

Intimate Labors

Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care

Edited by Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas

Stanford Social Sciences
An Imprint of Stanford University Press
Stanford, California

2010

18

More Intimate Unions

Dorothy Sue Cobble

THE OLD MYTH THAT WOMEN are unorganizable has largely been demolished. The stories of successful labor organizing among women generated by decades of feminist scholars have had an impact.¹ But there are still myths and outmoded paradigms that hamper our ability to think clearly and productively about the labor organizing of intimate workers. I call this outmoded paradigm the “factory paradigm” of labor organizing. It is a hangover in part from the glorious but by now long-gone heyday of mass production organizing and industrial unionism. It also owes much of its staying power to the economistic and “factory proletarian” biases that still shape present-day theories of worker consciousness and collective action.

This chapter asks how our analysis of collective mobilization would change if we moved beyond the factory paradigm and took the experiences of intimate labor and of intimate workers as prototypic rather than exceptional. To help answer that question, I draw on the rich history of labor organizing among intimate workers as well as the now considerable body of feminist scholarship that challenges theories of identity and agency premised on narrow and singular notions of human motivation and desire.²

Worker resistance and activism takes many forms, but in this chapter I will focus on the efforts of intimate workers to create unions and other workplace-based institutions.³ Such institutions include unions affiliated with the two major U.S. labor federations, the AFL-CIO and, since July 2005, the Change to Win Federation; unaffiliated or independent unions representing workers; as well as worker associations and centers that may not, as do most unions, seek a collective bargaining relationship with an employer to advance and secure their goals.

Creating a model of labor organizing that incorporates the realities of intimate work and intimate workers, of whom the majority are female and people of color, is necessary if our theories of collective mobilization are to reflect the twenty-first century economy. It is also crucial to making possible “more intimate unions,” another central concern of this chapter. The phrase *more intimate unions* has multiple meanings. It signals a focus on how *more* unions of intimate workers can be organized as well as on how a more *intimate* labor movement can be encouraged. Such a movement would be one in which intimacy is no longer feared and in which attention to the interpersonal in all realms of life, including the union movement itself, is recognized as essential for advancing freedom, human dignity, and social justice. Having more intimate unions in both senses, I will argue, has the potential for revitalizing the labor movement as a whole and for benefiting those who serve and those who are served.

In the spirit of this anthology, I rely on “intimate workers” as a category of analysis. In my usage, it is a broad category that refers to those who do care work, sex work, household labor, as well as any other job that involves servicing others. I will use it interchangeably with the term *personal service workers*.⁴ At times, I also refer to “interactive” or “frontline” service workers, both terms that foreground a significant structural element shared by many intimate workers: that is, their interaction with clients, patients, or customers—that third party so aptly termed by saleswomen as “our friend the enemy” in Susan Porter Benson’s classic history of department store workers, managers, and customers.⁵

I welcome the concept of “intimate labor” because it crosses occupational boundaries and focuses on what workers in a range of service jobs have in common. It also helps us capture the complexity and multidimensionality of personal service work. The service occupations I have studied, be they waitresses, flight attendants, clerical or household workers, confound easy categorization. None can be captured by a *single* distinguishing characteristic. Neither do they fit easily into *one* of the now popular categories of “care work” or “sex work.”⁶ Many of these jobs may involve care work and “emotional labor”; yet many may not.⁷ At the same time, many *also* fall into what could be called the sexual service sector, a term I first encountered in Baxandall, Gordon, and Reverby’s 1976 women’s history documentary collection, *America’s Working Women*.⁸ Jobs in the “sexual service sector” involve the selling of one’s sexual self. Prostitutes, strippers, and other “sex workers” are part of this sector, but so

too are many workers in the retail, hospitality, and entertainment sectors not commonly thought of as doing “sex work.” Indeed, with the increasing sexualization of work and the heightened emphasis on appearance as well as aesthetic and erotic titillation, few jobs are wholly without a sexual dimension.

Intimate labor is also a useful term because it does not presuppose a particular affective state on the part of the service provider. Intimate exchanges may vary in their degree of caring and closeness, being, as C. Wright Mills once noted, both “more impersonal and more intimate.”⁹ The relationship of the worker to her work is left unspecified: The worker may be engaged in “deep” and potentially “self-alienating” forms of emotional labor or simply “surface” ritualistic performance.¹⁰ Service encounters then may be exploitative as well as mutually beneficial. There is room for multiple and shifting possibilities.

The Factory Paradigm of Labor Organizing

What are some of the deeply embedded—and I might add untested—assumptions that are part of the “factory paradigm” of labor organizing? At its core, it is a theory that presumes that workers who most closely resemble the archetypal male proletariat toiling away on the mass production assembly line are the most likely to organize. There are many derivatives of this ideal that misshape our theories of who will organize and for what ends.

First, it is a model that privileges a “market or waged work” identity and assumes it correlates more closely with collective action than other identities and self-conceptions. Despite the longstanding feminist insight that work must be conceptualized broadly to encompass productive and reproductive labor and span the household and market realms, some theorists of labor organizing still worry that women wage earners whose identity rests primarily or even secondarily on the work of social reproduction don’t yet have a fully developed consciousness as “workers” and hence will be less likely to turn to collective action.

Chandra Mohanty, for example, in *Feminism without Borders*, writes of her desire that the women workers she is studying discard their family identities and adopt a “worker consciousness” based on their paid work; it is only then, she suggests, that they will move toward “solidarity” and collective resistance.¹¹ Other scholars worry that care workers may not be ready to unionize or assert their rights because they offer “unpaid” or voluntary care as an add-on to their paid job, thus resisting the valuation of their work in market terms and lacking sufficient autonomy from those they serve. What is the un-

derlying teleology that is being expressed here? What does a fully realized “worker consciousness” look like? Does it require the shedding of other less desirable identities, such as those tied to household, family, and community and the development of an autonomous market-based self? And is such a narrow and self-interested “worker identity” a necessary precondition for collective mobilization?

History suggests otherwise. Women’s ties with family, household, and community as well as with those they serve—or put another way, their sense of themselves as mothers, daughters, sisters, lovers, partners, good caretakers, or providers—have sparked successful workplace-based organizing as much as deterred it. For many women, as scholars of African American and working-class women’s consciousness have shown, identity as a mother or a housewife was inseparable from identity as a deserving wage-earning woman.¹² Whether we call it “womanist,” or “female consciousness,” or “feminist,” the organizing of working-class women on behalf of themselves *and* those dependent on them has been a powerful, if not dominant, force for change.¹³ Macdonald and Merrill find a similar confluence of identities spurring today’s labor organizing among child and family care providers. These workers are seeking collective power to secure their own independence and dignity; they are also organizing to advance their beliefs in an “ethic of care” and to gain recognition, culturally and economically, for their work as “good providers.”¹⁴

A second lingering inheritance from the “factory paradigm” is the idea that factory jobs are easier to organize than other jobs. If the first notion privileges a market and individuated consciousness more associated with men, this second assumption privileges the kind of working-class jobs traditionally held by men. The imagined factory on which much organizing theory is based is the mass-production factory system peopled by men: It is located outside the home and is most commonly a large, bureaucratic enterprise with full-time, highly routinized waged employees. It is this workplace, the story goes, with its large concentration of homogeneous alienated workers, that will lead most readily to collective mobilization. The popularity of George Ritzer’s 1993 study, *The McDonaldization of Society*, for example, was based in part on its assumption that as service jobs “McDonaldized,” or came to resemble the Taylorized mass production workplace of old, and as service workers “proletarianized”—a concept based on perceived transformations in factory labor and its long inevitable march toward routinization and deskilling, a new wave of worker resistance would ensue.¹⁵

But intimate workers are often found in work settings that differ dramatically from those common to the mass-production enterprise. Intimate work tends to take place in smaller, less bureaucratic settings; “tightly constrained” or rationalized work systems make up a small fraction of all service environments.¹⁶ The employment relationship, where it exists, may be personal and informal, and the line between employee and employer is often blurred and easily crossed. And, unlike workers in goods production, a third party—the customer, client, patient, passenger—complicates and transforms the old employer–employee dyad. The quality of the server’s relationship to that third party may be more important to his or her overall well-being, materially and psychologically, than the relationship to the boss or “employer.”

In addition, intimate workers are often geographically dispersed, scattered among many worksites rather than concentrated in a single large enterprise. They may work in the “privacy” of the home, be it their own or that of someone else; or they may ply their trade in the hidden and ephemeral “public” spaces carved out for sexual exchange. Many are part-time or “nonstandard” workers; few have long-term permanent relations with a single employer. It is these characteristics of the intimate workplace—smaller, dispersed, more personal and privatized—and of the intimate worker—casualized and lacking a classic adversarial class consciousness—that many see as impediments to unionism.¹⁷

But one of the surprising truths about the history of organizing in the United States is that the majority of workers who joined unions did not fit the mass production stereotype. All too often we conflate unionism with mass production unionism, which in the United States reached its peak in the mid-twentieth century. But prior to that, millions of nonfactory workers unionized. Certainly, the waitresses I studied—a service trade in which one-quarter of all workers were organized by the mid-fifties—were unusual in their proclivity for collective organization, but they were not alone. Neither was their approach to labor organizing, what I’ve called “occupational unionism,” atypical. Occupational unionism with its emphasis on the trade or occupational community and its control over hiring, training, and job performance was the dominant form of labor organization before the advent of mass production unionism. And when mass production organization surged in the 1930s and 1940s, so too did organization among those outside of manufacturing: in hospitality, communication, maritime, transportation, and other sectors.¹⁸ The largest U.S. union in the post-World War II era was not the United Auto Workers but the Teamsters, a union of workers, many of whom were inde-

pendent contractors or owner-operators, who spent most of their day alone in their trucks hurtling through space.¹⁹

Nonfactory unionism continued to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s with the organizing of public sector workers, the majority of whom were in interactive service jobs such as teaching, social work, and health care. Union density in the U.S. private sector is now a quarter of what it was in the 1950s, down to 7 percent in 2008. Public sector unionism, however, rose to 37 percent by the early 1980s and is still at that level.²⁰

In short, the organizing that is taking place today among intimate workers is not such a break from the past as we imagine. It is actually part of a long history of successful nonfactory organizing. It is these workers—as much as those among the fabled industrial proletariat—who turned to collective organization and built powerful and long-lasting workplace institutions. It is their story that is continuing today.

The Declining Factory Advantage

Part of that story, and an inspiring part, is how intimate workers organized despite the legal and cultural obstacles they faced.²¹ Many of these barriers existed because the state assumed the factory as its paradigmatic work setting and the industrial blue-collar male head-of-household as its model worker. Historically, only “industrial market work” was deemed “real work,” and hence those who diverged from that ideal often lacked “employee” status and the legal rights and protections that flowed from that status. Initially, for example, broad swaths of nonfactory workers fell outside the parameters of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) guaranteeing workers the right to form unions; they also were frequently exempted from the network of state and federal legislation regulating wages, hours, and other working conditions. Of course, it was no accident that the excluded jobs were ones predominantly held by African Americans and people of color: Racism has operated historically to deny those with darker skins the privileges of economic as well as political citizenship.²² Yet the particular “nonfactory-like” characteristics of intimate labor reinforced this racism.

At times, the courts agreed with employers who claimed, as did hotel owners, that any job resembling household labor should be exempt from labor legislation because of its nonindustrial character.²³ At other times, the location of work in the private noncommercial realm of the home prompted its exclusion. The home was seen, in Vivien Hart’s apt phrase, as a “rights-free enclave.”²⁴ In

part because of these intersecting, overlapping prejudices, the majority of domestic workers, for example, were not covered by federal fair labor standard legislation until 1974.

Today, many intimate workers still lack basic labor rights and protections because they are in the underground cash economy or are defined as “self-employed” or “independent contractors,” as is often the case for domestic cleaners, exotic dancers, and family care providers. The lack of legal recognition thus remains a formidable barrier to labor organizing for personal service workers.

At the same time, the legal terrain in the United States is shifting, lessening the once stark distinctions between unprotected nonfactory workers and others. Today, personal service workers are not alone in their lack of legal protections: Some one-third of *all* private sector workers are outside of NLRA protection.²⁵ And of equal significance, a consensus is rapidly emerging that most successful labor organizing at present happens outside the framework of U.S. labor law. In other words, the legal protections for organizing under U.S. labor law have eroded to such a degree that even those who “enjoy” such coverage find it of little help.²⁶ This is not to say that it is now easy for personal service workers to organize; it is only to say that the playing field has been leveled to some degree, making it as hard to organize those who supposedly have legal protections and those who don’t.

The playing field is also being leveled in other ways with the rise of global manufacturing and outsourcing. In terms of the global spatial politics of labor organizing, intimate workers have advantages over many other groups of workers. Personal service jobs are simply not as vulnerable to relocation as goods-production work.²⁷ Of course some interactive service work can be outsourced, as is the case with call center employees; and intimate workers are vulnerable to consumer whimsy, too: Sex tourists can move around the globe as the supply of sex workers fluctuates or the idea of the perfect sex partner changes. But, in general, capital mobility has proceeded more rapidly in goods-production. In a majority of the union campaigns among U.S. manufacturing workers in the 1990s, employers relied on plant closings, real and threatened, to thwart worker’s collective representation.²⁸

The strong bond many interactive service workers have with a third party is another advantage for them in labor organizing. Historically and into the present, workers from every industry and occupation have relied on allies to help them in their efforts to extract their just due for their labor. Sympathy strikes, boycotts, influencing public opinion, and political action are all key

weapons in the arsenal of labor activists. Intimate workers, however, have had an ace up their sleeve: They serve the public every day and hence have the opportunity for numerous personal encounters. Not only can they reach out for support to the general public, they can also mobilize their networks of customers, clients, or service recipients. The restaurant owners I studied were invariably surprised when their customers sided with the restaurant “help” during strikes. The striking waitresses, who earlier had hollered out complicated and highly specific breakfast orders to the cooks even before their hungry early-morning customers found their seats, were not.²⁹

The Rise of Intimate Unions since the 1980s

The final nail in the coffin of the factory paradigm of labor organizing may turn out to be the upsurge of workplace organizing among intimate workers since the 1980s. Not only are interactive service workers initiating and winning union campaigns more frequently than any other group of worker, they are doing so in record numbers.

Seventeen percent of nurses are affiliated with one of the many unions vying to represent them, making them among the more organized groups in the United States, and much of this growth has occurred since the 1980s. Sizeable numbers of nurses and other health care professionals now belong to the healthcare divisions of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).³⁰

Nurses also have demanded more unionlike representation from their professional nurse associations. Although the American Nurses Association (ANA), the national professional organization representing nurses and nurse supervisors, dropped its opposition to collective bargaining in the late 1940s, few of its affiliated state nurse associations seriously pursued the union route. In the 1990s, however, as the registered nursing shortage reached crisis proportion and the conditions of staff nurses worsened, dissatisfaction flared over the ANA’s commitment to representing the divergent interests of direct-care nurses and nurse managers. In 1995, the California Nurses Association (CNA) broke its ties with the ANA over the issue and dedicated itself to unionizing direct-care nurses. By 2007, their membership had grown fourfold, reaching 75,000. In 2009, CNA joined with two other nurse associations to form the 150,000-member National Nurses United (NNU). The new organization, now the largest national union representing direct-care nurses, seeks to organize

all direct-care RNs and serve as a national voice for nurses' rights and health care reform.³¹

The 1990s also witnessed a phenomenal rise in the unionization of home care workers who assist the elderly and disabled in their homes. Since the massive union victory in Los Angeles in 1999, in which 74,000 home care workers gained collective bargaining representation with the SEIU, making it one of the largest single union victories in modern labor history, momentum has continued to build. Current home care union membership tops 350,000, and Boris and Klein estimate that "discounting the underground economy of home health care aides, about thirty-five percent of the home health care labor force now belongs to unions."³²

More recently, unionism has spread to child care workers. One of their first large-scale breakthroughs occurred in April 2005, when 49,000 Illinois family child care providers voted to unionize. Since then, some additional 100,000 have joined, creating new child care provider organizations in Washington, Oregon, New Jersey, and elsewhere. In March 2009, the SEIU alone claimed 200,000 organized child care workers.³³

New intimate worker associations are cropping up as well. Domestic Workers United, for example, whose aim is to represent the 200,000 nannies, housekeepers, elder caregivers, and others working in New York City private homes—a largely immigrant female work force from Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Philippines—in 2003 helped secure passage of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, the first citywide ordinance in the country protecting the rights of domestic workers. In the spring of 2008, the first national convention of domestic worker associations gathered in New York City, making quite a stir.³⁴

Workers providing intimate care to the bodies of women (and some men)—facials, bikini waxes, massages, manicures, and pedicures—may be the next group to organize nationally. In 2007, as Miliann Kang shows in this volume, nail salon workers, a group primarily Asian in background, formed a network in New York City, the Nail Salon Workers Network, to address the severe health and safety issues in their industry and the disrespect with which they are treated by their clients or salon owners. The Nail Salon Workers Network, part of a coalition of groups representing service-economy workers called "Justice Will Be Served," arose after Susan Kim, a fifty-three-year-old Korean manicurist, won a \$182,000 class action lawsuit against a number of Upper East Side salons for overtime violations, back pay, and for "retalia-

tory termination." In Kim's case, she had been fired after she complained to her employer about the grueling ten-and-a-half hour work shifts and other illegalities.³⁵

Although the exotic dancers union at Lusty Lady in San Francisco disappeared, sister unions and sex worker associations have emerged in Argentina, Australia, Britain, Europe, and elsewhere.³⁶ The largest union of prostitutes currently exists in India. Founded by a public health scientist in 1992 but now largely run by the prostitutes themselves, it has some 65,000 members concentrated in West Bengal. *Newsweek* credited the union with lowering the HIV infection rate in the Sonagachi or red-light district of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) to 5 percent, a stunning achievement, particularly when compared to the higher and rising infection rates elsewhere. Seventy percent of Mumbai's prostitutes, for example, are estimated to be HIV-positive. The union asked its members to boycott customers who refused to wear condoms. It took considerable solidarity among the prostitutes to change their clients' behavior, but eventually safer sexual practices became more widespread.³⁷

The majority of the intimate workers who have organized since the 1980s, it should be noted, do not fit the "factory paradigm" of who will turn to collective organization. Many work in scattered, isolated workplaces, often hidden from public view; their boss may be a family member or someone else with whom they have close emotional ties. Their primary employment relationship, for better or for worse, may be with their clients, customers, or patients. Indeed, the "factory paradigm" would have predicted that center-based child care workers would have organized because they are more likely to work in large, impersonal work environments and have adversarial relations with their employer. The United Child Care Union, an AFSCME-affiliate based in Philadelphia, has signed up a few center-based child care workers, as has the SEIU. But overwhelmingly it is home-based child and family care providers who have organized, as Ellen Reese details in this volume.³⁸

More Intimate Unions

What will it take to grow intimate unionism? Certainly, there needs to be a greater commitment to organizing among current labor organizations: what many talk about as moving toward an "organizing" or a "social movement unionism."³⁹ But, just as importantly, there needs to be a transformation of union culture and values so that those who service the physical and emotional needs of others are welcomed and respected in the movement.

Most obviously, the intimate labor of sexual service remains in the shadows and, when mentioned in union circles, may elicit embarrassed silence or involuntary laughter. There are exceptions, of course, but the traditional labor movement is far from reaching a consensus over whether to organize sex workers and what specific political and economic policies would best serve their interests and those of the larger society. Here is an instance in which pressure from both inside and outside the union movement will need to be applied before much will alter. As sex workers “self-organize,” creating their own networks, associations, and alliances, established unions will feel pressure to change. Unions who already represent workers in the sexual service sector also can help spearhead this transformation by responding aggressively to issues involving sexuality and erotic labor in their industries.

UNITE HERE (the merged garment and hospitality union),⁴⁰ for example, has a long and honorable tradition of representation in this sector, which they could turn into an asset in organizing. I’ve written elsewhere about how HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees) organized Playboy Bunnies in the early 1960s under the guidance of the unstoppable Myra Wolfgang and how by 1969 they secured a national union contract covering all Hugh Hefner’s Playboy Clubs. The national contract ended the employer’s “no wage” policy (the bunnies had been expected to live solely on tip income), gave bunnies more control over the cut and style of their uniforms, set rules for customer behavior—“look but do not touch”—and challenged the club’s rigid ideas of female beauty. Bunnies were fired, for example, on “loss of bunny image” or the first sign of “crinkling eyelids, sagging breasts, crepey necks, and drooping derrieres.” After one arbitrator ruled in the union’s favor and reinstated one group of “defective bunnies,” Wolfgang quipped that not only had “bunnies bit back” but that Hugh Hefner had finally been “displaced as the sole qualified beholder of bunny beauty.”⁴¹

Some locals of HERE have continued their union’s historic willingness to challenge appearance standards and respond to the problems of those in sexual service jobs. In the 1990s, for example, Atlantic City’s HERE Local 34 threatened the casinos with a “pantyhose arbitration” over the sheerness of the pantyhose that management required casino waitresses to wear; the local also considered a class-action suit against all twelve casinos, alleging sex discrimination. The waitresses preferred thicker, less sheer pantyhose because they experienced less harassment. Heavier “support” hose also were more comfortable, helped tired legs, and covered varicose veins.⁴²

Yet problems with sexual harassment and appearance discrimination are widespread and increasing in hospitality, retail, and other sectors, and the labor movement has not made these issues a priority. Women workers are challenging these conditions in court: In *In Jespersen v. Harrah’s Operating Co.*, for example, a case recently rejected by the Ninth Circuit, a female bartender protested Harrah’s “personal best” grooming and appearance policy requiring women to wear makeup. Yet, so far, the large class action sex discrimination lawsuits in hospitality have not been brought by unions, as Avery and Crain note in their recent analysis of how service businesses are aggressively pursuing profit from “sexual commodification.” Sex discrimination is a “collective harm,” to borrow Marion Crain’s phrase, and labor will not be able to respond effectively to the needs of its members until it recognizes the intimate and the erotic as economic and labor matters.⁴³

In addition to taking sexual labor more seriously, the traditional labor movement has other things to learn from the new intimate unions that have arisen. Home care and child care unions put monetary matters at the center of their organizing: Not surprisingly, raising their own low wages and gaining some measure of economic security were top concerns for these workers. Yet their discourse about money was rarely just about money. The child care campaigns for “worthy wages” gained public support for raising the pay of providers by emphasizing the skill of their work as well as the *social* importance of care work. Put another way, theirs was a unionism that was challenging the distribution of wealth *and* of social prestige.⁴⁴

Many intimate unions also have repeatedly made connections between raising wages and improving the quality of care. Like earlier campaigns among teachers, nurses, and other frontline service workers in health and education, child care providers are conscious of creating a unionism that could help solve the problems of both service producers and service consumers. The collective bargaining agreement between SEIU Local 925 and the state of Washington, negotiated in 2007, is remarkable for its attention to the dual needs of caregiver and care recipient. In addition to guaranteeing higher wages, training, and benefits to 12,000 family child care providers, it pledges increased access to quality child care for every Washington State family *and* specifies that the rights of consumers to select or change their child care provider will be protected.⁴⁵ This is a unionism that, in alliance with parents, is pushing for a virtuous circle in which organizing caregivers raises the value of their care labor, improves the quality of the care they provide, and advances the right of all to receive good care.

Yet, in far too many instances, unions remain prisoners of what Viviana Zelizer calls a “nothing-but” economic mentality; that is, they still see the marketplace and industrial relations as almost wholly about commercial exchange and economic maximization.⁴⁶ Rather, what intimate unionism demonstrates is that monetary or “standard of living” issues are a good place to begin in representing workers but not the place to end. Worker’s psychological and relational needs must be addressed along with their economic needs.

The Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW) has led the way in this regard, pioneering what founding organizer Kris Rondeau calls a “relational unionism.” Like the nail salon workers, HUCTW members speak pointedly about the need to transform relationships—not just between worker and employer but between workers and those they serve. Transforming the point of consumption (which, in many ways, is also the point of production in service economies) is central to their mission.⁴⁷

Customers can be allies in the process of improving service encounters, as has largely been the case with home care and family care unionism. They may also be adversaries, as was true for nail salon workers, the Playboy bunnies, and the Indian prostitutes’ union, all instances in which collective pressure was necessary to change the behavior of clients. Indeed, in contrast to the child care unionists who sought to ensure the right of public access to their services, the Indian prostitutes’ union did not seek to expand sexual services. Their goal, one spokeswoman explained, was to ensure that they and their daughters had alternatives to sex work.⁴⁸

Harvard clerical workers fall somewhere between these extremes in terms of their relationship to their “customers.” When the Harvard administration offered “skills training” for clericals in how to handle “customer encounters” with irate and demanding faculty and students, HUCTW members found one lesson particularly galling. At this infamous session, the consultant hired by Harvard instructed attendees to “think of yourself as a trash can,” a vessel that would simply fill up with everyone’s ill humor throughout the day and then could be dumped after work. HUCTW decided it needed an alternative and insisted on setting up its own training program in “negotiating relationships.” Its goal, the union explained, was to end management’s “customer is always right” rule and develop more humane norms for clerical–customer interactions. The customer was neither right nor wrong, they decided, but certainly was “always interesting.”⁴⁹

HUCTW also tried to get management to understand that if the full complicated idiosyncratic lives of each worker were recognized and honored it

would actually be to the advantage not just of Harvard but of everyone. As Kris Rondeau once explained, “as a mature union,” we felt it was time to move “beyond economic man.”⁵⁰ For HUCTW, that meant resisting the idea that people’s desires can be reduced to the material and that selfishness and hyper-individualism are the best bases for prosperity and happiness.

Viviana Zelizer reminds us in this volume how much “mutual caring” occurs in the workplace and indeed how much occurs everywhere. It’s time not only for unions to recognize and value the intimate labor that we all do but also to put transforming human relationships at the heart of their mission. In the new economy of the twenty-first century, the economic and the intimate converge. Intimate workers and their unionism have the potential to transform these new relations of exchange, making them into a world C. Wright Mills could not envision, one that was both more intimate *and* more personal. Ultimately, it is not the things that matter; it’s the people. That’s why we need more intimate unions and why they would benefit us all.

Notes

1. See, for example, Milkman, 1985; Baron, 1991.
2. For an introduction, Larrabee, 1993; and Tronto, 1993.
3. For discussions of nonworkplace organizing, see Kelley, 1993; and Kaplan, 1982.
4. The term *personal service* has been discarded in part because of its negative associations with servitude. But the stigmatization of service and its conflation with servitude is a cultural and intellectual legacy that should be challenged. The African American men who founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in the 1920s sought such a change. Their slogan was “Service not Servitude.” See, among others, Arnesen, 2001; and A. Philip Randolph Institute (retrieved March 7, 2009).
5. For “interactive” service work, see Leidner, 1993; for “frontline,” see Korczynski, 2009; for quote, see Benson, 1986: 258.
6. For example, Cobble, 1991a, 1999; Cobble and Merrill, 2009.
7. The term *emotional labor* is from Hochschild, 1983: 3–12, *passim*; for contrasting views on who does “care work,” see England and Folbre, 1999; and Duffy, 2005.
8. Baxandall, Gordon, and Reverby: xx.
9. Mills, 1951: introduction and 161–188. See also Zelizer’s expanded and ambiguous formulation of “intimacy” in *The Purchase of Intimacy*, 2005, 14–16.
10. On “deep acting” and “self-alienation,” see Hochschild, 1983; on “surface” encounters and ritualistic performance, see Butler, 2006.
11. Mohanty, 2003: chapter 6.
12. For example, Collins, 2000, especially 173–201.
13. Brown, 1989; Kaplan, 1982; Cobble, 2004: 3.

14. Macdonald and Merrill, 2002.
15. Ritzer, 2004.
16. Herzenberg, Alic, and Wial, 1998: 11–14, 42–43.
17. For a fuller development of these points, see Cobble, 1994.
18. Tomlins, 1979; Cobble, 1991b, 2005.
19. Cobble and Vosko, 2000.
20. Cobble, 2005; U.S. Department of Labor, “Union Members in 2008.”
21. Boris and Klein, 2007.
22. Palmer, 1995; Mettler, 1998.
23. Cobble, 2004: 111.
24. Hart, 1994.
25. Cobble, 1994; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2002.
26. Compa, 2003; Freeman, 2007.
27. Lerner, 2007.
28. Bronfenbrenner, 2001.
29. Cobble, 1991a: especially chapters 2, 3, and 4.
30. Gordon, 2005. For nurse membership figures, AFSCME (retrieved February 2, 2010); MacDonald (retrieved February 2, 2010); SEIU (retrieved February 2, 2010).
31. Ketter, 1996; Furillo, 2007; Raine, 2009; Beyerstein, 2009. The other two organizations that amalgamated with CNA were the Massachusetts Nurses Association and the United American Nurses, a group founded in 1999 by activist nurses within ANA.
32. Delp and Quan, 2002; Boris and Klein, 2007, 2008: 33.
33. Smith, 2004; Whitebook, 2002; Cobble and Merrill, 2009: 157, 162–163; Reese, “But Who Will Care for the Children?” Chapter 16 in this volume; SEIU (retrieved February 2, 2010).
34. Fine, 2007; Boris and Nadasen, 2008.
35. Gonnerman, 2007; Nussbaum, 2007. See also Kang, “Manicuring Intimacies,” Chapter 14 in this volume.
36. On organizing Lusty Lady and the exotic dancers alliance, see *Live Nude Girls Unite*; Friend, 2004; Kempadoo, 1998. On sex worker unions globally, see Gall, 2006: chapters 6 and 7; on Argentina, where AMMAR (the Argentinean Female Sex Workers Union) has been particularly successful, see Hardy, 2010.
37. MacKinnon and Piore, 2001; Mukerjee, 2006.
38. Smith, 2004; Whitebook, 2002.
39. On “social movement unionism,” see Turner and Hurd, 2001; and Lopez, 2004.
40. UNITE HERE is in transition as an organization. As of July 2009, part of its membership, under the leadership of former UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) President Bruce Raynor, organized a new union, Workers United, and affiliated with the SEIU. Another group, under the leadership of former HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees) President John Wilhelm, remained in UNITE HERE.

41. Cobble, 1991a: 128–131.
42. Cobble, 1996: 347.
43. Avery and Crain, 2007; Crain, 2007.
44. Macdonald and Merrill, 2002; Boris and Klein, 2007.
45. Contract in possession of the author.
46. Zelizer, 2005: 29–32.
47. Rondeau, personal interview with author (November 8, 2008); Savage, 2007.
48. MacKinnon and Piore, 2001.
49. Eaton, 1996.
50. Rondeau, 1998.