *ethos* in the same manner as men. Lorena Ann Olmstead reported to the *Fire Engineering* magazine in 1942 on women’s emergency response: “Any day in the year, the fire department siren may send forth its call. When that happens, the women drop whatever they are doing, whether it is the weekly washing, baking a pie for dinner, or cleaning the house” (Olmstead). Women were ready to respond at a moment’s instance, navigating the gendered roles of homemaker and firefighter. The ladies auxiliary members turned firefighters from the Branchville (MD) Volunteer Fire Department were acknowledged as “a very effective addition to firefighting under wartime emergency measures” (Branchville). Noting their recent graduation from a 15-week course in firefighting techniques, *The Pittsburgh Press* reported on women from the Landisville (PA) Volunteer Fire Company successfully battling a greenhouse fire in 1944 (“Women Fight \$8000 Fire”). Women’s success as wartime volunteer firefighters suggests the extent to which they learned firefighting practices from the sidelines; for fire departments to have maintained emergency services and department *ethos* – and even be commended – with so many “new” members was impressive and newsworthy.

When World War 2 ended, the exigence behind women’s entrance into volunteer firefighting expired. For many of the women who entered into the workplace during this time, men’s return home meant women’s return to the house. Jordynn Jack highlights the pressure that women workers faced at the end of the war with “renewed attention to homemaking as women’s natural role,” citing *New York Times* articles from 1945 and 1946 that call for women to relinquish their positions to offset job shortages and to acknowledge women’s inferiority to men in the workplace (“Acts” 299). Women largely left their

volunteer firefighting positions, but some women reinvented their roles in the department, reshaping the department's image by claiming space for women: characterized as "wifely and motherly" work at that time (Hartmann 19), some women remained in the fire department by moving into medical care. Volunteer ambulance squads had begun providing first aid services in the 1920s in New Jersey and Virginia, and over the following decades, this service spread across states and was included under the fire department umbrella (Zaidi and Bucher). It was a practical decision: fire departments were already there, with established infrastructure for a similar purpose and volunteers with a similar commitment. Women quickly moved into these roles opened by a new type of crisis response, keeping volunteer positions with the fire department.

By leveraging conventions of "women's work," some women made a smooth transition from volunteer firefighting to volunteer medical care after men returned from war. This gave women another way into the fire department and another way to reshape the department's image and values. The story of Mrs. Lee Warrender, from the Port Washington (NY) Fire Department (PWFD) illustrates women's movement into the field, first as volunteer firefighter during the war and then as medical care providers afterwards. During World War 2, the PWFD suffered a "shortage of man power caused by many of our members in the service or working in war plants," which it resolved when it "decided to seek women volunteers" ("Firemen Name Woman"). Warrender was welcomed into the department, and with "an opportunity to prove herself capable of this kind of [firefighting] work," it is reported that she "proved beyond doubt that she [could] replace the firemen who [had] gone to the front" (Long); for her service, she received a gold badge (Long).

Warrender was acknowledged as a good “fireman,” who was as effective as any other firefighter.

Near the war’s end, Warrender moved into fire department medical service. Other PWFD women continued their service by volunteering with the ambulance too (“Department History”). PWFD first aid was important to the community: as PWFD chairperson William H. Hewett told the local newspaper, “the oxygen, resuscitator, and inhalator services have to be ready for any emergency at a moment’s notice, as any delay may mean the difference between life and death” (“Firemen Name Woman”). With her training in first aid and her reputation as a “very careful auto driver,” Warrender was named Ambulance Driver after “considerable consideration” (“Firemen Name Woman”). This title also conferred leadership status to Warrender, appointing her as an officer. Earning this title was no small feat, considering the challenge of operating an unwieldy vehicle and the challenge to the gender conventions that restricted women from getting behind the wheel of such a vehicle; even into the 1950s and 1960s, “powerful, large car[s] [were] destined for the male head of household” (Wajcman 135). Warrender proved herself capable of fire department work once again, as a leader, a driver, and a first aid provider. The PWFD was “very proud” of Warrender’s contributions and “received many letters of appreciation from patients testifying to her excellent service” as a first aid provider (“Firemen Name Woman”). Warrender’s successes across fire department roles showed the PWFD and the community that women were an asset to the fire department; the impact of Warrender and the other women first aid providers on the PWFD’s public image led to women’s increased acceptance and participation, creating greater opportunities for women to act as productive collaborators and CoP members.

Women increasingly began joining fire departments in first aid positions after World War 2; fire departments were responsible for medical issues as well as fire crisis, and women were situated to step into these volunteer roles. Some of these women, such as Warrender, found medical service as a way to stay directly involved in emergency response after they were no longer afforded access to firefighting; many of these women were ladies auxiliary members and firefighter wives, previously in supportive roles at the edge of the CoP. Such departmental connections and previous experience eased women's transition into prominent volunteer medical care positions; by striking a careful balance of gender-appropriate contributions and supporting their firefighter-husbands, women continued to make an argument for their departmental service. For example, in 1951, the Moyers Corner (NY) Fire Department purchased an ambulance and began offering first aid in conjunction with their ladies auxiliary. The group consisted of 24 men and 8 women who had received Red Cross training; their firehouse was even designated a Red Cross First Aid Station (Moyers Corners). Nearby Union Hill (NY) Fire Department formed a volunteer ambulance corps in 1959, staffed by firefighters and ladies auxiliary members with first aid training (Union Hill). Medical service provided women with professionalization and public visibility within the fire department, reshaping department image and values. The wartime "man shortage" afforded women opportunity to shift collaborative roles, but when men returned home after the war ended, women did not simply return to ladies auxiliaries. Some women used their wartime experience as productive collaborators to carve out a niche for themselves in medical services, maintaining foregrounded participation on the fire ground.

Stepping In During the Daytime

Women were again solicited to volunteer as firefighters along the east coast starting in the 1960s, when there was another type of “man shortage”: families had moved to the suburbs but the breadwinner-fathers worked in the cities, leaving fire departments in rural and suburban areas short of male daytime shift volunteers (LeRoy & Sonstelie; Baum-Snow; Kopecky & Suen). The old model of volunteer firefighting, where men would come running from work at the sound of the fire alarm, was no longer tenable because of its reliance on work-home proximity and a fading occupational model, where men could abruptly leave for emergency response (Fifield). Changing employment trends created a need for women’s volunteer labor, especially for fire department daytime shifts when men were less available. Fire departments assumed that women had daytime availability because they were unemployed; if they had school-age children, it was presumed that they had several hours each day to themselves when they could respond to emergencies.

Across the east coast, volunteer fire departments confronted understaffing problems. Once again, fire crisis provided an exigence for women’s entrance: bodies were bodies, and while men’s bodies were ideal, women’s bodies could do the work. Women were increasingly recognized as capable firefighters, especially given their service during World War 2 and their fire department work as volunteer medical care providers. In a 1973 report, the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control recommended to all U.S. fire departments “that communities train and utilize women for fire service duties” based on the success of firefighter wives responding to daytime fires in lieu of their husbands in Florida and Ohio (20). In 1981, John McQuade, the New Jersey State Fire Marshal, explained that the “trend” of women volunteers began in 1975 and would continue because “young men today, too busy making a living and keeping up with the

economy, are not as eager to become volunteers as they once were [...] women are being accepted because they are badly needed” (Saul). Women were “badly needed” to protect their communities in case of fire crisis, opening up women’s movement from supportive wifely roles at the edge of the CoP to productive roles engaging directly in firefighting at the center of the CoP.

Similar to their predecessors during World War 2, women responded to this call and proved that they were effective firefighters. A survey of fire departments in rural and suburban areas outside of New York City reveals contributions by young women in the 1970s. Fire departments, like the Hopewell Hose Company #1, now the East Fishkill Fire District, not only accepted women but welcomed them as daytime firefighters to “fill the gap” while men were working (East Fishkill). In 1974, Mary Valone became the first woman to join the Middlebush (NJ) Volunteer Fire Department, where she helped cover the daytime shift while her three children were at school (Saul). In the late 1970s, Beverly Reese responded to the Port Washington (NY) Fire Department’s call for women to join daytime shifts: “I used to do mostly days, because the kids were in school and I could go up there all day long and do it” (Reese 6). Women were accepted into daytime volunteer firefighting positions to “fill the gap,” but very few women worked overnight shifts.

The barriers to women covering overnight shifts were many, but a primary one was mentioned previously: women were expected to handle household and childcare responsibilities while their husbands prioritized emergency response (Simpson 32). Since most women volunteers were firefighter wives at this time, for families with children husband and wife could not both respond, and so the man, as the culturally preferred body, would go and the woman, with her parenting duties, would stay. This same obstacle existed

for ladies auxiliary members as firefighter wives, though providing auxiliary support services at the emergency scene did not require as many bodies as firefighting. Some ladies auxiliaries circumvented the childcare obstacle by creating systems for alternating between staying home with children and attending the fire. The women provided childcare for each other to satisfy both mother and fire department ladies auxiliary roles. Jacqueline Walters, ladies auxiliary member of the Port Washington (NY) Fire Department (PWFD) since 1968, teamed up with her sister-in-law, also a member: “we would take turns. One of us would watch all the kids and [the other would] go, and the next time the other one would go” (Walters 5). The collaboration eventually extended across the auxiliary, and Walters says, “sometimes, the girls [the other auxiliary members] would—we’d take each other’s kids” (Walters 31). Women’s coordinated efforts enabled them to satisfy the cultural demands of motherhood and participate in the fire department ladies auxiliary beyond daytime roles.

As PWFD women grew in number and influence, childcare moved into the firehouse; the space that had excluded *women* a few decades earlier now accommodated women and their *children*. Since Mrs. Lee Warrender’s volunteer contributions, the number of women members at PWFD had grown, especially as its ambulance service expanded. The PWFD needed women volunteers to maintain its services and its *ethos*, creating an opportunity for women to integrate childcare directly into the department in response to crisis. The childcare system from the 1960s, described by Jacqueline Walters, of keeping mothering at home and fire department work at the firehouse, was too restrictive for the increasingly busy fire department schedule, particularly given the unpredictability of emergencies; it was a struggle to efficiently coordinate and arrange childcare at a moment’s notice. The

crisis brought childcare into the firehouse. The PWFD relied on women's availability, and so by the early 1980s, women were bringing their children with them. PWFD first aid provider Jane Weiss recounted, "children, of course, love the fire department, so I would take them with me [...] if there were other women there – and even some of the men – they would watch the kids if somebody went out on a call [to respond to an emergency]" (Weiss 12). Weiss described a firehouse childcare system that was a revision of Walter's at-home childcare system, but significantly both men and women provided childcare in the new arrangement: "even some of the men," Weiss said, would watch the children, allowing women to respond. This is evidence of women's central presence in the CoP: the concerns, problems, and passions of the CoP expanded to include conventional women's work of childcare. Childcare looked different, because the new system grew out of crisis response; the former system, which kept women volunteers at home with their children, failed because it limited the number of bodies available for emergency response.

Some PWFD women credit the childcare system with improving recruitment and retention of women members in emergency response. Free and readily available childcare enabled women to seek additional training, put in extra hours, and rise through the ranks. PWFD first aid provider Christina Alexander had young children when she started volunteering in the 1990s. Required to sign-up for weekly "on-duty" hours to be fulfilled at the firehouse, she knew she might not always have outside childcare: "I might have a kid with me, but every Thursday from five to nine, [two long-time members] took me under their wing and out on the ambulance I went" (Alexander 25). Alexander brought her children with her to the firehouse, knowing that if an emergency happened she could leave her children there, under another volunteer's supervision. With the PWFD support for

crossover between motherhood and fire department roles, Alexander thrived, eventually becoming a Captain of the PWFD Fire Medics. The childcare system, born out of crisis, facilitated Alexander's movement into a productive collaborator role as a leader, at the center of the CoP.

When PWFD women were called into volunteer firefighting positions in the 1970s to "fill the gap" during men's daytime absence in response to crisis, they rhetorically reconstructed the firehouse into a true "house", a place that was suitable for them as firefighter and mothers. Crisis provided an exigence for women's entrance into the PWFD and a reason to adapt the childcare system. As the fire department image and values changed to accommodate women's and children's presence, women seized the opportunity to move from the edges of the CoP to the center, creating the possibility for women to truly see the reflection of themselves as a "whole person" in other CoP members (Wenger 55-56). Women's assistance was essential to the PWFD, and their rhetorical savvy led to women's participation beyond daytime shifts and beyond entry roles, as evidenced by the experience of Captain Alexander. For east coast mid-Atlantic fire departments, the PWFD serves as a model in gender role flexibility and permeability under crisis that other departments would do well to follow. Firefighters providing childcare at the firehouse may be unprecedented, but it offers a provocative example of women's movement into the firehouse and the change it has on departmental space and priorities, contributing to the regendering of the fire department.

Conclusion

Collaboration between men and women gave women access to the fire department: women entered as ladies auxiliary members in background supportive roles, and then

under the pressure of crisis, when more bodies were needed, women stepped into foreground productive roles to participate directly in firefighting. The fire is always a crisis, and men's bodies are the default cultural expectation, but women have proved again and again that they are capable. From the edges of the Community of Practice, as firefighter wives and ladies auxiliary members, crisis provided exigence for women to move towards the center of the CoP, as volunteer firefighters and volunteer medical care providers. Women gained influence to reshape department image and values in these new roles, carving out niches for themselves in emergency medical services and bringing childcare into the firehouse; women were needed for crisis response, and they leveraged the demand for their assistance to make the fire department accommodate their lives. For women to fulfill motherhood and fire department responsibilities, for example, childcare had to be provided at the firehouse. As women moved towards the center of the CoP, they changed the face of the community, enabling more women to fully identify in a "whole person" way with emergency response roles.

From temporary participation in moments of crisis, to more formal volunteer roles during World War 2 and more long-term involvement starting in the 1960s, women have worked their way into volunteer firefighting. Collaboration played a central role in sustaining local fire departments under shifting political and economic forces. Women and men worked together under gender fluidity, stepping in and stepping out of collaborative roles, moving along the gendered collaborative spectrum as opportunities arose. This fluidity helped to protect local populations, especially in rural areas where volunteer fire departments were most prevalent, and simultaneously giving women greater access to the department and expanded roles in direct firefighting efforts. Women were quick to grasp

these new responsibilities based on previous experience at the margins of the CoP, and leveraged their success to craft and inhabit medical roles, and eventually volunteer firefighters roles, on a more permanent basis.

Tracking women's work as volunteer firefighters across the twentieth century, there is a pattern of increasing access and opportunity as evidence of women's capability, and fire department need for more bodies, accumulated. While in the early twentieth century ladies auxiliary members were only permitted to step into direct firefighting under pressure of crisis, at the end of the century women volunteers were welcomed and supported in seeking additional training and promotion. To resolve crisis, volunteer fire departments had to change; the crisis prompted the emergence of new collaborative systems, which allowed departments to function at a higher level. The volunteer fire department had to embrace women members to maintain their services and its *ethos*. As women stepped into volunteer firefighter boots, the fire department image and values began to change.

CHAPTER IV

COLLABORATION FAILS: WOMEN'S ENTRANCE INTO CAREER FIRE DEPARTMENTS

Collaboration offers a way to understand much of women's early fire department participation – women and men working together as ladies auxiliary members and firefighters, women and men working together as volunteer firefighters – but collaboration failed for women attempting to gain full time, paid, firefighting careers. Volunteer and career firefighters underwent similar training and performed similar work for emergency response, but career firefighters were paid to be available, working in shifts to ensure there

were always sufficient for community protection. Despite passing the tests and even outperforming the men in the application exams, women often faced hostility from the fire department and the public as they moved into career firefighting jobs; the general sentiment was that people wanted to be saved by men in emergency scenarios. The New York City *Daily News* reported on a 1982 demonstration protesting the hiring of women firefighters, where protestors held up signs with slogans like “I want to be saved by firemen,” that men were “the best candidates for the position,” and women’s hiring was “discrimination against men” (Davis). Without department or community support, women turned to their own skills and knowledge, persevering under challenging circumstances to earn firefighter careers, regardless of such resistance.

Women largely did not face such opposition upon entering volunteer firefighting. In volunteer firefighting, the crisis of the fire provided exigence for any available capable body to participate directly. Women volunteered to “step in” and “step out” of foregrounded productive collaborative roles as needed to address the fire crisis, as shown in the previous chapter. In career firefighting, however, crisis did not create opportunities for women because there were sufficient “ideal” bodies – white and masculine – paid to be already available, waiting to respond. The volunteer fire department model shows gender fluidity, with women invited to perform “men’s work,” and the career fire department model shows gender rigidity, with conventional gendering that excludes women from “men’s work.” This points to an underlying norm of antithetical gendering, which is only suspended when more bodies are needed to resolve fire crisis. Antithetical gendering situates bodies in a false binary, pitting women and men as opposites, generally to men’s benefit; bodies are situated in a gender binary “where a sliding scale might be more apt” to represent physical

characteristics like height, weight, and strength (Jack, "Acts" 290). In the fire department, antithetical gendering casts men as strong and brave, women as weak and scared. The urgent need for capable bodies in volunteer firefighting superseded the preference for white male bodies, even if only temporarily. The threat of insufficient responders was diminished in career firefighting by around-the-clock paid staffing; there were always enough available bodies for standard emergencies in career fire departments. The fire was still a crisis, but firefighting was a job. When crisis occurred, abundant male firefighter "employees" responded; there was no need or for women to voluntarily "step in" from the margins.

Institutional and culture preference for the prototypical white male firefighter has had reverberating effects; in 2012, women composed 3.4 percent of career firefighters (NFPA "Fire Occupations"). The career fire department reifies the rhetorical gendering of fire department work as masculine, heightening barriers to women's participation, through the privileging of masculine performance and the exclusion of women. Gender as a performance is built over time, in Judith Butler's words, "an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (140). Firefighting work has been constituted as masculine through an enforced performance, closely monitored at the boundaries to eliminate any alternative performances by the department and the public, as evidenced by such demonstrations as the one documented by the *Daily News*. The "ideal" firefighter, characterized as "large, strong, athletic, unemotional" (Chetkovich 37), was a white man, and this image was nearly universally upheld and uncontested. This chapter explores how this antithetical framework was maintained, despite anti-discrimination legislation and

policies, and the resulting failure of collaboration as women insisted on their workplace rights, considering women's strategies for persevering to gain firefighting careers.

I posit that the antithetical gendering that reinforced firefighter white masculinity was perpetuated in career fire departments by hiring processes; competition replaced collaboration. Departments hired those with "ideal" bodies and no exigence existed for hiring those with other bodies. The resounding belief was that the average man made a better firefighter than an exceptional woman, so when there was an abundance of bodies in the application pool for career fire departments, white men were hired. As women gained employment opportunities and occupational status in the 1970s, they were denied collaborative roles as equals in firefighting careers; at a time when women were largely expanding their professional participation, the fire department remained a masculinist stronghold. Gender rigidity was not overturned by women's participation and success in volunteer firefighting; the gender antithesis was suspended to address crisis, but the opposition to hiring women career firefighters is evidence that the preference for white men was still present.

Evidence of gender rigidity in career firefighting compared to the gender fluidity in volunteer firefighting can be found in the numbers, though historic data is limited. In 1999, there were an estimated 40,000 women volunteer firefighters (Women in the Fire Service vi) and 4,000 women career firefighters (NFPA "Fire Occupations"). In 2014, there were 70,450 women volunteer firefighters and 12,100 women career firefighters (Haynes & Stein iv). Most of these women volunteer firefighters were in rural or suburban areas; 95% of volunteer firefighters protect communities less than 25,000 people and 70% of career firefighters protect communities greater than that number (Haynes & Stein 3). More

populated urban areas generally have more resources, including the financial means to hire career firefighters. The differences between location, resources, and staffing mean the same woman could be welcomed as volunteer firefighter and rejected as a career firefighter.

Despite strong resistance, women found ways into firefighting careers. This chapter explores women's entrance into career firefighting and their navigation of rhetorical barriers when collaboration failed. Without welcome into the career fire department, women negotiated inventive paths forward by pulling on personal knowledge learned from their families, schooling, work, and everyday experiences, employing a range of literacies; literacy was a means of circumventing gendered barriers. Literacy encompasses ways of knowing, believing and doing, including but expanding beyond traditional literacies of reading and writing to account for everyday skills learned and practiced within specific communities. My view of literacy aligns with that of New Literacy Studies scholars, who understand literacy to be "both a set of socially sanctioned, community-based 'skills' and content that is validated, produced, and reproduced within that same community" (Carter 579). To be regarded as "literate" in this sense is to harness skills to produce content according to community standards. As women attempted to gain and maintain firefighting careers, they pulled on literacies that extended far beyond department resources to map routes forward when collaboration failed; without collaboration of their firefighter colleagues, women turned to literacies developed in other communities to accomplish their fire department career goals.

In this chapter, I consider three women who became career firefighters and their literacy skills. These women were some of the first women career firefighters on the east

coast: Judith Livers Brewer, in Arlington, Virginia, became a firefighter in 1974; Brenda Berkman, in New York City, applied to become a firefighter in 1977; Beatrice Rudder, in Washington, D.C., was hired as a firefighter in 1977. These three women leveraged their literacies to overcome barriers when collaboration failed and went on to decades-long firefighting careers, creating entryways for the women who followed them. Fire department culture may still be deeply rooted in discriminatory ideologies, but women have innovated, persisted, and disrupted masculinist leanings. The remainder of this chapter takes up these stories to explore women's entrance into career firefighting from the 1970s through the 1990s. I draw on archival materials, primarily newspaper articles, technical publications, legal proceedings, and personal accounts, from women career firefighters in New York City, Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia. These accounts show that women succeeded in the fire department by transferring their established literacies to new settings in the fire department; the novel application of literacy skills created a path forward into career firefighting when collaboration failed.

Collaboration Fails

Collaboration gave women access to direct firefighting roles, at first temporarily in response to crisis and eventually in volunteer firefighting positions. Paid firefighting work altered the impetus for collaboration, leading to its disappearance in most career fire departments. For fire departments staffed by career firefighters, the fire was still a crisis and extinguishing it required the same work regardless of who was doing it. Gendering remained rigid, however, because competitively-selected "ideal" bodies – white masculine bodies – were paid to be ready to respond at any time. There was no risk of an insufficient number of responders, and this meant there was no exigence for others to participate;

gender antithesis never had to be suspended, roles never had to become fluid, women never had the chance to “step in.” The status quo cultural and institutional assumptions that men were “naturally” better suited for firefighting than women were maintained in career departments due to the abundance of white masculine bodies available to hire; given the choice between hiring an “ideal” body or hiring a woman, the fire department reified and reinforced the gendered antithetical framework. There was general widespread resistance to hiring women: the prevalent argument was that only the “best” people should be hired since lives were at stake, and of course those people were white masculine men.

Such fortified antithetical gendering in the career fire department made collaboration increasingly unviable. At the same time that women were seeking productive collaborative roles as equal contributors, extreme fire department gender rigidity pushed women towards the wifely supportive work of the ladies auxiliaries 50 years before. Antithetical gendering pitted men and women against each other by upholding a false binary, positioning women as too weak, too small, and too emotional to do the job. The rhetorical gendered barriers were heightened. When women found ways over and around these barriers to firefighting careers, they faced oppositional male colleagues, some of whom refused to work cooperatively – particularly dangerous in a job that requires teamwork to ensure safety. Some men hoped to force newly hired women out of the career fire departments by treating them maliciously, to push the women to quit. Even though collaboration had dissolved and gender fluidity had disappeared, women persisted by finding ways forward without collaborative support.

Gender rigidity in the career fire department was in part a response to the wider cultural phenomenon of women’s increased workforce participation in the 1960s and

1970s; by 1978 half of all women over the age of 16 were working, with a significant rise in the number of married working women (Smith 3). Major legislative milestones paved the way, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978. In addition, the Supreme Court settled cases that set the precedent against hiring discrimination based on motherhood (*Phillips v. Martin-Marietta Corporation* in 1971) and on particular height and weight requirements (*Dothard v. Rawlinson* in 1977). Doors were opened to women in many professions, but not in firefighting; fire departments and all *public* employers were originally excused from Title VII, which at first prohibited only *private* employers from discriminatory hiring practices. This validated the perception of firefighting careers as for men only, reinforcing department gender rigidity and validating the dissolution of collaboration.

Title VII was amended to include public employers in 1972, at which point some career fire departments still explicitly refused to hire women; additionally, many fire departments were guilty of discouraging interested women. Legal scholar Richard Ugelow argues that “the primary focus [of the Department of Justice, in charge of enforcing Title VII] in 1972 and the years and the decades that followed was ensuring that there were hiring opportunities for under-represented males” because absence of minorities in public service was considered one of the causes of race-based unrest in the late 1960s (Ugelow 715). While Title VII prohibited discrimination based on “gender,” the Department of Justice primarily pursued lawsuits for Title VII violations on race-based hiring discrimination. The legislative emphasis on integrating minority men into public service professions meant that hiring discrimination against women was overlooked.

Many career fire departments feigned compliance with Title VII without too much concern that they would be discovered; these departments designed entrance exams to appear “objective” but arguably meant to exclude women and people of color. Applicants were required to take a written test and a physical test: the written test was pass/fail, and the physical test was numerically scored. Applicants were then hired based on rank order of the physical test scores, if they had also passed the written test. For example, if 100 people applied, and the fire department had 10 spots available, the department would hire the applicants who had the top 10 scores on the physical test as long as they had also passed the written test. The catch was that the physical test measured brute strength, rather than physical skills related to firefighting, prioritizing conventional ideas of masculinity. The written test was quickly contested for racial discrimination, for favoring specialized vocabulary and idioms prevalent within the majority white firefighter community; however, the Department of Justice did not seek out gender-based Title VII violations (Ugelow 715), and so this type of physical testing stood until individual women, challenged it. Originally exempt from Title VII, and for years after still overlooked, the fire department remained a stronghold of masculinity; the laws did not apply or were not enforced. Firefighting careers remained inaccessible for women, and the government’s willingness to look the other way on the department’s discriminatory hiring practices fortified the barriers meant to keep women out.

Male firefighters grew more vocal in their opposition to women’s participation in career fire departments as the first women forged their entrance, especially on the East Coast where firefighting traditions had long histories steeped in masculinity. In 1978 Chief Townley, a New Jersey fire chief, summarized his colleagues’ view that women should be

excluded because “an outstanding woman can do the job, but an average man can do it better” (Townley 33). He claimed women’s strength would decline during menstruation, women would need time off while pregnant, and women’s overall fitness would deteriorate after childbirth. Writing to fellow firefighters in one of the occupation’s technical publications, he asked: “Is it right to submit the lives of our people to the chance that the fire fighter cannot perform adequately to overcome the situation? What about those times when fire fighters are overcome or trapped and only the brute force of their fellow men can save them?” (Townley 33) A reflection of the anti-woman attitude in career firefighting, a bumper sticker reading “DON’T SEND A GIRL TO DO A MAN’S JOB” became popular in 1982 (*Don’t Send a Girl*). The bumper stickers, designed by male firefighters in the New York City Fire Department, “seemed to be pasted on virtually every male firefighter’s vehicle and posted throughout many firehouses” (“Women Firefighters”). Women firefighters, both career and volunteer, responded to this prevalent attitude: in a 1977 survey, women firefighters reported that the physical strength argument was “overblown,” especially given modern lightweight equipment and the increasing involvement of firefighters on medical calls, which required first aid skills rather than strength (Pantoga 52). A woman volunteer firefighter declared in a 1978 firefighter technical publication that “the days of the brawny smoke eater are gone” and firefighters needed more “brains” instead (Hamilton 81). Women were working alongside men, responding to fire crisis and performing the duties successfully; increasingly, these women spoke out in response to criticisms.

The exigence of the fire crisis fostered gender fluidity in volunteer firefighting, but without the impetus to collaborate in career firefighting, gender antithesis became prominent. Collaboration dissolved and disappeared, and career fire departments hastened

its demise with policies and practices that privileged white men. Career fire departments continued to hire men, who were perceived as “naturally” superior to women at the job, and little pressure was put on departments from the culture or the courts to do otherwise. As women continued to press forward into firefighting careers, departmental gender antithesis became more prominent and women and men were increasingly polarized. With minimal support from the firefighting community, women relied on their own personal knowledge to gain and maintain firefighting careers, confronting outright opposition at each step. Women endured and eventually overcame the gendered barriers placed in their paths, displaying great determination and perseverance. Greeted with hostility instead of collaboration, women became career firefighters by turning to their own literacies.

Literacy as a Compensating Strategy

The first challenge women faced in their attempts to gain firefighting careers was discrimination in the hiring process. This varied by fire department, but the general response of the department, the firefighters, and the public in the 1970s echoed that of Chief Townley above, that men were “naturally” better suited for the work. Women were hired, eventually, through pulling on previously established alternate literacies as a compensating strategy when collaborative means were unavailable, drawing on alternate literacies to gain access and negotiate department barriers to their firefighting careers. I categorize and theorize these alternate literacies broadly, as social practice literacies. Literacy as a social practice requires the recognition and negotiation of the embedded forces at work in that particular context at that exact moment, as “rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being” (Street 2), instead of the traditional conception of literacy as a stable set of rules for reading and writing to be learned once and then applied equally

across situations. In New Literacy Studies, literacy is the ability to navigate complex systems in accordance with community standards; to be literate, then, is “to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes” of a particular community (Carter 574). People gain these literacy skills through everyday lived experience as they join a community, becoming more familiar with the local values and more competent in reproducing them.

This way of conceiving literacy, as a complex community practice, is most notably explained by James Paul Gee, a foundational scholar in the New Literacy Studies movement. Gee argues that literacy is decoding “signs” – symbols or representations that take on “different meanings in different situations, contexts, practices, cultures, and historical periods” (18). These signs can be words, but signs may be “all sorts of different things that can take on meaning, such as images, sounds, gestures, movements, graphs, diagrams, equations, objects, even people like babies, midwives, and mothers, and not just words” (Gee 17). Decoding a sign within its context, its semiotic domain, is literacy: “we can say that people are (or are not) literate (partially or fully) in a domain if they can recognize (the equivalent of ‘reading’) and/or produce (the equivalent of ‘writing’) meanings in the domain” (Gee 18). From this base, Gee famously applies this approach to videogames, to explore videogame literacy as a process of decoding signs and making informed choices to succeed in the game. To be literate in any community is to “read” the signs and “write” the products that are valued in that domain.

I do not mean to suggest that literacy necessarily holds power for its users to overcome social injustice (as Paulo Freire famously argues), heeding Sylvia Scribner’s caution that the “literacy as power” metaphor is problematic because literacy too often

does not actually “confer power” or cause “significant and lasting economic and social change” (11-12). Instead, I look at accumulated literacies in particular contexts at specific moments, without assuming that literacies always yielded success or that every woman had the opportunity to employ her literacies. The vignettes I offer below are meant to showcase the great resourcefulness and perseverance required of the first women career firefighters as they mapped new routes into the fire department, without creating a grand narrative that frames “literacy” as a solution to gender discrimination in the fire department.

The first women career firefighters had to draw on alternate literacies to gain and maintain their careers, because they were offered little collaborative support; these first women reported the most daunting barriers they faced were emotional and psychological, not physical (Webster 1). As women passed the tests and succeeded in the job, some men responded by creating a hostile work environment. In a 1980 survey of women career firefighters, respondents identified the “attitude of male firefighters” as their primary workplace obstacle and over two thirds of the women said they had to work harder than the men to prove themselves (“Women” 22). While men firefighters often objected to the hiring of women because of perceived physical weakness, women suspected that the greater fear was that their presence would end the “fraternity house atmosphere” (“Women” 22) and a “cherished and enjoyable atmosphere ... the boy’s club” (Willing). Women found it difficult to “fit in”: to tolerate the behavior, language, and jokes of the “boy’s club” made her unworthy of respect, but to protest made her an opponent of tradition. One woman career firefighter described her decision to “fit more into the male role than the female” because “the roots of male/female roles in society were too deep and

entangled to cut that quickly” (Carlson). Antithetical gendering was entrenched in career firefighting; hiring these first women did not convert the fire department into an inclusive space. Excluded from department support to become “literate” in the career fire department community, women career firefighters had to make their own way, relying on the alternate literacies they already had.

Additionally, as the first, and usually only, woman in her local fire department, women career firefighters faced negative consequences of tokenism, including performance pressures and stress resulting from heightened visibility, social isolation, and gender-role-based job assignments – specifically, early women career firefighters commonly cited insufficient instruction, coworker hostility, silent treatment, hyper supervision, lack of support, and stereotyping (Yoder & Aniakudo). Some women faced more extreme forms of resistance: sexual harassment was not uncommon. Men would even refuse to assist women at the fire scene: in a survey, one woman said “I was told by a lot of [the men] that they would refuse to go into any incident with me, that they’d never be on a [hose] line with me” to extinguish a fire (Yoder & Aniakudo 30). Some men explicitly threatened the safety of their women colleagues and their communities, and many more men were quietly compliant in such plans. Long shifts, usually 12 or 24 hours, left women with little relief, especially vulnerable when officers stepped out (though some officers were complicit too) and when they inevitably would need to use the toilet, shower, change, and sleep.

With the absence of collaboration and heightened gendered barriers, the first women career firefighters rerouted to find new paths for entry and participation, relying on their own knowledge and support networks instead of the fire department community;

in doing so, they marked alternate courses for the women who followed them. Women mapped innovative routes for fire department success throughout their careers: from application procedures, to physical testing, to promotion processes. Next, I highlight three women who turn to alternate literacies – not in the fire department – for gaining firefighting careers. When fire department community resources were denied and collaboration failed, these women turned to their own knowledge to create new routes for their firefighting careers. The obstacles they encountered were significant: women were positioned as the antithesis of men, and rigid oppositional gendering situated all women as less capable than men in firefighting careers.

The following women each drew on knowledge beyond the fire department to succeed in their firefighting careers. For each woman, I consider literacy acquisition and use to create a broader picture of how women employed their alternate literacies to overcome gendered barriers in the fire department after the collapse of a collaborative system. Specifically, I consider Judith Livers Brewer's use of Heritage Literacy; Brenda Berkman's use of Legal Literacy; and Beatrice Rudder's use of Intersectional Literacy. These three women and their rhetorical savvy in bringing alternate literacies into the fire department to open closed doors created new routes into the workplace when collaboration failed. This suggests not only that women career firefighters are resourceful, but also that more attention should be given to literacy transfer in women's entrance into the workplace.

Heritage Literacy: Judith Brewer

Judith Livers (now Judith Brewer) became a career firefighter in 1974, making her the first woman career firefighter in the U.S. Brewer became interested in firefighting while helping

her firefighter husband study for a fire science class (Snow 127). As a firefighter wife, Brewer had insight into fire department values, which facilitated her entrance into firefighting and informed her response to resistance. Her “inherited” everyday knowledge of firefighting culture was crucial to her successful career: she retired in 1999, at the rank of battalion chief – another first for women career firefighters.

I theorize Brewer’s firefighting culture alternate literacy as a Heritage Literacy, building on Suzanne Kesler Rumsey’s term. Heritage literacies capture everyday lived practices beyond the traditional sense of literacy (reading and writing) to consider the ways people “adapt, adopt or alienate” familiar practices in novel settings. Rumsey explains:

Heritage literacy is the set of multimodal literacy practices used within any community or family across multiple generations and over time. [...] Heritage literacy conceptualizes how people decide the extent to which they will draw upon intellectual inheritances they have been given from predecessors. (137)

Rumsey develops the concept across analyses of various Amish community practices, like quilting, religion, and cooking; for example, a young Amish woman learns cooking techniques and particular dishes through helping her mother in the kitchen, not from a cookbook, written recipe, or formal instruction. Rumsey’s concept is productive here in considering Brewer’s application of “intellectual inheritances,” gained as a firefighter wife, in her new role of career firefighter: Brewer knew fire department values, and she leveraged this knowledge to navigate gendered barriers when collaboration failed, to prove herself to the firefighters, who doubted her capabilities, and to the firefighter wives, who felt their marriages were threatened by a woman’s presence at the firehouse.

As mentioned above, the most challenging barrier to early women career firefighters was fire department culture, not the physical or intellectual work. Women found they could train and study in order to pass the tests, but to “fit in” at the firehouse was more difficult. Brewer was determined to succeed, even though she was greeted with skepticism rather than embraced as a team member; her knowledge of the culture made her confident in her ability to earn her coworkers’ trust over time. Her unwavering resolve was necessary: soon after she passed the entrance exams, her coworkers protested women’s presence by passing around a petition to nearby fire departments urging the Chief against hiring any more women (“First Female Firefighter”). Firefighters doubted that Brewer, at 5 foot 5 inches and 130 pounds, could save their lives in dire circumstances. Her station Captain in that first year summed it up:

“The men really don’t have anything against Judy personally. Some of them are just opposed to having women in the department. They’ll never change their minds. No matter how good a job Judy does – and she has been efficient – she’ll never be able to satisfy some of these guys.” (Walker)

Rather than give up, Brewer dug in, and eventually she persevered. She believed that over time she could prove her abilities, and even if some would “never change their minds,” others would accept her. She was watched closely for any mistake, subjected to hyper supervision. Brewer said, “Everybody watched me, everybody asked everybody else – What did Judy do on that fire? – I knew this would keep happening until I gained their acceptance” (“First Female Firefighter”). After nearly two years she felt accepted as part of the team through “[stand]ing her ground” until the other firefighters “let go” of their preconceptions (Staff). Brewer knew, from her experience as a firefighter wife, that if she

proved herself on the job she could earn the firefighters' trust eventually; she was patient and resolved, and as the firefighters' closely watched her, they realized her proficiency. Initially scorned, Brewer pulled on her own knowledge of the culture to gain acceptance and continue on in her career path.

Brewer's body was central in her peers' evaluations of her: her stature comes up frequently in archival records. Her fellow firefighters were staunchly opposed to the hiring of women because of this characterization of women as small, weak, and delicate. The fire department's antithetical framing of women's and men's bodies positioned them "as diametrically opposed" even though many aspects of bodies, like height and strength, are "distributed along a more gradual scale" (Jack, "Acts" 289). It is possible that there were men who were shorter and/or weaker than Brewer, who would not have been subjected to hyper supervision. While firefighters cited her weight and height as reasons to object to her hiring, as her Captain stated above, it came down to her gender. This was rigid rhetorical gendering: no matter how well a woman's body performed, that body was regarded as inferior.

Brewer's body was also considered suspect by firefighter wives, who viewed her as a sexual threat, given that she shared close quarters with their husbands. Brewer was met with immediate resistance by the wives of her colleagues, who were "fighting mad," "suspicious" and "perhaps a trifle jealous" (Walker). Firefighter wife resistance to newly hired women has been a widespread occurrence since women first became career firefighters: a 1995 study found that half of fire departments received complaints from firefighter wives after women were hired (Barber, Miller & Rosell). The binary structure of gender/sex that essentialized men as masculine and women as feminine also necessarily

emphasized heterosexuality: in the man's domain of the firehouse, in the most masculine of professions, the only role for a woman to inhabit was that of temptress/mistress. A fire chief summed it up this way to a newspaper reporter in 1989, in defense of his exclusion of women, saying "when you have women in a fire department, there's the possibility for hanky-panky. And even if there wasn't hanky-panky, people would think there was, and we don't need even the thoughts of it" (Associated Press).

When Brewer was hired, the firefighters' wives suspected "hanky-panky." Brewer frequently worked night shifts in her early years, sleeping in the firehouse dormitory filled with bunkbeds, near her coworkers who were accustomed to wearing just underwear to bed. Brewer, reportedly, was not unsettled by this arrangement but the firefighter wives were (Walker). In 1974, Brewer told the newspaper:

"A few of the women [firefighter wives] think it's immoral and possibly illegal for me to share the same bunkroom as the men. They've gone to the County Manager and circulated petitions. They say they'll go to court in order to keep women [firefighters] from bunking with their husbands." (Walker)

Brewer was perceived as a sexual threat merely because she was a woman in the domain of men; she was considered "window dressing" (Walker), hired for department image not her capability, and a risk to firefighters' marriages and family stability. The firefighter wives took action, meeting with the Fire Chief and the County Manager to formally air their grievances ("First Female Firefighter"). They wanted Brewer removed.

Just as Brewer's "feminine" body made her a threat to men on the fire ground, it made her a threat to women in the firehouse. The confined space of the dormitory, designed to fit as many men's bodies as possible into tightly-packed bunkbeds, meant that

Brewer was sleeping within feet of nearly nude husbands. The antithetical gendering of bodies necessarily emphasizes sexuality: women's bodies are different than men's because they are feminine, and this focus on difference draws attention to physical traits that become sexualized under heterosexual norms. Bodies in close quarters have long posed a problem for women's entrance into masculinized work spaces: Lindal Buchanan has detailed the ongoing work to fully integrate submarines, where antithetical gendering has positioned women as "incompatible" with historically masculinized submarine work ("A Few" 37); because women's presence in the restricted berths and restroom facilities would cause a problem to "morale" and "societal standards," women have largely been excluded from these professions (Buchanan, "A Few" 42). The "problem" of Brewer's body nearly excluded her from a firefighting career, but from her institutional knowledge, she knew to address and compromise with firefighter wives.

Brewer knew that the fire department was a community that valued firefighter wives and families from her own experience as a firefighter wife; she knew that simply ignoring the distressed wives was not conducive to her career. Brewer's own experiences motivated her to search for a solution, arranging to address the women on her own, going beyond any typical workplace expectations. After speaking with the wives, she was quoted: "The wives are extremely upset. One of them screamed at me and told me not to talk to her husband" ("First Female Firefighter"). Brewer did not allow the wives to deter her, but she did acknowledge them: she "modestly slept in full uniform" and "tried to dampen [the wives'] fears by looking as plain as possible" (Griffith). In a 1990 interview, Brewer reflected, "I'm still here [working at the fire department], so obviously the [wives'] concern died down eventually" (Griffith). Brewer found a balance between addressing the wives'

concern and carrying out her job. She employed her alternate literacies to make strategic choices on her own, choosing a path forward based on cultural values when no other route was available.

Brewer went on to a long and successful career, due in part to her ability to pull on her heritage literacy knowledge of firefighting culture to navigate gendered barriers posed by firefighters and their wives. With the failure of collaboration in career firefighting, she received little help in those early years; there was no opportunity for cooperation as she was continually framed antithetically to her colleagues. Jordynn Jack notes that such rigid gendering that casts men's bodies as strong and women's bodies as weak is "one of the primary symbolic resources for masculine domination" ("Acts" 289). Brewer knew that she had to show her colleagues she was capable, and that she would be watched, discussed, and evaluated until they accepted her. Her knowledge of the fire department and its culture prepared her for such hyper supervision, over a long period; she anticipated the perseverance and endurance she would need. From both the firefighters and their wives, Brewer came under scrutiny. Her alternate literacy in department culture primed her for resistance and equipped her to respond, through her performance, her conversations with the wives, and her appearance.

Legal Literacy: Brenda Berkman

Brenda Berkman took the qualifying exams to become a firefighter with the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) in 1977, the first time women were permitted to apply in the history of the FDNY. Brenda Berkman was a third-year law student studying immigration at New York University (NYU) Law School and working her father-in-law's civil-rights-oriented legal firm, but when the opportunity arose with the fire department,

“she seized the chance to realize her childhood dream” (Dupree 707). Berkman knew the available legal recourse and had the relevant experience to follow through, tirelessly working to gain and maintain a job as a firefighter; she endured and succeeded, retiring in 2006 at the level of Captain.

I attribute Berkman’s success to a combination of legal knowledge gained in the classroom and legal experience gained at the law firm; Berkman herself also emphasizes the value of her law firm experience to her firefighting career. I theorize Berkman’s skills as Legal Literacy, building on the term as it appears in legal scholarship. The American Bar Association began developing the term in the 1980s to “suggest some parallels between the institution of the law, and a system of language to be mastered, knowledge gained and understanding achieved” (Manley-Casimir, Cassidy, and de Castell 47). The intentional parallels to reading and writing highlight the rhetoricity of Legal Literacy as a resource for decoding the norms and conventions of the law. The concept has evolved since then, to include educating the public. From a 2012 article: Legal Literacy is meant to help people “become effective self-advocates, access available resources, and identify and work with legal professionals to attend to legal problems at their earliest, most easily resolved stage” (Hacki 367). From experience in the classroom to the courtroom, Berkman was prepared to self-advocate, access resources, and work with lawyers in response to gender discrimination in the FDNY, though these legal problems, stemming from cultural gender antithesis, were not easily resolved.

Berkman turned to her Legal Literacy when no collaborative routes were available. The two instances considered below demonstrate the hostility Berkman faced in gaining and maintaining her career. Berkman immediately encountered gendered barriers because

she was not the “ideal” white man; she was “expect[ed] to act exactly like the cookie cutter, white, male firefighters, 6 foot 6 inches, handlebar mustache, blonde, you know carrying an ax, bare-chested” (Ugelow 725). The FDNY favored a particular profile in its hiring, privileging a very specific idea of white masculinity reflected in a long history of dynastic employment practices: new hires were the sons, nephews, grandsons, or male cousins of firefighters, recommended by word-of-mouth to fill open positions. The rigid gendering of the FDNY is perhaps an extreme. When entrance tests for hiring were mandated, the FDNY tests were arguably designed to keep everyone else out: as explained previously, people of color were excluded through written tests containing cultural references and vocabulary from white firefighters, and women were excluded through physical testing focused on brute strength rather than skills directly relevant to firefighting. After this first hurdle of discriminatory hiring practices, the only support women firefighters received for decades was from black firefighters, with whom they often found themselves united on issues of discrimination (LaTour 18).

Berkman’s saga began in 1977 when she applied to the FDNY, taking the first written test and physical test opened to women. Despite her conditioning to prepare for the physical test – she was a marathon runner and a cross-country skier, she chopped wood, lifted weights, did push-ups, pull-ups, and sit-ups – she failed, along with every single one of the other 90 women who took it. Berkman remembers thinking: ““This is crazy. You mean to tell me that not a single woman in the entire city of New York is fit to be a firefighter?”” (*Sisters* 136). Berkman immediately went to a law professor at NYU who worked on women’s rights, believing the physical test emphasized “masculine” traits by measuring height, weight, and strength rather than testing actual firefighting skills; instead

of performing firefighting tasks, such as raising a ladder to a window or controlling a fire hose's water stream, the applicants were judged on the amount of weight they could benchpress and their speed on a short run. The test exemplified the FDNY's antithetical framing of women and men; according to Jack, such moves exaggerating difference "perpetuate a system of masculine domination" ("Acts" 289). Berkman's Legal Literacy prepared her to become an advocate for herself and all of the other women who failed this test; she knew of available resources and she immediately turned to legal professionals.

Berkman and her lawyer figured the case would be settled quickly by asking for a new physical test, but when the city and the firefighters' union refused to cooperate, Berkman filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and sued under Title VII for discriminatory hiring practices (*Sisters* 146). Her knowledge of legal processes primed her to be persistent and resilient against a gender rigid system, even without the fire department's cooperation. The suit, filed in 1979, claimed that the physical exam was unrelated to firefighter job performance because of its concentration on brute upper-body strength and maximum speed instead of stamina, pacing, technique and training (Berkman). Berkman won the case in 1982, after years of delay, and the Court ordered a new physical test for interested women who had failed the original test in question, requiring the FDNY to hire up to 45 women who passed the new test; Berkman and 37 other women were hired. The case unsettled fire department gender antithesis by declaring that firefighters needed technique and skill to succeed, not particular physical traits. Through her Legal Literacy, Berkman knew the original physical test violated Title VII and she was aware of available recourse; she also had connections to a women's rights lawyer and she had the familiarity with legal proceedings to patiently see the case through

despite delays. Her Legal Literacy prepared her to demand equal access to a firefighting career, even as the FDNY refused to cooperate at every opportunity.

Berkman pursued the lawsuit and won, a groundbreaking case that opened up firefighting careers for women across the nation. While many women benefited, no eligible woman would join Berkman as class plaintiff in the suit, fearing hostile response. Berkman moved ahead on the case as sole plaintiff, which resulted in high visibility and subsequent retaliation. Again, Berkman's Legal Literacy was crucial to her success. Before applying to the FDNY, Berkman worked at the civil rights law firm on a case filed by a woman police officer against the City of New York for discriminatory hiring and promotional practices at the police department (Acha). Berkman saw firsthand how the woman "went through hell because she was named class plaintiff" (Ugelow 721). Berkman remembers:

"[Other police officers] left her out on patrol by herself, she could never be assured that she was going to have any backup if she called for it, operating in the most dangerous neighborhoods. She got, you know, severe harassment from her coworkers, her marriage broke up. All kinds of things, terrible things, were happening to her as a result of her being named class plaintiff in that lawsuit. So I had a little bit of an inkling of what might go on when I agreed to be sole named class plaintiff." (Ugelow 721)

Berkman was the face of the lawsuit. Like the woman police officer, Berkman became a target for defying the FDNY's historic gender rigidity and unsettling the status quo of fire department discriminatory hiring practices. Her exposure to the woman police officer's case through her Legal Literacy gave her "an inkling" of possible adverse outcomes as sole plaintiff, but also gave her knowledge of legal recourse for responding.

Gaining access to a firefighting career was the first step for Berkman, but keeping it proved to be the next challenge. The newly hired women faced great resistance, with no opportunity for collaboration, as they entered their first probationary trial year in the FDNY: they were split up, no more than one at a station, and they “experienced a catalog of horrors,” including men firefighters urinating in their boots, disabling their safety equipment, slashing their tires, deserting them in burning buildings, and sexually harassing them; at least one woman was raped, one was stabbed, one was almost run over by a car, one was locked in a firehouse kitchen filled with tear gas, and all of this was purposefully done by male firefighters, who largely went unpunished (Faludi 86). The women turned to Berkman, their *de facto* leader after the initial lawsuit, expecting her to resolve problems and confront the superior officers. She remembers: “The women relied on me to deal with the administration. [...] But it was very difficult for me. I was on probation myself. I had no idea what was going on. I had no experience with the Fire Department” (*Sisters* 138). Her ability to advocate for herself and others, gained through Legal Literacy, situated her as the spokesperson for the FDNY women firefighters, which resulted in “extra treatment”; she remembers “the men refused to eat with me or talk to me – incredibly dangerous in an occupation where your lives depend on one another. I also received mailed and phoned death threats” (Thom 333). Berkman’s safety was threatened by the very people entrusted with ensuring the safety of others through emergency response.

At the end of the probationary year for Berkman and the 37 other new FDNY women firefighters, only two women were fired: Berkman was one of them, despite her consistent ranking as one of the most physically fit and capable of the women (LaTour 10). Berkman and her lawyers responded by filing another lawsuit claiming the dismissal was

retaliatory. She went before the same judge as for her previous case, and he quickly reached a decision in Berkman's favor: Berkman was fired in September 1983 and re-hired just before that Christmas (LaTour 11). Berkman had "a little bit of an inkling" of the retaliation she might confront as she entered the department, due to her Legal Literacy, and she was prepared to seek legal assistance again. By helping with the New York City woman police officer case in her father-in-law's firm, she had learned the unfortunate consequences of filing suit as sole plaintiff and she had learned to respond through legal recourse. Such retaliation is reflective of Berkman's early years with the FDNY as she confronted hostility at every turn; the men continually jeopardized her wellbeing and attempted to expel her from the department, but Berkman knew her rights and her options, enabling her to persist.

With no collaborative options for moving forward into a firefighting career, Berkman turned to her Legal Literacy as a compensating strategy, to find an alternate route into the FDNY. Her experience in the civil rights law firm proved crucial to her success in gaining and maintaining her firefighting career. Berkman's ability to advocate for herself and others, her access to resources, and connections to legal professionals positioned her to demand fair treatment, charting a path for other women to follow. Her first landmark lawsuit impacted fire department hiring practices across the country. The only route to disrupting the gender rigidity of the FDNY was through the court, and once the course was mapped, others followed. Berkman set a second standard by fighting retaliatory treatment, boldly coming back into a department where she was not welcome to pursue her dream job. The wide-ranging impact of Berkman's pursuit on women firefighters across the

country and across decades is truly remarkable; her Legal Literacy enabled her to persevere, seek legal action, and become a leader to women firefighters.

Intersectional Literacy: Beatrice Rudder

Beatrice Rudder became the first woman, and the first black woman, career firefighter in Washington, D.C. in 1977. Rudder rose through the ranks to become a Deputy Fire Chief for the D.C. Fire Department (DCFD) as the first woman officer and a top candidate for Department Chief, also running the training department and the professional standards office later in her career (“3 Senior Officers”). As a black woman in the DCFD, Rudder faced many challenges related to her gender and her race; many fire departments were rigid in terms of gender and race, primarily composed of white men, and Rudder was positioned as antithetical in both aspects. I suggest that her background in confronting discrimination prepared her to succeed in the fire department and to demand fair treatment for herself and others. Rudder showed awareness of the complex intersections of gender and race as she shifted rhetorical strategies over time, employing silence in the face of gender-based discrimination and then uniting with black firefighters later to confront racial bias.

I theorize Rudder’s success in the DCFD comes from her Intersectional Literacy, an extensive familiarity with alliance-building across identity markers of gender, class, race, religion, etc., while maintaining an awareness of the self. I build on the concept of intersectionality from Kimberlé Crenshaw, and work on black women’s literacies by Elaine Richardson and Shirley Wilson Logan. Crenshaw’s seminal article on intersectionality, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” published in 1989, considered the impact of categorizing black women by race and by gender separately, as either Black or

Woman, to argue that an Either/Or perspective was insufficient and unjust. Crenshaw focused on the experience of black women losing lawsuits against employers for discriminatory hiring practices; the women had to choose between filing based on sex or race, and in either case, the employer responded that they were hiring women (white) and black people (men). Crenshaw describes it: “intersectionality captures the way in which the particular location of black women in dominant American social relations is unique and in some senses unassimilable into discursive paradigms of gender and race domination” (404). Since Crenshaw’s article, the concept has found traction and been applied widely in an attempt to avoid marginalizing and homogenizing accounts of women’s experience; broadly applied, an intersectional approach requires considering the interaction of identity markers like “black” and “woman” rather than looking at such markers individually, in order to understand the subordination of black women within hierarchical systems.

Rudder was literate in intersectionality, by which I mean that she had deep knowledge of her own identity markers and how she was situated in relation to those with other identity markers, and she leveraged this knowledge to succeed in the fire department. In an environment characterized by white masculinity, Rudder had to be wary. In Richardson’s work on African American literacies, she finds that black girls have a particularly “early knowledge of the self as racially and sexually marked objects” in relation to white girls and boys (81). From this knowledge, these girls grow up practicing social literacy strategies to “protect and advance themselves,” two of which are especially relevant to this chapter: strategically selecting silence and building alliances. Experiencing this awareness of an intersectional identity throughout life, “the Black woman’s consciousness of her condition/ing, her position/ing in American society, the condition/ing

of her audiences must be factored into her language and literacy practices” (Richardson 82). Rudder grew up marked as black and female, and, I argue, her Intersectional Literacy was deepened by her family circumstances: her parents, a black Quaker and a white Jew, were activists who took their five children with them to protests over racism in local department stores and restaurants, the execution of Willie McGee, the death of Emmett Till, the death penalty, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, nuclear bomb proliferation, and more (Morgan). From a young age, Rudder witnessed the complex manifestations of intersecting identity markers as her family joined with diverse groups to protest various causes. From a young age, she developed awareness of injustice’s multiple forms and practiced aligning with others across difference to address it.

Rudder’s home was rooted in energetically pursuing community interests, racial equality, and human rights, with the belief that such work would yield real progress for society. A newspaper profile on the family suggests that “much as doctors and lawyers routinely raise children who become doctors and lawyers [John and Doris] have raised children in their independent mold [...] The Rudder children learned that change can come through action, often unpopular action.” (Morgan). From increased awareness of her own intersectional identity, Rudder called for justice for herself and others, taking part in a long history of African American women stepping into leadership roles in pursuit of “the uplift of women’s work and the work of racial uplift” (Logan 177). Shirley Wilson Logan charts the efforts of black women activists in the late nineteenth century, and their emphasis on racial uplift, labor devoted to the self-help and self-improvement of other black people, by “encouraging those who were in need to take initiative and challenging those who had accomplished to ‘lift’ those who had not” (18). The call for racial uplift rang across

centuries; Rudder grew up in a family that exemplified it, taking initiative when they were in need – for example, filing a lawsuit to protest the leasing conditions in the government housing apartments where they lived (John Rudder) – and then lifting up others by visibly and vocally protesting injustices around them. Rudder’s awareness of her situatedness prepared her to seek change through action, becoming a leader in fighting discriminatory practices in the DCFD.

Rudder applied to the DCFD in 1977 because, she later reflected, “the idea of becoming a firefighter was very exciting” (Stevens “First Woman”). Rudder scored in the top 48 out of 3000 applicants, the only woman out of the 143 women who took the exam to score highly enough to be hired (Stevens “First Woman”). Rudder’s first barrier was to “fit in” as the only woman, and a black woman. At first, other firefighters refused to collaborate with her on grounds of gender and/or race. At the intersection of gender and race markers, Rudder felt excluded through antithetical framing by white men as a *black woman* and excluded by black men as a *black woman*; as more women joined the department in the following years, Rudder felt excluded by white women as a *black woman*. When the Assistant Fire Chief described her as “readily accepted by the class [of new firefighters],” she “disagree[d] on this point” to insist that ““a few people have been friendly with me in the class, but only a few”” (Stevens “First Woman”). She was continually confronted by obstacles of race and gender. An anonymous survey of black women career firefighters, conducted in 1992, showed that those women felt particularly unwelcome in the fire department; one woman said, “Being a black female, it was like two things that needed to be proven” (Yoder & Aniakudo 336). Another woman surveyed explained that white men in the department preferred that white women were promoted over black women, saying,

“We [black women] just seem to be the lowest on the totem pole when it comes to any type of support in this job” (336). As a black woman, Rudder had more “proving” to do than Brewer or Berkman to overcome biases and earn the acceptance needed to participate as a team member with her fellow firefighters.

In her early years, Rudder was under close supervision, subjected to constant evaluation in an environment rigidly gendered and racialized. She told *People* magazine, “[I] felt like I was in a glass bubble” (“Lookout”), and the *Washington Post*, “Practically everything that has happened to me has gone through the entire fire department. Everyone knows what I’ve done by word of mouth”; sometimes these stories got twisted by the grapevine to characterize her as incompetent (Stevens “D.C.’s First”). But Rudder was careful to avoid alienating anyone, speaking only “hesitantly” in newspaper interviews when prompted about racism, sexism and unfair criticism – in contrast to Berkman (Stevens “D.C.’s First”). Aware of her situatedness as a black woman in what was understood to be a white man’s job, Rudder exercised silence as a rhetorical strategy, employed through her Intersectional Literacy. Richardson finds that black girls develop a deliberate use of silence as part of their social literacy, and that black women have historically employed silence to “resist perpetuation of distorted images of Black female sexuality and womanhood” (86). Rudder refused to engage the rumors and stories that other firefighters were telling about her, maintaining silence and letting her closely observed work speak for itself.

Recent feminist rhetorical scholarship has explored the rhetoric of silence; Cheryl Glenn argues that silence, “as a means of rhetorical delivery, can be empowered action, both resistant and creative” when it is a choice (155). Rudder’s purposeful silence enabled

her to resist dominant narratives and create space for her to position herself to negotiate barriers of gender and race in the moment. Doubly marked as a black woman in a white man's job, Rudder's purposeful silence in the department and in interviews early in her career allowed her firefighting skills show and for her to avoid "participating in the traditional rhetorical discipline of combat and dominance" (Glenn 157); at the bottom of the power hierarchy, the options available to Rudder were different than those available to the very vocal Berkman. Her choice to maintain silence in her first years reflects her knowledge of this fact, part of her Intersectional Literacy. Rudder's silence was powerful and generative, just as Berkman's voice. Glenn explains that we can use silence "to embody new ways to challenge and resist domination and hierarchy at the same time that [silence] disrupts and transforms [domination and hierarchy]" (157). By choosing silence, Rudder avoided alienating anyone as she built her firefighter reputation and situated herself to ally with colleagues in the future to disrupt and transform the hierarchy by pursuing promotions.

Upon entering the DCFD, Rudder first felt pressure to overcome rhetorical barriers of gender. She worked quietly and diligently, eventually gaining acceptance as a woman. From a 1979 interview: "[The men accepted me] when they found out that they won't die because of me, you know, and that it doesn't make that much difference that I'm a woman, you know, the company's still run the same" (Fire Fighter's Project, qtd in McCarl 133-134). Then, having earned acceptance as a woman, Rudder shifted rhetorical strategies to build alliances with black men in the DCFD. Her Intersectional Literacy informed her careful choices for approaching her fire department goals, displayed through her deliberate navigation of the intricate interactions of gender and race; intersectionality "create[s] more

fluid and malleable boundaries” around identity markers as compared to race-only or gender-only groupings, fostering intentional movement between and across such labels (Patricia Collins 205). As a black woman, Rudder first established herself as a capable colleague, from which point she could unite with the black men to “uplift” herself and them to seek promotion.

Rudder first joined the black men in a 1984 lawsuit, *Marvin K. Hammon v. District of Columbia*, which claimed that the DCFD had discriminated against black firefighters from 1960 to 1984 in promotion testing (Hammon). The settlement required new promotion procedures and two subsequent exams, in 1990 and 1991 (Hammon). As part of the lawsuit, Rudder qualified to take the 1990 exam for promotion to lieutenant; she scored high enough on the exam for the first promotion, but not high enough to qualify for the next promotion test in 1991. Although she could not take the 1991 exam, Rudder became the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit protesting that exam, on behalf of the 59 firefighters involved, claiming discriminatory testing procedures against black firefighters under Title VII (Beatrice). I argue that this is evidence of her Intersectional Literacy: she displayed leadership in the pursuit of racial “uplift”, or upward career mobility, a role historically occupied by African American women and for which her family background prepared her. Rudder purposefully chose to break her silence to make a strategic move to solidify her alliance with black men, which benefitted her career in the long term. Received by the black men of the DCFD as a black woman, Rudder shifted attention to rhetorical strategies for confronting shared barriers of race. Her Intersectional Literacy cultivated her rhetorical choices to advance her career, moving up from the bottom of the hierarchy by pivoting between audiences to tactfully address questions of gender and race.

Rudder did accomplish her career goals – first gaining acceptance by maintaining strategic silence, second gaining promotion through allying with black men – rising to become one of the top three candidates for the DCFD Chief in 2002 at the relatively young age of 50 (“3 Senior Officers”). Rudder relied on her Intersectional Literacy, born out of her own life experience, to navigate fire department barriers when no other routes were available. As a black woman, she was doubly marked as an unwelcome outsider in a job characterized by white masculinity; at first she had no collaborative options for gaining and maintaining the firefighting career she desired. Her childhood of protesting and picketing for a multitude of causes, with diverse groups of people, gave her insight into how to position herself within the fire department, eventually building collaborative relationships with black men. If in her early years she had been openly critical of gender-based discrimination, instead of keeping silent, she may have alienated herself from the black men who became important allies later for seeking promotion. Rudder’s later rise into DCFD leadership points to the long term benefits of her alliances. Rudder’s Intersectional Literacy is evident in her navigation of her distinctive role within the DCFD, and her rhetorical savvy in advancing her career.

Conclusion

The collaboration that had enabled women to enter the fire department in ladies auxiliaries and volunteer firefighting failed in the career fire department, resulting in heightened gender and rhetorical barriers for women: in acceptance as a team member, in hiring and testing practices, in promotion procedures. Women career firefighters did the same work as their volunteer counterparts, but introducing financial incentive changed expectations and opportunities. The fire crisis did not create an exigence in career fire

departments for all available bodies, because there were full time paid firefighters ready to respond at any time. Fire department hiring practices reinforced the cultural and institutional prototype of white male firefighters; even after gender-based hiring discrimination in the fire department became illegal, many departments continued to exclude and discourage women. But some women persisted, mapping innovative routes into firefighting jobs by relying on literacy skills developed elsewhere. Denied resources and support that male applicants and new hires received, women pulled on knowledge they already had – alternate literacies that might not have seemed potentially relevant at first glance.

The picture created here is only partial: certainly women brought in a multitude of other literacies, some of which were probably not effective. My work here suggests that for the three women of this chapter, they may not have had firefighting careers without their alternate literacy transfer: Judith Brewer may not have navigated the resistance of firefighters and their wives, Brenda Berkman and her women cohort may not have been hired, Beatrice Rudder may not have been accepted or promoted as a black woman. The topic of literacy transfer for reading and writing literacies has been explored in composition studies, but more research on social literacy transfer is needed; my findings suggest that this will be a productive approach to understanding women's entrance into the predominantly male workplace more broadly. Literacy skills build rhetorical strategies, some of which, like silence, have been generally characterized as feminine and long gone undertheorized and unexplored. The wide range of applicable literacy skills for productive transfer reveals the complexity of workplace landscapes – whether it's knowledge gained

as a wife or a lawyer or a human rights activist, those literacies have a depth and a richness that can reach far beyond typical expectations.

My findings also point to the difficulty in overturning, or even shifting, antithetical gendering in the career fire department; the fire department and the public still favor white men for the job. A quick internet search reveals the ongoing debate over whether women should be hired as firefighters. The prototypical image of a career firefighter has been challenged by women success in this “manly” job, but it has not been changed. Women such as Brenda Berkman and Beatrice Rudder have established legal precedents against department discrimination, and since then, women have regularly followed in their footsteps to turn to the law when the department fails them. The New York City Fire Department, the same fire department where Berkman set the standard for women refusing discriminatory treatment, has paid out over \$109 million settling workplace discrimination cases since 2008 (Rutecki). Despite the cost to the city and the department, cases continue to be filed; not even the expense of such cases has impacted the department’s efforts to shift its rigid gendering. My work shows how deeply antithetical gendering is entrenched and raises questions about institutional and cultural responsibility for the career fire department’s current state, as well as obligations to shift the model towards gender fluidity.

This chapter’s implications on the understanding of collaboration are also important, particularly the impact of introducing pay into collaborative models. The volunteer fire department evolved in the second half of the twentieth century to welcome women into long term instead of temporary roles, motivated by crisis. Crisis demands change, and in volunteer firefighting, this gave way to a more robust system that allowed

for more bodies to participate. In career firefighting, there was little exigence for collaboration, and instead, competition and conflict characterized women's experiences. As feminist rhetoricians heed Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith's call to explore "how workspaces, professions, and tasks become gendered or regendered as masculine or feminine in different times and places" (202), the impact of changing economic conditions on workplace collaboration over time will be central. Even in the fire department, however, this is not the end of collaboration; taking a broad look across time and place includes recent history, where in the twenty-first century, fire department collaboration re-emerged in new forms.

CHAPTER V

OUT OF THE FIRE: NEW COLLABORATIVE FORMS

Collaboration in the Fire Department

Over the course of the twentieth century, women have mapped new routes into the fire department, originally in harmonious collaboration and later despite its absence. The regendering process has been slow, but every time that women occupied fire department spaces made a difference, whether the women were there providing refreshments, offering first aid care, or extinguishing the fire. Collaboration offered an avenue for women to enter these new spaces despite fire department gender antithesis, which framed women and men oppositionally and positioned the fire department as men's realm. Women originally occupied supportive background roles that mirrored gender conventions, but fire crisis provided exigence for women to move into productive foreground roles doing "men's work"; especially in volunteer fire departments, the threat of an inadequate response because of insufficient firefighting bodies resulted in suspending gender antithesis. Gender rigidity was replaced gender fluidity, facilitating women's participation in prototypical volunteer firefighting work, at first in temporary positions, such as during World War 2, and later in long term positions in the 1960s and 1970s.

Women had great success as volunteer firefighters, receiving public accolades for their work. These women earned recognition and many of them earned promotions, even moving into leadership positions over their male colleagues. The suspension of gender antithesis under crisis caused gender fluidity that enabled women thrived in a generally welcoming environment. In career fire departments, however, the status quo of antithesis

and gender rigidity remained: women were clearly unwelcome, no matter their past experience or success. By introducing financial incentive, fire departments moved from collaborative volunteer models to competitive career models that reified conventional gender roles. The career fire department, under institutional and cultural pressures, reinforced its image of white masculinity by hiring “ideal” bodies out of the large pool of applicants. Those bodies were always ready to respond to fire crisis, and therefore the fire crisis did not create exigence for women to participate, as it did in the volunteer fire department. With the absence of collaboration, women pursued equal opportunity through turning to literacies developed outside of the fire department, applying their knowledge and skills in innovative ways to gain and maintain firefighting careers.

The absence of collaboration between women and men in the career fire department is not the end of cooperative efforts in the profession, however. Starting in the 1980s, women in career fire departments reached out to each other to establish new support networks. Often the only woman at her firehouse, these women firefighters sought encouragement, tips, and advice from each other. These collaborative relationships were more than friendships; the groups organized to advocate for women’s equal treatment, in some cases pursuing legal action against their fire department and the firefighters’ union. Characterized as “sisters in the brotherhood” (LaTour), women firefighter networks built up women’s resources, spoke out for women’s rights, and prepared women applicants. The rhetorical work of these groups was to give women representation, at the local and national levels, in legal, institutional, and political forums. Their contributions have carried on the regendering process in the fire department, and their approaches raise additional questions for studying collaboration.

Women firefighters' professional organizations draw on the long tradition of women's groups providing avenues for rhetorical production and civic participation, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the National Woman Suffrage Association, and the League of Women Voters, where women "learned the rhetorical tactics of political influence" (Sharer 16). Even after gaining the right to vote, women's collective civic engagement remained powerful in a male-dominated system where "women found little opportunity for agency and influence" (Sharer 34). Similar to their foremothers' organizations, women firefighters joined together in collaboration as a compensating strategy when other avenues into male-dominated spaces were unavailable. Significantly, these groups were organized by women in career firefighting, who later invited women volunteer firefighters to join in some cases, originally for women without collaborative support from their colleagues. When the career fire department failed to welcome or cooperate with them, women united for collective power.

On the local level, Brenda Berkman established the first women firefighters' group, the United Women Firefighters (UWF), in 1982 – the same year that she became a firefighter ("Guide"). The UWF was a women's support organization for the women in the Fire Department of New York City (FDNY) that dealt "with occupational and sexual discrimination women firefighters faced" ("Guide"). Berkman established the group by adapting the New York City Policewomen's Endowment Association constitution and by-laws to the FDNY; she submitted the paperwork to the FDNY who "hemmed and hawed for a while, but eventually, they recognized us" (qtd in LaTour, 133-134). Fellow woman firefighter Joann Jacobs, hired at the same time as Berkman, described the UWF's impact: "The women felt from the very beginning that there was someone they could go to and talk

to and we could hash [it] around and figure out how to solve problems” (qtd in LaTour, 134). The women rarely saw each other while working, but they began meeting regularly under Berkman’s leadership to “solve problems” together, strengthening their network and their resolve.

While the available organizational history is sparse, there is evidence of the UWF’s active role in supporting FDNY women firefighters and women applying to the FDNY. On the UWF’s website, published in 2016, it says: “The UWF has been conducting our training program for women for the past 20 years. We have developed a training program with classes, instructors and mentors specifically geared to help women pass the physical portion of the firefighters exam” (“Our Mission”). This suggests the UWF has hosted the training program since 1996. Photographic record from the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, dated “1980s,” shows women firefighters, including Berkman, recruiting more women, sitting in front of a UWF banner (“Recruiting Women”). Recruitment efforts and UWF training programs deserve credit for the recent growth of FDNY women firefighters, who now total 63 women, about .5% FDNY firefighters (Edmonds). The UWF has supported the FDNY’s first and only Asian American woman firefighter, Sarinya Srisakul, hired in 2005; the first group of all Latina women to be hired, including Joy Flores, Sophy Medina, Sarina Olmo and Jennifer Quinones, hired in 2008; and the first trans-woman firefighter, Georgia Brooke Guinan, hired in 2012 (“Herstory”).

Furthermore, the UWF coordinated efforts with the Vulcan Society, the FDNY’s organization of black firefighters, began in 1940. African American firefighters were “the only men who stood up” for FDNY women in the early 1980s, with the Vulcan Society president testifying on FDNY women’s behalf in various lawsuits (LaTour 133). The strong

relationship between the UWF and the Vulcans has continued since 1982, with the two organizations working together on a wide range of goals to promote equality and diversity, including a firefighter-themed festival in April 2017 to educate the public about firefighting jobs and recruit interested applicants (Alston). As marginalized groups, originally unwelcome and unsupported in a white man's job, women and black men organized the UWF and the Vulcan Society respectively, as a compensating strategy. Coordinating their efforts, these two groups became an even stronger force in representing and recruiting diverse firefighters. This creates a ripple effect of expanding networks growing more powerful as they unite, perhaps eventually becoming a wave of cultural change in the FDNY.

In addition to local department organizations, women have organized on the national level, creating a group now known as iWomen: The International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services. The organization provides important support and resources to women firefighters, from camps for young girls to information for retiring women firefighters, and accepts men as members as well. The group grew out of the efforts of two women career firefighters' attempts to find other women career firefighters across the country ("History"). These women, Therese Floren in Ohio and Linda Willing in Colorado, created a directory of women career firefighters and sent out the first monthly newsletter in 1982; the group formally organized in 1984, with less than 200 members from across the nation ("History"). From the beginning, the group was vocal in representing women: Floren was asked to work with the U.S. Fire Administration in Washington D.C. to oversee surveys and gather statistical data on women in the fire service, and more recently, iWomen has joined with other national and federal organizations in

setting firefighter training standards, presenting at workshops on diversity and inclusion (“History”). Since 1985, iWomen has served its members through biannual national conferences, leadership training seminars, and connecting women firefighters with specialist attorneys (“History”). At national and now international levels, iWomen offers a place for individual women to develop rhetorical strategies for entering and advancing their firefighter careers, while also playing an influential role as an organization in fire department standards and policy formation.

Extending the history of women’s fire department participation into the present day shows the cumulative impact of micro-shifts in the regendering of the profession. The cycle of stepping in and stepping out of foreground volunteer roles, and the formation of women’s networks for support at the career level, create collaborative routes towards increased inclusion and influence that navigate around gendered rhetorical barriers. This project brings women’s fire department service into the light, a messy and complex saga, under-theorized and under-valued to the point where women’s contributions have been forgotten. By recovering this unconventional women’s work, I build a theoretical model of crisis and collaboration that has the potential to advance the field’s understanding of rhetorical gendering of work and the workplace across fields.

Collaboration across Workplaces

My findings from my dissertation all stem from taking a “long view” of women’s entrance into the fire department, responding to Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith’s call for exploration of workplace re/gendering in different times and places: by examining “larger histories of gender,” scholars can see the means by which such gendered paradigms change (201-202). From this perspective, looking back across the twentieth century, new

aspects of collaboration, gendering, and women's workplace experience become visible. My contributions to the field grow from this perspective, and I suggest that feminist rhetoricians continue building long histories to open the aperture. This wide-angle view exposes the rhetoricity of gender, work, and workplaces, as many feminist scholars before me have demonstrated in their research. The imposition of gender antithesis, and then its suspension under crisis, highlight the artifice behind gender role rigidity: if women are capable of doing the firefighting job when more bodies are needed during fire crisis, it follows that they are capable of doing the job at other times. Considering collaboration, crisis, and gender together exposes the way work is constructed, as well as the alternate ways it could be constructed.

By taking the "long view," my dissertation highlights the importance of tracing women's workplace histories all the way back, to include pre-work contributions that prepared them for the workplace and began shifting workplace gendering. My research shows that women's participation in ladies auxiliaries was the first step to women entering firefighting careers, to women becoming Fire Chiefs. Taking the "long view" makes this easy to see. Economists, government agencies, and researchers have found widespread evidence of women's volunteer work leading to employment, with research dating back to the 1960s (Mueller 326-327). Some of such volunteer work, as with fire department ladies auxiliaries, is conventional women's work that led to women entering employment in less conventionally womanly roles. Similar to my findings with women's entrance into the fire department, it appears that across professions, women's workplace histories often begin before they are hired. Making the connection between women's club activity and their working lives will help correct the "imbalance of attention" in feminist rhetorical

scholarship, which has focused on women's schooling and civic engagement more than on women's workforce experiences (Hallenbeck and Smith 206). Taking a "long view" of workplace gendering should include women's preparation to enter that space. This preparation might include volunteering under the same organizational umbrella, or in a related capacity, or it might include literacy transfer of seemingly unrelated skills developed in the more conventional women's spaces that have already received scholarly attention.

My model of collaboration and crisis offers an approach for a closer examination of women's entrance into the workplace. Building on Lindal Buchanan's work on collaboration as a rhetorical strategy used by women to gain access to new spaces, my project expands on this by theorizing the conditions under which collaborative forms change in crisis. Historically rhetorical collaboration has allowed women to balance ideological constraints of conventional women's roles and their professional work (*Regendering* 152-154). My research shows that under "crisis," an event that challenges fundamental values (Weick 305), exigence may open for collaborative arrangements to abruptly shift, regardless of convention by requiring everyone "to think and act differently by being preoccupied with failure" (Newswander 558). Crisis provides an exigence for "other" bodies, bodies that are capable and available, but otherwise excluded. In the case of the fire department, the "ideal" bodies are white and masculine, but under crisis, the demand for more bodies provides opportunity for women to step in. Crisis has immediate and future impact on the gendering of collaborative work, because crisis suspends status quo antithetical gendering, which "continually figure[s] men's bodies as strong and women's bodies as weak" (Jack, "Acts" 290). Antithetical gendering imposes a gender rigid

system, where women and men have distinct roles. When crisis occurs, however, gender rigidity softens; gender roles become more fluid, and women can step into men's roles, which are generally of higher privilege and status. In the volunteer fire department, this means women can step into firefighter boots and pick up the hose to extinguish the fire. Even if women are only in the foreground temporarily, this has an effect. Every time that women inhabit men's spaces, step into men's roles, or perform men's work, women are associated with those activities. Women claim a place and do the job, building *ethos* and establishing themselves, if only at the margins, of the fire department Community of Practice. This is the slow process of regendering. In the volunteer fire department, collaboration prepared women to move from supportive to productive roles and created a positive environment for them as they learned new responsibilities.

My model of collaboration and crisis is intended to be productive and generative across women's workplace histories. The negotiation of gendered barriers, and the conditions under which these barriers are heightened and lessened, is central to much of women's experience. The gendering of bodies and work is always rhetorical; in the fire department, when we look at women's participation across the twentieth century, it is clear to see that women are excluded because they are women, not because they are incapable. Jordynn Jack borrows Pierre Bourdieu's term "acts of institution" to describe symbolic action meant to "create or exacerbate minor differences between men and women in order to perpetuate a system of masculine domination," such as the rhetorical barriers posed to women entering the fire department ("Acts" 288). For much of the century, women were welcomed and solicited to do the work in temporary and volunteer roles. Women, such as Mrs. Lee Warrender, were successful in those roles, building *ethos*

and claiming space, chipping away at the rhetorical barriers that kept women out. In career firefighting, however, women faced those barriers again, navigating around them through their own resources and skills to gain and maintain employment without collaborative support, as Brenda Berkman did. Women held decades-long fire department careers, receiving promotions over male colleagues and earning prestige. These women excelled at firefighting, but were nearly excluded from the profession because of their gender. This is true for firefighting, but also for other women in other professions: preaching, teaching, public speaking, medicine, science, and more. Exploring women's work across occupations in terms of collaboration and crisis reveals the rhetorical gendering of bodies and work, and women's rhetorical strategies for mapping routes forward.

There is rich potential for the application of my model across women's entrance into the workplace, particularly the male-dominated workplace. A cursory survey of previous feminist scholarship on women's work suggests the relevance of my model: collaboration and crisis appear in women's entrance into factories during World War 2 (Jack "Acts", Enoch "There's No Place"), and in changes in women's roles more broadly during World Wars 1 and 2 as explored throughout the edited collection *Women and Rhetoric between the Wars* (George, Weiser, and Zepernick). Similarly, recent changes in military policy and submarine habitability standards, arguably motivated by security crisis, have opened opportunities for women to work on the Navy's submarines (Buchanan "A Few"). Across these examples, women and men's collaborative forms shifted workplace gendering to accommodate local and national needs during crisis, exposing the rhetorical nature of these roles. After crisis was resolved in these historic cases, collaborative forms shifted again, with women stepping out of the foregrounded "man's" roles but sometimes leveraging

their experience and visibility to craft new professional spaces, such as women's movement into emergency medical care from volunteer firefighting roles after World War 2. The robustness of collaboration and the fluidity of gender during crisis may help feminist rhetoricians theorize women's experiences entering a range of workplaces across time, to understand the rhetorical gendering of work and the diverse forms that women's contributions have taken to this re/gendering.

Beyond feminist rhetorics, understanding crisis and collaboration can inform professional writing and rhetoric studies by calling attention to communication networks and location. Marilyn M. Cooper points out that language and technology arise in response to stimuli, not autonomously (22), and these stimuli may include crises. By viewing the rhetorical situation as "an embodied interaction with other beings and our environments" (M. Cooper 18), the scope is widened and crisis may become visible as stimulating change. For example, the crisis of fire brought women into prototypical firefighting roles in an "official" volunteer capacity, particularly during World War 2. Around this same time, aluminum-based ladders were increasingly replacing wooden ladders on the east coast, as significantly lighter, taller, and cheaper than the wooden ones (Angulo). Women brought many innovations to firefighting technique that benefitted everyone: for instance, having two people carry a ladder instead of one was more efficient for both men and women, and response time became faster as men stopped trying to "macho everything to death" (Roppe 3-4). Crisis opened up opportunities for women and became a stimuli for shifting language and technology in the fire department. The example of fire department ladders demonstrates how examining crisis as part of the rhetorical situation can be illuminating for understanding why and when such invention occurs.

Additionally, studying crisis and collaboration expands work in the growing field of workplace rhetorics and workplace literacies. Antithetical gendering in the workplace continues to be a powerful force in determining who is welcomed into what jobs, and collaboration is not always present. Workplace collaboration is an underexplored topic. Under what conditions does collaboration thrive, under what conditions does it fail? When crisis creates exigence for women to fulfill conventionally masculine roles, even if temporarily, the gendering of the role becomes open to change. In the highly-gendered fire department, this is happening slowly, over repeated iterations; women firefighters perform and present a visual argument that regenders the job. The prototypical image of a white male firefighter is disturbed when the public sees a black woman, such as Beatrice Rudder, performing the work. The movement of women into and out of foreground roles across the century has begun to unsettle the gender norms that initially held sway. There are limitations to collaboration: my findings suggest that women career firefighters found new routes into the workplace in the absence of collaboration, pulling on previously established literacies that may not seem related to firefighting at all. Such literacies might stem from traditionally undervalued women's work, such as Judith Brewer's literacy as a firefighter wife. I theorize literacy using a New Literacy studies approach, which frames literacy practices as more than reading and writing, to include acquired skills to navigate and participate in our Communities of Practice; Shannon Carter characterizes this alternate literacy "as social rather than alphabetic, situated rather than universal, multiple rather than singular" (Carter 578). Exploring the ways women persist without collaboration helps reveal and revalue literacies that might otherwise go unnoticed. Much research has been done on the transfer of reading and writing literacies into and out of the composition

classroom, but more research needs to be done on social literacy transfer, for women entering the workplace and beyond, for fuller theorization of this process.

Collaboration between Academia and the Community

Women will surely continue regendering the fire department, from their participation in ladies auxiliaries, volunteer firefighting, emergency medical service, and career firefighting. Women have persisted despite adversity, reaching out across their local departments to other women and other marginalized groups, as well as across the nation. Women advocate for themselves by claiming space in the firehouse and at the scene of the fire, but also by educating young girls, recruiting and training new applicants, and representing women in national and federal forums. Women are moving forward in regendering the fire department, but it is a slow process requiring great endurance. Taking a long view on women's fire department participation, as Hallenbeck and Smith suggest, disturbs culturally dominant narratives of women's "gradual but steady linear progression" into the workplace that neglects women's realities and dismisses the ongoing work necessary to achieve better workplace conditions (202). More work is needed, and feminist rhetoricians can help, responding to Jacqueline Jones Royster's call for "attention to ethical action" (280) and "commitment to social responsibility" (281).

Fire department culture today still favors white men, and as women have gained access to firefighting careers, they continue to face harassment and bullying. In 2014, the former president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, called firefighting a "white guy's club" in an open letter, continuing on to say "in a surprisingly large number of fire departments ... it's OK to harass and physically assault women and minorities – even rape women – in our fire stations" (qtd in Jouvenal). Women continue to face hostile work

environments, but in addition to what happens at the fire station, some of it now happens anonymously online. In April 2016, Firefighter-Paramedic Nicole Mittendorff of the Fairfax County (VA) Fire and Rescue Department hanged herself after online sexual harassment and cyberbullying in an anonymous internet forum used by her fellow firefighters (Fox). Mittendorff's suicide has prompted more women in that department to come forward, filing lawsuits against the department for failing to stop sexual harassment and allowing for ostracism of women who report workplace discrimination (Jouvenal). And this is just one fire department; women firefighters across the nation are still confronting workplace harassment, still filing and winning similar lawsuits.

I view my dissertation project as another type of collaboration, between firefighters and academia, a feminist effort to develop compensating strategies in pursuit of greater workplace equality for women firefighters. I am committed to being a scholar-advocate, who learns, studies, and performs a community's advocacy, to bridge academic goals with community ones. Aaron Hess explains it: advocacy "would be considered and practiced in conjunction with the organization" by the scholar and the scholar would "[support] the vernacular organization and its conception of a (new) political reality" (Hess 135). Scholar-advocacy aligns with the goals of a growing area in the field of rhetoric, rhetorical field methods. At the intersection of rhetoric and ethnography, rhetorical field methods ask researchers to deeply consider how they participate in the communities with which they engage for academic purposes and how those actions manifest in the world. Such an approach should "create more equitable representations of marginalized voices" and identify "how those voices are or can be deployed in ways that (re)construct more emancipatory power relations" (Middleton, Senda-Cook & Endres, 389). I plan to move this

project forward to do just that, following the calls from iWomen (“2014”) and The National Fire Heritage Center (Slaughter) to preserve firefighter history and experiences, which are also aligned with feminist scholarly goals of recovering women and exploring gendered workplace rhetorics. Collaborating across the boundaries of academia opens new possibilities advancing both academic understanding and workplace policy, confronting the rhetorical barriers to women firefighters through theory and practice.

My dissertation showcases the richness of collaboration, from ladies auxiliary members in conventional roles collaborating with firefighter husbands in the early 1900s to women career firefighters collaborating with each other in the late 1900s, to women firefighters and academics collaborating across professions today. The antithetical gender constructs that keep women out of firefighting careers can be constructed differently; the disciplinary borders that separate academic and workplace knowledge can be reconstructed too. My findings suggest that across male-dominated workplaces, patterns of re/gendering through collaboration and crisis will emerge that are productive for scholarly study and for improving women’s workplace experience. Every time that women step into the foreground and make new roles and collaborative forms visible, it has an impact on future opportunities, contributing to the slow process of changing workplace values. Collaboration matters because women’s work, in all its forms, matters; collaboration offers a way to take the “long view” on women’s changing workplace contributions and to theorize those changes in terms of crisis and gender.

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VITA

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Appointments

Faculty, University of Virginia Center for American English Language and Culture,
 Charlottesville, VA. 2010-2017.

Education

PhD in English (Rhetoric), Aug 2017. Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.
 MA in Applied Linguistics (Sociolinguistics), May 2013. Old Dominion University,
 Norfolk, VA.
 MA in English (Literature), May 2010. University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.
 BA in English, May 2007. Ohio Northern University, Ada, OH.
 BM in Music Composition, May 2007. Ohio Northern University, Ada, OH.

Publications

Article. "A Strong Leadership that Does Not Show': Ladies Auxiliaries as Women's
 First Entrance Points to the Fire Department", forthcoming at *Rhetoric
 Review*.
 Book Review. David Gold and Catherine Hobbs' *Educating the New Southern Woman:
 Speech, Writing, and Race at the Public Women's Colleges, 1884-1945* with
 Lindal Buchanan, in *Rhetoric Review* 33.4 (2014): 442-446.

Selected Presentations

"Becoming Firefighters: Women's Heritage Literacies in the Workplace." 2017
 Conference on College Communication and Composition Annual Convention,
 March 2017, Portland, OR.
 "Rhetoricians in the Field: On the Ethics of Advocacy, Change, and Engagement."
 Rhetoric Society of America, May 2016, Atlanta, GA.
 "Large Scale Writing Assessment." 36th Annual Conference on the Teaching of
 Writing, March 2015, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.
 "Women in the Workplace: Countering the Narrative of Steady Progression."
 Feminisms and Rhetorics 2015, Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History
 of Rhetoric and Composition, October 2015, Arizona State University, Tempe,
 AZ.
 "Gendered Associations of *Recruit* and their Effect on Hiring Women Firefighters."
 57th Annual International Linguistic Association Conference: Language and
 Institutions, April 2012, City University of New York, New York, NY.

Awards

ODU English Department Pegasus Travel Grant, February 2017.
 ODU Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistantship Award (university-wide), May
 2012.