

**EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE  
WINNIPEG GARMENT INDUSTRY: GENDER,  
ETHNICITY AND CLASS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY**

by

KATHRYN MOSSMAN

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Anthropology  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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**Of**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the work and home life experiences of immigrant women in the Winnipeg garment industry. A case study involving interviews with twenty-three current and former immigrant women garment workers from a variety of backgrounds was developed. Participants were asked to share their experiences of coming to Canada, working in the garment industry, and balancing work and home life. They were also asked to share their views and opinions on the removal of quotas on imported textiles as stipulated by the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC), and the impact this has had on the local garment industry.

The findings of this research reveal that the immigrant women garment workers in this study have faced economic barriers and challenges throughout their lives in Canada. While strategizing to improve their situation and deal with these constraints, often through social networks, the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Clothing and Textiles has led to further challenges through the rapid loss of jobs in this industry. Thus, the increased liberalization of the garment industry through the WTO has intensified the inequalities workers have experienced, especially in a context where company owners are profiting from cheaper overseas labour while local garment workers are losing their livelihoods.

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## **Dedication**

In loving memory of Heinz (*Opi*) Rummel, and Mary (*Grandma*) Mossman.

One loved anthropology, the other loved to sew. Both shaped this research  
and will be greatly missed.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The garment industry has long been a significant part of the manufacturing sector in the city of Winnipeg. During the many years this industry has been in operation in Winnipeg, it has been driven largely by a workforce consisting of immigrant women. While the garment industry has waxed and waned throughout its history in this city, the future of its manufacturing operations is currently in question. This is largely a result of the removal of quotas on imported textiles as stipulated by the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Textiles and Clothing. Leading up to and following the elimination of these quotas in January 2005, many manufacturing jobs have shifted from developed countries to less developed countries. Thousands of garment workers have already lost their jobs, ironically often to some of the same countries they left to find work here, and this trend is expected to continue. Industry members perceive this movement to be a necessary development whereby production will move to countries where cheaper wages can be paid to workers, reducing their production costs to remain competitive in the world market. These changes have greatly affected the Winnipeg garment industry, especially the lives of local garment workers. The purpose of this research, then, is to examine the work and home life experiences of immigrant women garment workers during a time that some perceive to be the decline of garment manufacturing in the city of Winnipeg.

#### **Statement of Problem**

This study explores the experiences of immigrant women in the Winnipeg garment industry. The emphasis on women's experiences is an attempt to bring to light the ways that women interact with their world and make sense of it, a research area that

had been absent from anthropological analyses until the last few decades. In traditional anthropology, Reiter (1975a:12) notes, "Too often women and their roles are glossed over, under-analyzed, or absent from all but the edges of the description." Her work emphasizes the need to develop new anthropological studies that focus on women's views and experiences because "...the final outcome of such an approach will be a reorientation of anthropology so that it studies *humankind*" (Reiter 1975a:16). My study builds on Reiter's women-centred approach through its focus on women as research subjects. As well, the works of Rapp (1999, 2003) and Martin (1989) are particularly relevant to my research, as both focus on women's experiences and try to elicit them through a number of methods, namely in-depth interviews. My decision to focus on women also reflects their predominance in this industry where 94 percent of sewing machine operators in Winnipeg are women (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education & Training 2005).

An emphasis on the study of *immigrant* women is also an important area of research, considering that the political and social participation of immigrant women as well as their life experiences has been overlooked throughout Canadian history (Ng 1988). Migliardi (2001:7) notes that only in recent years have the experiences of immigrant women "...become part of the corpus of literature, as well as shaping groups of interests working toward their increased visibility and the improvement of their social conditions in the Canadian society." The intention of my thesis research is to contribute to this body of literature by examining the experiences of immigrant women as labourers in the present-day Winnipeg garment industry, highlighting the challenges these women encounter in relation to ethnicity, gender and class.

The garment industry in Winnipeg has been rapidly downsizing its manufacturing base in the last several years in anticipation of the removal of quotas on January 1, 2005, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs in this field. However, the question of who gains from the WTO phase-out of quotas in terms of the distribution of benefits between capital and labour has barely been raised (Hale and Burns 2005:219). Much of the discussion of this issue has focused on economic gains and losses for the garment industries of different countries. According to Hale and Burns (2005:219-220), "...since the

framework is set in terms of competing comparative advantage between regions and countries, there have been no openings for debating the global impact on the people who work in the industry. Yet this impact will be massive,” and millions of workers will lose their jobs. This research area should be further explored in order to develop an understanding of the impact of these job losses, as well as to push for debate on these issues and the consideration of the lives of garment workers in the building of policies and international agreements that affect them.

It is valuable to consider the experiences of those directly confronted by these job losses. Martin (1994:248) notes that, “Even as corporations downsize, unstaff, and delayer, we need deliberately to keep in mind the physical and emotional effects of these processes on the delayed workers in near or distant communities.” This is not to imply that immigrant women workers are powerless in this situation, but rather my study considers the agency of these individuals as they negotiate their positions in a context of tightening constraints and fewer opportunities. As Smith (1987:142) points out, we need to explore the dynamics of relations in which our lives are caught up, and how we are continually transforming the contexts of our struggles and our existence. Thus, the focus of this study is on the experiences of immigrant women in the Winnipeg garment industry, including how they are affected by and deal with current and impending job losses in the local industry. Drawing out the lived experiences of one’s informants – in this case, immigrant women garment workers – is an important part of conducting anthropological research.

### **Focus of this Study**

The focus of this case study is to explore the experiences of immigrant women who have recently worked, or are working, in the manufacturing sector of the Winnipeg garment industry. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, twenty-three participants were asked to share their experiences of coming to Canada, working in this industry, and balancing work and home life. They were also asked to share their views on the changes currently taking place in the garment industry, how these changes have

affected them and their co-workers, and where they might be looking for other job opportunities.

## **Methodological Issues**

### *Overview*

Anthropological qualitative research methods were used to conduct this study. The bulk of this research involved the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour in length with twenty-three current or former immigrant women garment workers. These interviews were conducted with garment workers of various backgrounds, including those working in different garment assembly areas, as well as workers from a variety of factories, cultural backgrounds, ages, time spent in the garment industry and time spent living in Winnipeg. Only consenting adults (those over 18 years of age) were interviewed for this research project. Interviews were recorded on audiotape with the permission of each participant.

In addition to interviews with garment workers, a joint interview with two union representatives, as well as one visit to a small factory, were conducted during the course of this research. My two-year participation as a research assistant in a study of the Winnipeg garment industry, conducted on behalf of the Manitoba Research Alliance on Community Economic Development in the New Economy (see Wiest 2005), also led to literature and web-based searches of relevant issues which were used in support of my primary thesis research. This research project also involved a number of plant tours as well as interviews with independent designers, factory managers, and company executives, some of which I personally conducted. This information was utilized in constructing research results, and shaped the ideas presented in this dissertation.

### *Recruitment Process*

Recruitment of participants began by contacting local organizations, such as unions, immigrant associations, employment agencies, and training centres, and inquiring if they had members or clients who were current or former garment workers. If the response was positive and the organization was interested in assisting with my



recruitment efforts, a letter was sent to a representative requesting written consent to specific recruitment activities with the organization.<sup>1</sup> This included posting notices about the research project at the site, requesting staff recommendations for potential participants, or my own interactions with organization members. Written consent was received from seven different organizations, through which twelve participants were initially recruited. Six participants were recruited through my own personal acquaintances and five were recruited through chain referral selection (also known as snowball sampling) (Schensul et al. 1999:241). In this form of sampling, the initial interviewees were asked to suggest other potential interviewees, in this case, immigrant women garment workers with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. This recruitment process of accessing participants through local organizations and chain referral selection was carried out repeatedly until saturation of information and ideas on relevant issues was achieved, resulting in a total of twenty-three interviews. Specific information gathered during the course of the interviews was kept confidential and not shared with those assisting in recruitment efforts.

Participant recruitment through organizations and chain referral selection proved to be a useful approach for the aims of this research. The methods employed for this study are similar to those utilized by Martin (1994:10) in her research approach, where contacts were met through organizations, and interviews were arranged depending on people's willingness to participate. Building trust with informants was a very important task in the course of this research. Chain referral selection allowed me to develop a rapport and familiarity with research participants through their knowledge that other friends, relatives and co-workers had also participated in the study, and that this research had the support of the organizations with which they were involved. It should be noted that the organizations and individuals who chose to participate greatly shaped this research. Those who were most interested and forth-coming during the interview process, including interviewees and the individuals who assisted with recruitment, contributed many of the insights that shaped the direction of this research. Notably, participants directed my attention towards the difficulties and frustrations they experience not just as

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1: Letter to Community Organizations

garment workers, but as immigrant women in general, and the strategies they employ to deal with these challenges. As Watson (1999:149-150) states, "It seems common experience amongst anthropologists...that the direction their research in the field takes... is determined by the availability of opportunities and the congeniality of the personal friendships that are struck up once in the field."

### *Interview Structure*

In-depth, semi-structured interviews involve pre-formulated interview questions with open-ended answers and the ability to expand responses at the discretion of the interviewer and interviewee (Schensul et al. 1999:149). Schensul et al. (1999:149) argue that "Semistructured interviews combine the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data." The decision to use this qualitative research tool was due to the nature of my research, where I already had enough information to develop a sense of the background issues in the garment industry, and my goal was to develop an understanding of the impact these issues have on garment workers. It was important to have focus during the interviews, but also to allow for meaningful dialogue and open-ended responses. As a result, there are instances where participants did not directly respond to particular questions in order to focus on addressing issues they felt were more pertinent to their specific life situations. In this research, then, I employed a directed but adaptable interview approach in order to elicit a discussion of the experiences of immigrant women garment workers both in the factories and at home, and in the context of declining employment prospects in the garment industry.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Use of Interpreters*

A number of participants in this study were not fluent in English, and as a result, interpreters were hired to assist in the translation of interview questions and responses with these individuals. In some cases, professional interpreters were hired to facilitate communication between the participants and me. In other cases, friends or relatives of the

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

participant acted as interpreters for the interviews. In both instances, participants were asked before the interview took place if they were comfortable with the particular interpreter translating the interview. Also, all interpreters were required to sign an interpreter confidentiality form at the beginning of the interview in the presence of the participant and me after the details of the form had been explained to the participant.<sup>3</sup> This confidentiality form acknowledged the interpreter's agreement to keep confidential all personal information disclosed and issues discussed during the interview. It also asked the interpreter to translate in a clear and precise way, and as closely as possible to the original statements. I attempted to monitor interpreters during the interview process to ensure careful and thoughtful translation. This involved watching whether or not the interpreter appeared to be listening carefully to my questions and the participant's responses. As well, my confidence in the translation usually stemmed from the knowledge that most participants spoke some English, and corrected the translator if necessary. The interviews involving interpreters often took more time to complete than those without interpretation, although this also varied with the participant and how descriptive they were with their responses. Compensation for those acting as interpreters for this research was discussed before the interviews took place. When monetary compensation was preferred, the amount was determined and agreed upon before the interview. Otherwise, I showed my appreciation for an interpreter's time and effort in assisting with this research project through other means, which often involved a gift of baked goods.

### *Informed Consent and Confidentiality*

A consent form indicating the goals of the research and the confidential nature of the interviews was reviewed with each participant at the start of the interview.<sup>4</sup> In some cases an interpreter explained the form to the participant in her home language to ensure comprehension. Only after the consent form was reviewed and signed by the participant did the interview commence. Each participant was asked if she felt comfortable having

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 3: Interpreter Confidentiality Form

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 4: Consent Form.

the interview tape-recorded, and if consented to, a section of the consent form dealing with tape recording was initialed by the participant. While many did agree to be tape recorded, some informants expressed concern that they might be nervous with the tape recorder, or felt that their English was not fluent enough to be recorded on audiotape. I respected their wishes not to record the interview in these instances, and instead took handwritten notes. Audiotapes were transcribed following each interview, and handwritten notes were typed on the computer.

With respect to ethical standards, I followed those of the Canadian Tri-Council guidelines by not engaging in any activity that might harm human subjects. Consent was obtained from all research subjects, and steps were taken to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity. This included using pseudonyms and disguising personal information in all interview transcripts and related research documents, including my thesis manuscript.<sup>5</sup> Interview tapes were stored in a locked and secure location, and tapes were destroyed after they were transcribed. As well, a key with codes linking subjects' true identities with their pseudonyms was created for personal reference, and this key was kept apart from the participants' data, locked in a secure location, and carefully protected. All attempts were made to prevent unintentional or inadvertent breaches of participant confidentiality and anonymity. As a result, only I had access to subjects' identities and the information gathered from informants' interviews.

### *Reciprocity for Participation*

Monetary compensation was not provided to informants, and as interviews often took place in the informant's place of residence, the issue of reimbursing transportation costs never arose. In following the anthropological approach to research, I sought to generate a relationship of trust and confidence with my informants. Thus, I showed appreciation for the time and energy they donated to this research project through acts of reciprocity that often involved the provision of baked goods, depending on the time and resources available before the interview took place. Many seemed pleased to receive this

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<sup>5</sup> All names of participants referred to in this thesis have been changed for the purpose of maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality.

gift, and if appropriate, I also offered to assist them in finding information relating to job training or employment opportunities, which I then e-mailed to them with their permission. In one case, I sent information to a participant about cooking classes for herself and art classes for her daughter, as requested. In another case, I agreed to assist a participant in finding a new job, should that issue ever arise. A number of participants also offered me food and refreshments, which I happily accepted.

### *Participant Feedback*

At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they would like a copy of their transcribed interview notes and were invited to give their feedback, whether it involved clarification, comments, or questions about the interview content or the research in general. Many did request a copy of their interview notes, which was delivered to them either in paper-form, or electronically by e-mail with their permission. A small number of participants did contact me with feedback; two informed me that they were comfortable with the notes I had taken, and another two had corrections for a few factual errors in my note-taking. Most participants (19 of 23) requested a copy of the findings of my thesis; I offered this to them and will deliver a copy upon its completion. Comments and suggestions from research participants were taken into consideration and helped to shape the direction of the research and interviews that followed.

### **Analysis**

After audiotapes and written notes from interviews had been typed on the computer, I began the process of analyzing the data collected from these interviews, my interaction with members of different organizations, and collections of literature reviews and internet searches. Firstly, the interviews were divided up thematically in correlation to the questions asked during the interview and entered into an electronic spreadsheet. This process involved 1) thoroughly reading through each interview transcript and/or notes taken from the interviews, and 2) placing the responses into particular categories based on the questions asked and issues commonly expressed by participants. Comparisons across categories were then made to draw out notable themes, trends, and

contradictions from these data in light of literature relevant to this thesis. Once broad themes were developed, they were broken down into smaller themes, which were further explored as significant issues to be discussed in the research findings.

### **Study Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to this research project. Due to the non-random sample size of twenty-three participants, this study cannot be considered representative of immigrant women garment workers in Winnipeg; instead, it is an exploration of the experiences of the selected participants. However, as Homans (1950:19) long ago pointed out in his use of case studies, wide coverage is sacrificed for the gain of intensity of analysis. In his view, it is the behaviour of people, often in small numbers, that "...has inspired the largest part of human literature and eloquence" (Homans 1950:4). It is my hope that this case study will contribute to the understanding of the impact of the elimination of clothing and textile quotas on immigrant women garment workers in Winnipeg and their experiences in this industry.

Not included in this study were garment workers who settled in Canada by applying for refugee status. Refugees are defined as having very different experiences from those of independent or sponsored immigrants who can be considered to have some choice in their movement to another country. In contrast to independent or sponsored immigrants, a refugee is defined as a person located outside of his/her country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country due to this fear (Bouchet-Saulnier 1992:127). As Sullivan (1996:96-97) notes, "Amongst the immigrants who today are seen as genuinely choiceless are refugees singled out for persecution because of ascriptive characteristics over which they have no control, such as racial or ethnic group membership," as well as wartime refugees. Also, refugees have presumably encountered previous situations of hardship and violence, and the distressed memories of these experiences may still be with them (Migliardi 2001:3). They face a sudden relocation often to unknown places, and are more likely to return to their home countries once

conditions there sufficiently improve (Migliardi 2001:3). As a result of their unique migration circumstances compared to that of other immigrants, refugees were not considered in this research project; their experiences could not be adequately dealt with in the scope of this study. Thus, the focus of this research is on the experiences of a group of immigrant women, both sponsored and independent, in the Winnipeg garment industry.

My study is grounded in a recent research project on the Winnipeg garment industry (Wiest 2005) and seeks to build and expand on its discussion of the experiences of garment workers in local factories. Homeworkers, or workers who are given garments to sew in the home, were excluded as research subjects. Since homeworkers are a largely hidden and unprotected workforce, they often experience a great deal of exploitation, and the many issues they face were not able to be addressed within the scope of my thesis research; instead, this study focuses on the lives of immigrant women presently or formerly employed in Winnipeg garment factories.

### **Profile of Research Participants**

One of the goals of this research was to interview immigrant women garment workers from a wide variety of backgrounds. A total of twenty-three immigrant women were interviewed between October 2005 and December 2005 for this research project. Fourteen of these women are currently employed in the Winnipeg garment industry, eight of which are sewing machine operators (SMOs), while two are employed as sorters/helpers, and one each are employed as a designer, quality inspector, sample-sewer and pattern-maker. Nine of the participants are no longer employed in this industry, seven previously working as SMOs, and two as pattern-makers (see Table 1).

The women in this study came to Canada from a total of twelve countries in a wide variety of regions, including East Asia (China and Hong Kong), South Asia (India), South East Asia (Philippines, Vietnam), Eastern Europe (Poland, Ukraine), Southern Europe (Italy, Greece, Bosnia/the former Yugoslavia), South America (Guyana), the Caribbean (Jamaica), and East Africa (Tanzania). Twelve of these women immigrated to Canada as sponsored/family class immigrants, and one woman became a landed

immigrant after marrying a Canadian citizen. Six research participants came to Canada after being recruited in their home countries to work in the local garment industry, and subsequently became landed immigrants. Two women came to Canada through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), and another two accompanied their husbands who found jobs here through the PNP (see Table 2).

**Table 1: A Study of Current and Former Winnipeg Garment Workers: Current Positions in the Garment Industry (2005)**

<b>Position in the Garment Industry</b>	<b>Currently Employed Participants</b>	<b>Previously Employed Participants</b>
Designers	1	0
Pattern-makers	1	2
Sample Sewers	1	0
Quality Inspectors	1	0
Sewing Machine Operators	8	7
Sorters/Helpers	2	0
Total	14	9

**Table 2: A Study of Current and Former Winnipeg Garment Workers: Countries of Origin (2005)**

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>
Philippines	5
China	5
India	2
Bosnia/Yugoslavia	2
Hong Kong, Greece, Vietnam, Jamaica, Ukraine, Poland, Italy, Tanzania, Guyana (one interview with a participant from each of these countries)	9
Total	23

The participants were all adult women whose ages ranged from 25 to 72 at the time the interviews took place. Nine of these women were in their thirties, and another nine were in their fifties. Two participants were in their twenties, while three were sixty



years of age or older. The majority of the women interviewed for this study were married. Only two of the participants were single and unmarried, and one was divorced. As for language skills, eight participants spoke little English such that a translator was required for the interviews, while another eight interviewees spoke English with a high level of fluency. The remaining participants spoke slightly less fluent English, but had a high enough proficiency in the language for communication to be adequate during the interview process. Six participants were not visible minorities, i.e., Caucasian in background, and none of these women spoke fluent English when they arrived in Canada. Only one woman who was not a visible minority showed a high level of English fluency during the interview process.

### **Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One describes the focus of this study, research methods, the analysis process, study limitations and a profile of those participating in this research. Chapter Two is a review of the literature relevant to this study, including a review of the global, national and local levels of the garment industry, and a discussion of the many challenges faced by immigrant women, working women, and garment workers. As well, theoretical considerations involving theories of globalization and agency are also explored in this section. Chapter Three examines garment workers' experiences in immigrating to Canada and their transition to Winnipeg, while Chapter Four discusses their experiences working in the garment industry; this includes an overview of their prospects for upward mobility, relationships with co-workers and supervisors, and other aspects of working in this field. Chapter Five explores the home life experiences of the women in this study, with an emphasis on their housework and childcare responsibilities. Chapter Six discusses the impacts of the WTO agreement on local garment workers, including their views and opinions about the phase-out of quotas, while Chapter Seven summarizes the findings of this research.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature and Theoretical Considerations

#### Global Garment Industry and WTO

##### *The Global Garment Industry*

By the end of the 1990s, scholars and policymakers widely agreed that the garment industry had become global in scope (Collins 2003:183). Today, it is one of the most widely distributed industries in the world, in both less developed and industrialized nations, officially employing 6 million people globally (Collins 2003:8). This industry has experienced many changes over the last century, including its global expansion. Historically, the labour intensity and low capital requirements of this business made it congenial to small-scale entrepreneurs, including immigrants, who did not have to make large investments to start a shop (Collins 2003:7-8). Most garment work involves manipulating limp materials and fabrics, and such operations cannot be easily mechanized (Collins 2003:7). In fact, Collins (2003:7) notes that most of the technological innovations in the garment industry have occurred in non-sewing operations like design, warehouse management, cutting and distribution, while sewing in this industry has not differed greatly from the operations taking place 100 years ago. As a result, entrepreneurs wishing to establish their own garment factory often only needed to buy sewing machines, which they could often purchase second-hand from larger firms, and rent a space (Collins 2003:7). In the past, the garment industry consisted of many small, family-owned firms (Collins 2003:7). However, this situation began to change in the 1990s when corporate mergers and an increase in productive capacity through the use of subcontracting fuelled a trend toward larger and fewer firms over the decade (Collins 2003:7).

Today, the simplicity of sewing technology in garment work has led to the continued labour intensity of this industry, and while average labour costs are slightly less than one-third of total manufacturing expenditures, they are still considered to be the most significant production cost (Collins 2003:7). Collins notes that “It is this heavy reliance on labor as a factor of production that has driven apparel industry firms to seek cheap labor throughout the developing world” (2003:7-8). The result has been intense overseas competition from countries seeking to gain a share of the market through low labour costs. This competition mainly consists of developing economies like China, India and Korea, which are characterized by low wages, vast labour resources and export subsidies, and subsequently they are taking an increasing share of the world’s export of clothing (Ghorayshi 1990:275-276).

Further changes have occurred in this industry in its present global context. Yanz et al. (1999:9) note that the garment industry has experienced a fundamental restructuring in the globalized economy. While ten or fifteen years ago manufacturers did the designing, marketed their samples to retailers and then produced the orders, today the structure of the industry is turned on its head (Yanz et al. 1999:9). Yanz et al. state that now, “It is dominated by giant retailers and super-labels who design the clothes and then contract out the production of their apparel to manufacturing contractors around the world” (Yanz et al. 1999:9). These super-labels and retailers dictate the turnaround time and price of production, while contractors from all over the world compete for orders (Yanz et al. 1999:9).

#### *Workers in the Global Garment Industry*

Global competition in the garment industry has contributed to the precarious position many female garment workers around the world experience in their local workplaces. The declining working conditions and difficulties faced by garment workers as a result of the global expansion of capital has been widely explored by a number of scholars (Bonacich 1994; Ching Yoon Louie 2001; Howard 1997; Jamaly and Wickramanayake 1996; Kernaghan 1997; Nutter 1997; Piore 1997; Ross 1997; Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003; and Wiest et al. 2003). For example, the study of garment workers in

Bangladesh by Wiest et al. (2003:166) focused on the impacts of intense global competition, market volatility and rapidly changing conditions on the lives of garment sector workers. They found that labourers often have to work overtime (which was commonly not reimbursed at a higher rate), have little job security, are subjected to poor working conditions, and receive monthly salaries below the minimum wage (Wiest et al. 2003:180, 186-188). Garment work in this context also affects the home lives of women garment workers. Many of these labourers live in slum dwellings or squatter settlements due to a lack of rent money, have isolated social lives because of their low social status, and experience growing mistrust and conflict of interest between family members as a result of their employment in the factories (Wiest et al. 2003:191, 196, 204).

In this global context, not only are companies from around the world competing with each other, but workers in one country are forced to compete with those in many other countries. According to Collins, “Apparel workers participate in an industry whose labour market has become interconnected – where workers in different parts of the world find themselves competing to perform the same operations for the same firm” (2003:4). She points out that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most apparel firms could effectively locate or subcontract their production in almost any part of the world (2003:5). Thus, labour groups have faced a loss of power due to globalization processes where liberalized trade and capital flows have encouraged multinationals to move production overseas to reap lower labour costs (Newland 1999:52-53). This has resulted in higher unemployment and threats of plant relocation, which has weakened unions’ traditional bargaining power (Newland 1999:52-53).

### *The World Trade Organization and the Global Garment Industry*

Competition on a global scale has been guided by a number of international agreements encouraging trade liberalization and the opening up of markets. Overseas competition associated with the low wages and government subsidies available in a number of less developed countries have already had an impact on local industries, including that of the Winnipeg garment industry. However, the removal of quotas on imported garments in January 2005 has intensified competition and the local industry’s

response. In 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s Multifibre Arrangement (MFA), which had allowed for the application of quantitative restrictions on the import of certain textile and clothing products by the importing country (namely Canada, the US, and countries in Europe), was replaced by the WTO's Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) (World Trade Organization, 2005; Hale and Burns 2005:211). For the period from 1995 to the end of 2004, the ATC set out the transitional process for the ultimate elimination of these quotas, which took place on January 1, 2005 (World Trade Organization, 2005). This has greatly impacted industrialized countries like Canada that had used the quotas to protect their manufacturers from having the domestic market flooded by cheaper goods from less developed countries.

Ideas about who will gain from the elimination of these quotas and the implications of the ATC are not straightforward. According to Hale and Burns (2005:220), "Negotiations were based on the assumption that developing countries would gain from the increased access to Northern markets and the main losers would be Northern producers." Yet, the consensus today is that the negative impact will be greater in countries of the South than those of the industrialized North, as the result will be the relocation of garment production between Southern nations, not a dramatic increase in access to Northern consumer markets (Hale and Burns 2005:214). Hale and Burns state that "With a more open system, producers will have to compete in a global market and the result is likely to be greater concentration of production in a few low-cost locations" (Hale and Burns 2005:214). In this context, there is expected to be an overall shift of production to China, while Bangladesh is predicted to experience the greatest loss of production (Hale and Burns 2005:232). Overall, however, the main beneficiaries of this process will be Northern-based companies that will profit from reduced restrictions on their global operations (Hale and Burns 2005:232). It is mostly workers who will suffer the consequences of the elimination of clothing and textile quotas. According to Hale and Burns (2005:232), "Not only will there be massive job losses but, even in countries which benefit from the phase-out, the downward pressure on wages and working conditions is likely to become even more intense."

In this context of a rapidly globalizing industry, a growing number of issues need to be considered by the key players. Apparel firms must fit their desire for cheap and controllable labour within a complex equation that includes distribution channels, speed of delivery, transport costs, fashion cycles, import rules, branding strategies, profit levels, and share prices (Collins 2003:5). For garment workers, the equation includes the structure of local labour markets, gender roles, racial hierarchies, social reproductive needs and choices, job characteristics, and the evaluation of those characteristics within locally developed moral economies of work (Collins 2003:5). In Collins' view, these two equations intersect on the shop floor, and, "All of this takes place within the context of national and international governance and the institutions that coordinate labour and business" (2003:5). An exploration of the garment industry at the national level in the context of Canadian governance will now be discussed.

## **The Canadian Garment Industry**

### *Historical Background*

Clothing and textile industries are classic examples of industries that have faced severe competition from developing countries and have received substantial sectoral adjustment assistance over the last several decades from the Canadian government (Seward 1990:1). This involves a range of protectionist import measures such as high tariffs and non-tariff barriers to imports from low-cost producers, primarily in Asia (Seward 1990:1). According to Seward, the rationale for this protection was, "...to prevent injury to Canadian firms and workers, and to provide a 'breathing space' during which firms could revitalize themselves and become internationally competitive" (1990:1).

As trade liberalization in the garment industry started gaining momentum with the 1989 Free Trade Agreement and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, protections for the Canadian industry, including quotas and tariffs, were dismantled (Yanz et al. 1999:10). In Seward's view, without the continuation of special protection from the government, large segments of the Canadian clothing industry will not be able to compete with low-cost producers (1990:2). Local industry response to this has been

varied. Yanz et al. (1999:11) state, "While many Canadian manufacturers simply closed down, converted into importers, or moved into high-skilled, high-tech, and high fashion markets, others began to compete for the just-in-time reorder market". This lower-end segment of the industry generates short, seasonal production runs of less-standard garments so as to meet the needs of retailers requiring immediate reorders of seasonal clothing as certain items sell out (Yanz et al. 1999:11). Contractors bid on these small production runs, and consequently are enticed to cut every possible corner to lower production costs, including subcontracting to homeworkers who provide their own machines and renting out small work spaces in rundown buildings (Yanz et al. 1999:11). In this work context, garment workers are hired and fired according to the demands of production (Yanz et al. 1999:11).

#### *Workers in the Canadian Garment Industry*

Those who are part of the labour force in industries threatened by international competition are becoming increasingly vulnerable (Seward 1990:2). Certain demographic groups found in the garment industry, including workers with low levels of education and older workers, have special difficulties in adapting to economic change, especially in regions where economic opportunities are limited (Seward 1990:2). Many immigrant women are also employed in the garment industry. This is largely due to the relatively poor working conditions and low wages associated with this work that led to rapid turnover in the industry (Seward 1990:4). During the 1970s and 80s, labour shortages experienced by many clothing firms caused employers to make arrangements with Employment and Immigration Canada to recruit and bring in foreign workers to Canada to meet the industry's labour needs (Seward 1990:4). Seward states that "In order to keep overall wage costs as low as possible, the clothing industry has relied on a relatively inexpensive pool of labour, including a large proportion of immigrant women" (1990:4). Today, there are a disproportionate number of immigrant women found in industries such as clothing and garments, and immigrant women in the clothing industry have found themselves in a particularly disadvantaged position (Seward 1990:2).

### *The Current Situation in the Canadian Garment Industry*

According to the Apparel Human Resource Council (AHRC), a national, industry-led organization, there are 1200 apparel manufacturers, and more than half of these firms are located in Quebec (2005). There are 63,000 people working in the Canadian apparel industry, and in 2002, more than 80 percent of industry-related positions were in production, with less than 17 percent of jobs in administration (AHRC 2005). However, the AHRC (2005) notes that this is expected to change in the next five years, as more emphasis and opportunities will be focused on careers in design, management, human resources, sales and marketing, logistics, engineering, information technology, etc. The value of the Canadian apparel industry to the national economy is estimated at \$9 billion, and as Canada's 10<sup>th</sup> largest manufacturing sector, this industry accounts for 2 percent of total manufacturing GDP (AHRC 2005). In 2004, 45 percent of Canadian-manufactured apparel goods were exported to other countries for a sales total of approximately \$2.5 billion (AHRC 2005). The U.S. was the largest importer of Canadian-made clothing and apparel, purchasing more than 43 percent of exported Canadian-made products, followed by Germany and Great Britain (AHRC 2005). Also in 2004, Canada imported more than \$6 billion worth of merchandise produced in other countries, such as the United States, China, India, Bangladesh, and Mexico (AHRC 2005).

The Canadian industry has been greatly affected by WTO's elimination of clothing and textile quotas on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005. While the ATC involved a phasing-out of quotas on imported garments over a ten year period, Canada, the U.S. and the E.U. delayed the bulk of their liberalization until the final year of this process, i.e., 2004 (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2005). Thus, the Canadian garment industry had experienced the effects of the phase-out over this ten-year period, but the impact of this agreement was felt even more strongly shortly before and following the removal of quotas in January 2005. According to UNITE HERE Canada (2006), a union representing clothing and textile workers, the Canadian clothing industry has decreased by over 25 percent since January 2004, and this decrease intensified with the WTO lifting of global apparel quotas. The union notes that since the quotas were lifted, imports from China have doubled for all clothing categories, and in some cases, even quadrupled



(UNITE HERE Canada 2006). In October 2005, Chase (2005) reported that Chinese imports had led to the loss of 15,000 jobs in the Canadian apparel industry in the last sixteen months. As a result of this increased competition, the Canadian government pledged in late 2005 to remove existing tariffs on some imported fibres, fabrics and yarns to help reduce the material costs for Canadian manufacturers of fabric, yarn and clothing (Chase 2005). As well, UNITE HERE Canada (2006) points out that many countries, such as those of the European Union, and the United States, have implemented safeguards to protect their local industries from a flood of Chinese imports following the phase-out of quotas. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (2005), "When China joined the WTO in 2001, it agreed to a product-specific safeguard mechanism that allows WTO members to restrict temporarily growth in specific textile and apparel imports from China through 2008." In response to political pressure from domestic producers, in May 2005, the U.S. re-imposed quotas on seven different clothing categories from China, limiting the annual growth of Chinese exports in each restricted category to 7.5 percent (CSIS 2005). Similarly, the E.U. has decided to limit growth levels of ten categories of Chinese textile exports until the end of 2007 (Europa 2005). Canada has yet to implement such safeguards, although UNITE HERE is hopeful that Canada will follow the example set by the E.U. and U.S., especially considering the dramatic effect these safeguards have had in protecting the U.S. apparel industry (UNITE HERE Canada 2006). However, support from the Canadian apparel industry is required for these safeguards to be employed, and with many manufacturers taking advantage of outsourcing opportunities in countries like China, their support for such protective measures is doubtful (Chase 2005; Yui 2005). Also, some industry members suspect that the implementation of safeguards against Chinese textile exports may only succeed in driving trade to other Asian producers providing cheap imports (Yui 2005).

Overall, few strides have been made to protect the Canadian industry and the jobs they provide in light of the WTO elimination of quotas. In general, trade unions have found it challenging to respond to the situation workers will find themselves in with phase-out of the MFA (Hale and Burns 2005:224). Hale and Burns (2005:224) note that,

“One of the problems is the complexity of the issues and the remaining uncertainties about outcomes makes it difficult to even understand what is at stake, let alone deal with it.”

## **The Winnipeg Garment Industry**

### *Historical Background*

The garment industry has a lengthy history in Winnipeg. While there are reports of some companies that could be considered part of the apparel industry in 1884, Ghorayshi (1990:274, 290) notes that the first clothing factory in Manitoba was the Winnipeg Shirt and Overall Company, which was established in 1899. Historically, this industry produced work clothes for railway and farm workers as well as military uniforms. Eventually, however, the Winnipeg garment industry became best known for manufacturing outerwear, sportswear, work wear and jeans. Largely involved in the production of standardized garments, this industry flourished early on, resulting in 129 companies by 1943 (Ghorayshi 1990:274).

### *Workers in the Winnipeg Garment Industry*

This industry has lengthy history of relying on the labour of new immigrants. Ghorayshi (1990:275) reports that, “From its beginning, the clothing industry has been a major source of employment for poorly educated working-class women of Jewish, Ukrainian, Polish, German and Russian origin.” Indeed, in the 1920s and 1930s, most of the workforce consisted of Ukrainian, Jewish, and Eastern European immigrants (Ghorayshi 1990:281). By the 1950s, 80 percent of the garment industry labour force consisted of women; 60 percent were immigrants who did not speak English well and 60 percent were married (Lepp et al. 1987:149, 153).

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, there were four postwar crises that lead to major layoffs, starting in 1957, 1966, 1974, and 1979 (Lepp et al. 1987:150). With each set of layoffs, many workers were driven out of the industry. However, Lepp et al. (1987:150) state that, “...as each crisis passed, the manufacturers cried that a shortage of ‘experienced’ workers was crippling the industry, and called on the government to bring

in immigrants.” This led to a flooding of the labour market, and the perpetuation of a group of women reduced to low-paying, dead-end jobs, largely funded by Canadian tax dollars. Lepp et al. (1987:156) state that, “Clearly it has been to the bosses’ advantage to flood the labour market at the low end, to recruit large numbers of immigrants, to discourage veteran workers and dilute their skills by modernization.”

After 1966, a substantial proportion of garment workers began to be recruited from overseas with the help of Immigration Canada (Lepp et al. 1987:157). This was a result of increased competition in the industry that drove down wages and working conditions, such that few Canadians were willing to work in the factories. Thus, between the years of 1966 and 1970, numerous trips were made to Italy and Philippines, bringing in a total of 700 workers, most of whom were single women, all of whom were skilled (Lepp et al. 1987:158). This trend of recruiting workers from overseas continued into the 1970s. Lepp et al. (1987:161) note that, “After 1978, at least 26 percent of the three thousand workers added to the industry were overseas recruits.”

In the 1980s, the workforce continued to be made up of women, most of whom were immigrants. According to Ghorayshi (1990: 278, 282), by 1982, there were 81 apparel firms employing a total of 6,468 labourers, and 82.9 percent of production workers in the garment industry were women. Seventy percent of garment workers in the industry were reported to be of a non-English speaking background in 1981 (Ghorayshi, 1990:281). However, while garment work was still predominantly performed by immigrant women, the ethnic origin of these women has shifted from mainly that of Eastern Europe in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to that of South Asian countries by the 1980s.

During the 1990s, the garment industry prospered in Manitoba, and it continued to rely on immigrant labour. In 1996, Hilf (1996:16) reported that apparel manufacturing was the second largest industry in Manitoba, with 115 companies employing 9,000 workers, 87 percent of which were visible minority labourers.

### *The Current Situation in the Winnipeg Garment Industry*

Currently, Manitoba is the third largest garment production centre in Canada, most of which takes place in Winnipeg (AHRC 2005). Manufacturers in Winnipeg largely produce workwear, uniforms, technical sports and active wear (AHRC 2005). As well, the AHRC states that, "Manitoba has been named the Outerwear Capital of Canada, and produces garments with such famous labels as OshKosh Outerwear, Nygård International, London Fog and Jhane Barnes Outerwear, and Calvin Klein, to name but a few" (2005). The local industry is mostly export-oriented, supplying customers in Mexico, Hong Kong, Australia, Japan, and the U.S., and consists of several large firms that are complemented by smaller firms filling the boutique and niche markets (AHRC 2005). As for future directions, which are largely shaped by the elimination of clothing and textile quotas, Jonasson (2005:121) reports that the local garment industry is expected to shift away from "...encompassing all aspects of design, manufacture, and marketing of garments, to the more specialized area solely focussing on design and marketing." While large-scale manufacturing is expected to decline, it is the small-scale, niche production of independent designers and entrepreneurs that is considered to be the future of garment manufacturing in Winnipeg (Jonasson 2005:130-131).

The shift away from large-scale production has been taking place for the last several years. Shortly before the elimination of quotas on clothing and textiles, a number of Winnipeg garment companies shut down local plants and laid off their workers, often to relocate overseas and take advantage of lower wages in places like Guatemala, Mexico, Bangladesh and China (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2004). For example, Western Glove Works, a large and well-known garment company in Winnipeg, had 1,200 employees in 2002 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2004). However, by 2004, this number was reduced to 700 positions after the company closed down two of its three plants in 2003, with the expectation that there would be only 250 workers by January 2005 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2004; Human Resources Development Canada 2003a; Human Resources Development Canada 2003c). As well, in April 2003, another large Winnipeg garment company, Gemini Outwear Ltd., closed its domestic garment manufacturing operations

and eliminated virtually all of its SMO positions in the city, relocating most of its production to off-shore production facilities located in Bangalore, India and a number of other Asian cities (Human Resources Development Canada 2003b; Cash 2003:B1). Indeed, the elimination of quotas has led to a decrease in local garment production, resulting in the December 2004 closure of a major training centre for SMOs offered by the Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI), an industry association, and the eventual termination of the organization itself (Social Development Canada 2004).

The loss of jobs for garment workers in Winnipeg has been drastic. In 2003, the AHRC estimates that Manitoba had 6,000 workers in the garment industry (2005). By 2004, there were 5,000 garment workers employed at more than 90 apparel companies in Manitoba, reportedly exporting more than one billion Canadian dollars worth of goods around the world (Manitoba Fashion Institute 2004). However, the estimated employment of SMOs in Manitoba in 2005 was 2,965 positions; 91 percent of this employment occurred in Winnipeg, with the long term trend being that work in garment manufacturing will move offshore (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education & Training 2005). This corresponds to a Social Development Canada (2004) report that states that the gradual shift to the worldwide removal of quotas has resulted in the elimination of over 2000 jobs in Winnipeg. Despite these job losses, the Winnipeg garment industry has continued to recruit immigrant workers through the Provincial Nominee Program. In this program, local employers are able to recruit foreign workers to fill positions that they may have been unable to fill with a Canadian worker, and recruited workers can receive a permanent resident visa (Manitoba Labour and Immigration 2006). Pettman (2005:23), in his report on government programs for the garment industry, notes that over the period of 1999-2004, 191 garment industry immigrants were recruited through the Provincial Nominee Program. Thus, with the assistance of the Provincial government, the industry's penchant for bringing in immigrant workers to keep labour costs down appears to have persisted in spite of impending layoffs and plant closures. As well, it should be noted that the Provincial government provides many other forms of support for this industry. Ghorayshi (1990:19) notes that "Government assistance...has been crucial and has taken many

forms: direct grants, wage subsidies, tax shelters, low business taxes, import restriction, and subsidized training programs.”

Today, it is evident that the garment industry continues to rely on the labour of immigrant women. In 2005, 94 percent of SMOs were women and 70 percent were visible minorities with low average earnings of \$21,000 per year (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education & Training 2005). As a result, it will mostly be immigrant women garment workers who have felt, and will continue to feel, the effects of the removal of quotas on imported garments. Ironically, most garment manufacturing jobs are being relocated to South Asia, including some of the same countries that immigrant workers originally left to find work in Winnipeg. The experiences of Winnipeg workers in this context of rapid job loss are the main focus of this thesis research.

## **Immigrant Women Garment Workers**

### *Women at Work*

There are a number of wider issues that come to play in this Winnipeg context, including those associated with feminist anthropology, such as women and labour, and the experiences of women workers in a context of rapid globalization. Today, more and more women are generating their own income through finding jobs outside of the domestic sphere. Currently, three out of five women work outside of the home, and by 2005, women were expected to comprise 62 percent of the U.S. workforce (Kanner, 2004:6). In light of this, scholars have increasingly taken an interest in investigating women’s participation in the paid labour force. As Lamphere states, “In the past several years, feminist anthropologists, sociologists and social historians have produced a new literature on women’s work outside of the home...[and] many of us focused on the labour process...and ways in which women workers actively dealt with their work situation” (1985:519). This literature includes a discussion of the position of women in the paid labour force. The gendered structure of the labour market has resulted in women having a disadvantaged position in the world economy (Redclift and Sinclair 1991:2). Indeed, women pursuing paid employment are often channelled into “pink-collar ghettos”, areas

of work that are characterized by low pay, low status, and little opportunity for promotion (McDaniel 1988:111). The wage gap between male and female workers also continues. While an increasing number of women are bringing home their own income, it is still often less than men's, as in 2003, women made 75 cents to every dollar made by a man, a seven cent increase from 1985 (Kanner 2004:6).

One of the reasons for women's disadvantaged position in the workplace is related to ideas about women's abilities as workers. Sinclair (1991:12) notes that women's low earnings compared to men's are related to the belief that they are not as skilled as men, irrespective of their actual abilities and skill levels. As well, many activities and tasks traditionally practiced by women, such as sewing, are seen as a natural extension of their gender role and therefore are not perceived as skilled work or are not perceived as work at all (Hilfinger Messias et al. 1997:299). Consequently, work primarily allocated to women is typically lower in status and viewed as less desirable than work allocated to men (Fisher and Arnold 1990:334). There are also economic reasons associated with the relatively low pay, low status jobs in which women are employed. According to Sinclair (1991:14), "Not only do employers benefit from women's roles as an 'unskilled', cheap, flexible workforce; male workers also maintain their relatively privileged position as 'more skilled' and hence higher status workers, receiving higher wages in the paid labour market." Mies (1986) discusses the process of housewifization, whereby the ideal of the privatized, domesticated woman was constructed along with the development of the capitalist world economy. With women considered to be primarily mothers and housewives, their work outside the home is often viewed as a supplementary income to that of the "main breadwinners", the husbands, and is defined as an "income-generating activity" rather than "free-wage labour" (Mies 1986:116-118). This devaluation of their work means that it can be purchased at a much cheaper price than men's labour, and it is advantageous for employers to keep women's wages low (Mies 1986:116). As well, Mies (1986:116) states that "...by defining women universally as housewives, it is possible not only to cheapen their labour, but also to gain political and ideological control over them." This is because housewives tend to be isolated and atomized, making their ability to organize very difficult. Thus, the relatively

disadvantaged position of women in the workplace with respect to male workers is associated with both gender biases and economic benefit for the employers who take advantage of the undervalued skills and abilities of women workers.

Not only do immigrant women garment workers have to contend with their inequitable position as women in work contexts, they also have to deal with experiences of being a newcomer in a new workplace and country, the challenges of garment work, and the difficulties of balancing work and home life. In addition, many now face the loss of their jobs in the garment industry due to the WTO elimination of quotas. As Golz et al. (1991:9) state, "The garment industry provides an excellent illustration of the interaction between gender, ethnicity, and class as systems of subordination and exploitation." Some of the particular issues they face will now be discussed.

### *Immigrant Women*

Immigrants are considered persons who travel from one country to another with the intention of residing in the new country for an extended period of time (Migliardi 2001:3). The Canadian Immigration Act divides immigrants into three categories: independent immigrants, which includes "assisted relatives", whose entry into Canada is dependent on economic requirements and criteria evaluated by a point system; "sponsored" or "family class" immigrants, involving those who do not accrue enough points by themselves and are sponsored by a close relative; and business-class immigrants, involving those who have capital to invest in Canadian businesses and industries (Ng 1996:17). As well, immigrants can also apply for refugee status, and be evaluated by a different set of criteria.

According to Ng, the term "immigrant women" is a socially constructed category that presupposes a labour market relation, among other things (1996:16). She notes that, "Historically, immigrant women are the product of capitalist development, which displaces segments of the population from their indigenous livelihood and draws them to centres of new industrial development" (Ng 1996:17). However, one must be careful not to gloss the diversity of this group of women with the use of the category, "immigrant women." As Migliardi (2001:4) states, "The label 'immigrant women' shadows the



differences among and between women who have immigrated from all around the globe.” The notion of “immigrant” poses challenges in illuminating their diverse backgrounds and experiences, and just as the category “women” cannot be viewed as representing a homogenous group, neither are immigrant groups homogenous (Migliardi 2001:4). Like Migliardi, I use the term “immigrant women” to embrace a group of women with a wide variety of histories and experiences in their former countries and in Canada. As she notes, “It must be read as taking into account the different social and cultural positions (e.g., social class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) occupied by different groups and categories of immigrant women” (Migliardi 2001:4). Nonetheless, many immigrant women do share similar experiences due to facing systemic discrimination in their new countries. Pendakur and Pendakur (1998:520) make the point that immigrant women, especially those who are visible minorities, face even more economic discrimination than Canadian-born women. Interestingly, while there was no earning gap between Canadian-borne visible minority women and Canadian-borne white women, they found that, “...immigrant white women and immigrant visible minority women face earnings gaps of 1 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively, in comparison with Canadian-borne white women” (Pendakur and Pendakur 1998:520). Indeed, this difference reinforces Anthais and Lazaridis’ (2000:8) view that, “Gender and ethnic groups are not homogenous and it is important to pay attention to the rich complexity of experiences and positions.” The goal of this study of immigrant women garment workers is to take this category as a starting point and pull out some of the shared experiences, as well as the different situations, encountered by diverse individuals.

### *Immigrant Women in the Garment Industry*

Immigrant women play a significant role as garment workers in the local apparel industry. Golz et al. (1991:9) state, “The garment industry in Canada is a women’s industry, generally an immigrant women’s industry”. In Winnipeg, the garment industry has long depended on the labour supplied by immigrant women workers. There are a number of reasons why most of the garment industry workforce has consisted of immigrant women. In Collins’ (2003:4) view, “...ideologies of gender and ethnicity are

crucial to the political strategies through which employers recruit and administer a low-cost, efficient, and orderly labour force.” One reason given for the predominance of women in this industry is the notion of women’s inherent ability to sew and construct garments. Sinclair (1991:13) notes, “Abilities such as dexterity and accuracy are perceived as women’s natural characteristics,” and this view is evident in the mostly female workforce of Winnipeg’s garment industry. As well, immigrant women garment workers have often been a source of cheap labour. By claiming that it is difficult to find skilled, experienced workers in Canada, and pushing for the recruitment of immigrant workers, the garment industry has been able to hire new immigrants as beginners and pay them low beginning wages (Lepp et al. 1987:155). Due to language barriers, a lack of strong labour legislation, and a fear of job loss and deportation that discourage immigrant women from protesting exploitative practices and joining the unions, immigrant women garment workers have often been in a rather vulnerable position (Golz et al. 1991:10). Garment manufacturers, taking advantage of this relative powerlessness, have been able to avoid making improvements in working conditions and pay for their employees (Golz et al. 1991:10). As a result, the garment industry, and Canadian employers of female immigrant workers in general, have depended on the cheap labour of these workers to keep costs down and profits high (Golz et al. 1991:9).

Low wages have often been associated with this industry. In 1957, 30 to 50 percent of unionized members were earning less than a living wage (Lepp et al. 1987:153). In 2005, the starting pay for an SMO was rather low at \$14,600 per year (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education & Training 2005). However, new immigrants often have little money, accepting that they would have to work hard with little pay (Lepp et al. 1987:154). As Ghorayshi (1990:285) points out, “The disadvantaged position of immigrant women in the Manitoba labour market and the lack of alternatives have forced them to settle for wages that most Canadians refuse to accept.” As well as needing the income, immigrant women have been attracted to work in the garment factories because the majority of the other workers in this industry have also been immigrant women (Lepp et al. 1987:154).

Female garment workers encounter a number of challenges during their employment in the garment industry. Low mobility, low pay, and the constant threat of unemployment have been disadvantages of working in this sector (Ghorayshi 1990:282, 284). There have also been issues of gender inequality in the factory. Historically, women tended to perform “unskilled” tasks, such as sewing machine operation, while men usually held positions perceived to involve higher skill, such as cutting and tailoring (Ghorayshi 1990:282). Even if men and women did hold the same position, female workers were often paid far less than their male counterparts (Ghorayshi 1990:282).

### *Domestic Issues*

Immigrant women in the garment industry also face a number of difficulties in trying to balance work and home life. According to Lepp et al. (1987:149), the majority of these women have to put in double days of low-paid work in the garment factories and unpaid domestic work at home. The notion of the “double day” is a reflection of the fact that those women who work in the paid labour force continue to do the majority of the housework (Marat and Finlay 1984:360). Women’s responsibility for most of the housework and childcare is related to the persistence of notions of traditional gender roles and biological determinism (Mies 1986:45; Oakley 1974:93). As well, McDaniel (1988:121) notes that work is usually defined as what men do, which is to exchange their labour for wages, while unpaid work, which is most often done by women in places like the home or the farm, is not considered “work” and thus not included in the concept of Gross National Product. As Oakley (1974:4) states, when our modern concept of work is understood as the expenditure of energy for financial gain, this necessarily defines housework as the most marginal and inferior work of all. Ideas about the trivial nature of housework in our economic system and the persistence of traditional gender roles leads to women’s continued responsibility for the majority of household tasks, despite their work in the paid-labour market. According to Marat and Finlay (1984:357), there continues to be the notion that women in dual-earner families remain domestic role specialists, where a high level of domestic responsibility is simply presumed to be a categorical characteristic of all married women, including those who work outside the home. Given

the 'double-day' encountered by these women, Gannagé's (1986) work is especially useful in exploring how women garment workers attempt the challenging task of combining the work of social reproduction and paid production in their own lives. The double-day experiences of Winnipeg garment workers and issues related to their work outside and inside the home will be further explored in my study of Winnipeg garment workers.

### *Education and Skill Barriers*

Immigrant women also experience a number of barriers in seeking employment with respect to language skills and education, which is especially problematic for those facing massive job losses in the garment industry. These barriers include not having Canadian recognition of occupational and/or educational skills developed in their home countries, deskilling in garment industry jobs, and a lack of accessible training and assistance programs.

Migliardi (2001:119-120) notes that immigrant women found it difficult to pursue careers once arriving in Winnipeg due to a need for new training, higher educational attainment or work experience in Canada. Many immigrant women faced barriers in transferring their occupational skills to the Canadian context. As a result, immigrant women tend to find employment in just a few occupational areas, including domestic service, the garment industry, family enterprises, and more recently, highly skilled service areas like nursing (Pedraza 1991:314).

While immigrant women experience difficulty in having their skills recognized in Canada, those employed in the garment industry also face deskilling in the workplace. To deal with growing international competition, the Manitoba garment industry, as well as those of other advanced capitalist economies, has attempted to reduce costs by increasing mechanization, employing subcontractors, and relocating some production steps to less developed countries (Ghorayshi 1990:276). These tactics to decrease costs have resulted in job losses and a certain amount of deskilling of the work performed by garment workers. Deskilling involves breaking down a creative task like sewing into basic monotonous steps, and having each SMO repeat the same step faster and faster, often

with the aid of machinery (Lepp et al. 1987:163). As a result, a loss of pride in the craft has occurred in the attempt to increase quantity and speed, and higher-paid workers with more skill and experience have been laid-off to allow greater numbers of lower-paid, unskilled workers to enter the work force (Lepp et al. 1987:163). However frustrating these working conditions have been for garment workers, today they face an even bigger challenge, as the recent elimination of quotas on imported garments threatens the future existence of their jobs in Winnipeg.

Language barriers are another major challenge confronting immigrant women. For many of these women, coming to Canada was their first time experiencing isolation due to language barriers, and extended family networks provided a refuge where they could maintain their language as well as their cultural traditions (Gannagé 1990:17). Garment work also provides a space to speak one's own language as fellow immigrant workers may share the same language and country of origin. However, this context can lack opportunities to develop language skills in an official language like English. Seward states that, "...women working in the ethno-linguistic ghettos such as the clothing industry have limited opportunity to learn an official language" (1990:10). Being unable to speak an official language contributes to the vulnerability of these immigrant women workers, especially with their lack of access to language training, which was difficult to attend given time and financial restraints in trying to balance work and home life (Gannagé 1990:16-17).

Training and other assistance programs can be very difficult for immigrant women to access. Migliardi (2002) notes that immigrant women in her Winnipeg study experienced barriers to upgrading their skills, including the expense and lengthy time-commitment of training programs, as well as not being able to access specific programs because they were not recipients of Employment Insurance. Roxana Ng's (1996:15) study of an employment agency for immigrant women in an Ontario city found that a lack of English skills and officially recognized educational credentials made it exceedingly difficult for immigrant women to enrol in a job-training or skill-upgrading program. In Seward's (1990:2) view, without the continuation of special protection from the government, large segments of the clothing industry will likely not be able to compete

with low-cost producers. This suggests that efforts should be focused on assisting workers to exit the industry, and re-enter employment in more optimistic parts of the economy (1990:2).

In the past, the Canadian government did provide some employment and training assistance to workers in the garment industry, including a number of adjustment assistance programs specific to garment workers in the 1970s and 80s (Seward 1990:3, 7). In the 1970s, the only available form of sector-specific labour adjustment assistance was the pre-retirement benefits program for workers near retirement age in clothing and textile industries. In the 1980s, the Canadian Industrial Renewal Program (CIRP) (existing between 1981 and 1986) provided programs that aimed to diversify and strengthen the economic base of communities dependent on clothing, textile and footwear (CTF) industries for employment, and deliver a more liberalized form of pre-retirement income to displaced, older workers (Seward 1990:3-4). The CIRP also provided re-employment programs for these workers, including access to the regular labour adjustment programs offered by the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC), such as mobility assistance, institutional training, and job creation (Seward 1990:7). As well, the CIRP offered enriched features of these programs for permanently-laid off workers, such as increased mobility assistance, increased training allowances, and a portable wage subsidy to assist laid-off workers over age 45 to find new employment. Seward describes the success of these adjustment assistance strategies as mixed at best, noting that little headway had been made into the provision of mobility assistance and training intended to help displaced workers find new employment (1990:1-2).

Today, garment workers can access local employment counselling centres, English language courses, and Employment Insurance training programs that are available to most immigrant workers (Manitoba Labour and Immigration 2006). However, there are no specific adjustment programs to assist laid-off garment workers such as those available in the 1970s and 1980s.

## **Theories of Globalization**

This research examines the experiences of immigrant women garment workers in Winnipeg with an emphasis on the impacts of international trade decisions on their work and home lives. This is an opportunity to explore how global processes affect women workers in a localized context. According to Giddens (1990: 64), globalization involves "...the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa." In an economic sense, Rahman and Wiest (2003:6) describe globalization as a process whereby national economies are integrated into the world free market economic system. In their view, globalization "...is associated with cross-border free-trade, finance, and investment (in goods, services, and technology), and is facilitated by national policy reforms, such as economic liberalization" (Rahman and Wiest 2003:6). The WTO's ATC can be viewed as yet another example of globalization whereby there is an increased liberalization of trade in the attempt to allow for free-market competition on an international scale.

Economic liberalization is an important component of capitalism, and it is the spread of this system that is strongly associated with the notion of globalization. Robbins (2002:8-9) states that the spread of the capitalist world system has resulted in distinctive patterns of social relations and ways of seeing and interacting with the world, dominated by the belief in commodity consumption and trade as the source of well-being. The system of capitalism supports minimizing production costs in order to increase profit, and because of global processes that have resulted in the creation of free trade zones and other liberalizing of trade flows, multinationals have flocked to countries overseas to take advantage of lower labour costs (Robbins 2002:46-47; see also Newland 1992:52-53).

Similarly, Ong (1991: 279-280) notes that in the context of this increasingly competitive global arena, flexible labour regimes, which are primarily based on minority and female workers, are now common in both developing countries and poor regions of developed countries. In her view, "Following the 1970s world recession, intensified competition in the global arena compelled a new pattern of accumulation marked by flexible strategies" (Ong 1991:282). This included dispersal strategies in which mixed

production systems were situated anywhere in the world where optimal production conditions existed (1991: 282). For example, in their quest for global dominance, Japanese and Western companies evaded labour militancy, high production costs and environmental concerns in their home countries by moving to Mexico or Southeast Asia (1991:282). To Ong (1991: 282), such dispersal strategies "...became a means for the social reorganization of accumulation, pitting capital against capital, and one region of the world against another." As well, these rapid shifts with respect to labour markets and related new financial markets enhance the mobility and flexibility that allow corporations to exert greater control of labour on a global scale (Harvey 1989:147). As a result of the desire of corporations to control and discipline this labour force in countries with few labour regulations, there are situations where union organizers are dismissed, talking on the job is prohibited, verbal abuse is commonplace, and access to bathrooms is restricted (Robbins 2002:47, 52-53). In this context, globalization has increased the power imbalance between industry bosses and their workers. As Wiest (2004:259) points out, "The globalization of neoliberal capitalism has not been an equalizer in service to humanity. There is differential access to means of production based in deep histories." Thus, the process of globalization has not benefited all people equally, and in some cases it has intensified the pre-existing inequalities between groups of people.

The study of globalization involves a consideration of both global and local contexts. Shragge (1993:7) notes that global economic forces have had a dramatic effect on local communities, including the elimination of an industrial base, replacing it with a growing service sector that at best provides low-wage, unstable employment and a few high-wage, high-tech jobs. However, one must be careful not to assume the uniform spread of a homogenous global system, as the local context needs to be considered in combination with global processes. Due to our existence in a particular place at a particular time, Mazzarella (2003:17) suggests that we go beyond ideas of impending cultural homogenization through the global spread of capitalism, and instead focus on how the local is constructed locally just as much as the global is constructed locally. The work of Eric Wolf is useful here. Schneider (1995:19) notes that Wolf sees capitalism as far from homogeneously encompassing the whole world, but instead considers it to be a



source of variability and differentiation through its combination with other systems and in the course of its own operations.

Thus, it is valuable to consider Ong's (1999:4) work which focuses on the "cultural specificities of global processes", an attempt to explore transnational practices that exist at the nexus of global capitalism and intersecting structures of work, family, community, travel and nation. By examining how global processes have specific effects on particular locales, researchers are able to better define and understand these processes. As Wiest (2004:259) states, "Globalization challenges us to achieve meaningful linkages between on-the-ground micro-phenomena and seemingly unbounded macro-structural phenomena such as global financial markets." While many accounts describe globalization as an intangible and inevitable force, Collins (2003:21) suggests that discussing globalization as if it were an abstract phenomenon ignores the real actors that are implicated in these global processes. In her view, globalization, "...is made up of decisions and actions, struggles and negotiations carried out in a large number of specific places where people live and work" (Collins, 2003:21). Individuals with faces and histories are involved in these global processes, which bring benefits to some groups of people and losses to others. These are significant issues in contemporary society. Consequently, this study will attempt to develop an understanding of one piece of a particular set of global connections by drawing out the local experiences of women workers as they relate to how these women are situated in a specific global context. This will involve exploring the impacts of global-economic processes on immigrant women garment workers in Winnipeg and how they manage and negotiate these effects in their everyday lives.

### **Theories of Agency: Structures and Strategies**

Research on the experiences of immigrant women in the garment industry also brings up issues of agency in these workers' everyday lives. Bhattacharyya (1995:61) defines agency as "...the capacity of a people to order their world... to create, reproduce, change and live according to their own meaning systems, the powers effectively to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others." There have been a number of studies

about the experiences of women workers, including the different strategies they employ to deal with challenges in the workplace. This includes studies about women workers' acts of resistance in different factory settings (Ching Yoon Louie 2001; Hossfeld 1990; Ong 1987, 1999; Ward 1990) as well as those more specific to the garment industry (Hoel 1982; Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003). It is important to explore the many ways in which agency is experienced and employed. Scaglione and Norman (2000:132) note that "[There is] a need to expand the framework of subaltern agency beyond the simple dichotomy of accommodation and opposition, hegemony and resistance. Ong's (1987) research on the resistance of factory women in Malaysia is constructive in its investigation of the impacts of capitalist discipline on women workers, and its exploration of the links between power, economic organization, and cultural attitudes and practices. Her study shows the multifaceted negotiations and interactions between Malay women workers with the corporate culture of industrial production.

Practice theorists have attempted to articulate the nature of agency in the practices of everyday life. Ortner (1984:159) finds that modern practice theories try to have a balanced approach, where they accept "...that society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining, and yet this system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction." What appears to be a set of contradictions is actually a dynamic approach to understanding individual agency and cultural boundaries. Bourdieu's work is particularly valuable in exploring agency within social structures. Swartz (1997:98) notes that Bourdieu attempts to move away from strict structuralist notions of determination by emphasizing the importance of agency within a framework of structuralism. To Webb et al. (2002: 36), Bourdieu's view "...insists that practice is always informed by our own sense of agency (the ability to understand and control our own actions), but that the possibilities of agency must be understood and contextualized in terms of its relation to the objective structures of culture." Thus, our actions are shaped by our perceived abilities to make choices about our lives, which are in turn shaped and constrained by the culture in which we live. Garment workers often face a number of structural barriers related to gender, ethnicity and class, and it is within these structures that workers perceive their own sense of agency and strategize to achieve their goals. In further

describing his ideas about structure and agency, Bourdieu (1977:72) states that, “The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment...produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures”. In unpacking the notion of habitus, Swartz suggests that this refers to a set of mostly unconscious ideas about how society works and one’s chances of success that are shared by members of a particular status group or social class (Swartz 1997:197). Swartz notes that these dispositions, “...lead individuals to act in such a way as to reproduce the prevailing structure of life chances and status distinctions” (1997:197). This is not to say that a group’s objectives are unrelated to their objective chances; rather, Bourdieu’s view is that they are highly correlated (Swartz 1997:197). The practices people carry out are shaped by unconscious ideas about their future prospects, which are largely based on objective realities, such that their actions tend to reproduce these same structures that influence their socio-economic outlooks.

In addition, Bourdieu (1977:183) notes that groups are able to accumulate different forms of capital that produce specific effects, while being mutually convertible. According to Grenfell (2004:28), there are three principal forms of symbolic capital articulated by Bourdieu: economic, involving possessions and real money; social, involving networks and contacts with well-placed individuals; and cultural, involving qualifications, education, marks of distinction, and actual objects. It is through practices of the accumulation and mobilization of different forms of capital that people strategize and attempt to realize their goals within the structures of a particular context. For example, Wiest and Mohiuddin (2003) note some of the livelihood strategies employed by garment workers in Bangladesh. They describe how workers maintain a strategic and reciprocal attachment with their natal household through remittances in the hopes that “...they will be compensated by economic support and shelter from natal households during crisis periods of joblessness, sickness or any other unwanted consequences” (Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003:232). By maintaining these social contacts, Bangladeshi garment workers are strategically developing their social capital in case they need to make use of it for social and economic support in the future. Similarly, the mobilizing of social capital through the use of family and friend networks is a significant strategy

employed by immigrant women as they try to adjust to life in Winnipeg. Indeed, Swartz (1997:99) describes Bourdieu as seeing behaviour as strategic, where, "...actors in their everyday practices attempt to move through a maze of constraints and opportunities that they grasp imperfectly through past experiences and over time."

Examining the everyday practices of people is an important method of inquiry in order to understand the strategies people employ. To Abu-Lughod (1991:150), a focus on the particular does not necessarily mean a privileging of the micro over the macro. In her view, "A concern with the particularities of individuals' lives [need not] imply disregard for forces and dynamics that are not locally based. On the contrary, the effects of extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words" (Abu-Lughod 1991:150). Thus, an emphasis on the strategies used by individuals in their everyday practices can illuminate the ability of people to make decisions about their lives, as well as the larger structures that shape the choices available to them. It is with these ideas that the experiences of immigrant women in the Winnipeg garment industry will be examined, in an effort to draw out the constraints encountered and strategies employed by these women in their immigration to Canada, their work in the garment industry, their work at home, and their position in a local industry threatened by international policies of the World Trade Organization.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Experiences of Immigration and Transition to Canada**

#### **Introduction**

The experiences of immigration and settlement in a new country involve significant periods of transition and adjustment. This chapter explores the immigration experiences of women in my study, first by considering their education and work activities before coming to Canada and their age upon arrival. Their reasons for migration are explored, and largely involve motives that are economic and/or family-oriented. The transitions to Winnipeg experienced by the women in this study are also discussed, including their encounters with cold winter weather, language barriers, unfamiliarity of with their new surroundings, homesickness and family responsibilities, and assistance with adjustment to the city. These factors led to mixed views on their relocation to Canada. As well, their economic outlook upon arriving in this country is examined, with an emphasis on the challenges immigrant women face with a lack of skill transfer, language skills, and access and awareness of employment and training opportunities. Due to these constraints to employment, the immigrant women in this research project often found themselves with few options but to find work in the local garment industry.

#### **Home Country Experiences**

The story of one's migration begins long before arrival in a new country. The participants in this study had rich life experiences in their home countries before deciding to come to Canada. While it is not the goal of this study to delve into these many home country experiences, in order to understand the presence of these women in the Winnipeg garment industry it is necessary to have a sense of their backgrounds, including country of origin, as well as their educational and employment activities in their home countries.

### *Country of Origin*

The origin countries and dates of arrival of the twenty-three research participants in this study reflect historical migration patterns and the composition of the local garment industry. There has been a dramatic shift in the source countries of immigrants to Canada in the last several decades. The most notable trend has been a sharp decline in the share of immigrants from Europe, while the share from Asia has increased (Statistics Canada 1996:1). By the year 2000, 37.33 percent of immigrants arriving in Manitoba came from Asia and the Pacific, compared to 32.35 percent who emigrated from Europe and the United Kingdom (Manitoba Labour and Immigration 2001:9). The ethnic composition of the Winnipeg garment industry corresponds to these migration flows. Ghorayshi (1990:281) notes that instead of mainly coming from Eastern Europe as they had in the 1920s and 30s, by the 1980s, 60 percent of garment workers came from South Asian countries, such as India, China, Vietnam, Pakistan and the Philippines. In recent years, the majority of Canadian garment workers have come from Asian countries, while a smaller number are from Latin America (Yanz et al. 1999:14). In my study of Winnipeg garment workers, nine of the twenty-three interviewees arrived in Canada in 1980 or earlier, including all recruited participants from the Philippines. Most of the participants from European countries, such as those from Italy, Bosnia, Poland, and Greece, arrived between the mid-1960s to mid-1980s. Thirteen interviewees came to Canada in the last fifteen years, including the majority of women from China, India, and Vietnam, as well as those from Africa, Guyana and Jamaica. Reflecting the predominance of women from Asian countries in the Winnipeg garment industry, the majority of the women interviewed came from Asian countries; five were from China, five were from the Philippines, two were from India, one came from Vietnam and another women emigrated from Hong Kong (see Table 3).

**Table 3: A Study of Current and Former Garment Workers:  
Number of Participants, Age Range, Average Age and Home Country According to  
Decade of Arrival in Canada (2005)**

<b>Decade of Arrival in Canada</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Age Range upon Arrival in Canada (in years)</b>	<b>Average Age upon Arrival in Canada (in years)</b>	<b>Home Countries (number of participants)</b>
1960-1969	5	15-35	22.8	Philippines (3), Italy (1), Hong Kong (1)
1970-1979	2	25-31	28.0	Philippines (1), Greece (1)
1980-1989	3	25-35	29.7	Philippines (1), Poland (1), Yugoslavia (1)
1990-1999	6	20-46	31.3	China (3), Vietnam (1), Tanzania (1), Jamaica (1)
2000-2005	7	25-38	33.1	China (2), India (2), Bosnia (1), Ukraine (1), Guyana (1)

#### *Education and Work Experience*

All of the women interviewed for this study had participated in some kind of formal education while living in their country of origin. Fourteen of the twenty-three women interviewed had completed high school in their home countries, four having pursued training in design or garment construction at technical school afterwards, and three having completed university degrees unrelated to the garment industry. Seven of the interviewees had not completed high school but did participate in six or more years of formal schooling. Two research participants had less than six years of school experience, although one of these women had also participated in sewing training programs at a vocational school (see Table 4).

**Table 4: A Study of Current and Former Winnipeg Garment Workers:  
Levels of Schooling in One's Home Country (2005)**

<b>Level of Schooling</b>	<b>Number</b>
Completion of High School	14
-Only High School	6
-and Garment-Related Vocational Training	4
-and Non-Garment-Related University Training	3
-and Post-Secondary Computer Training	1
Six or More Years of Schooling	7
-Only Six or More Years of Formal Schooling	5
-and Training at English School	1
-and Training at Sewing School	1
Less than Six Years of Schooling	2
-Only Less than Six Years of Formal Schooling	1
-and Training at Sewing School	1

The women in this study had participated in number of different paid work activities in their home countries (see Table 5). Over half (16 of 23) of those interviewed had experience working with garments as part of their employment before coming to Canada. Many had been employed in garment factories, including ten participants who had worked as SMOs, one who had worked as a sorter/packer and another woman who had been employed as a pattern-maker. Three women had provided sewing services in their homes for clients, and another four women had been employed in private tailor/dressmaking shops or design companies. Four women in this study had participated in both garment-related and non-garment related work in their home countries. For example, Ying worked in China as a cashier at a hotel before switching to work as a SMO in a garment factory. Five of the twenty-three participants had no experience working in the garment industry, having worked instead in other areas, including engineering, office work, a beauty parlour, cashier work, and other types of factory work. All but two had some kind of paid work experience before coming to Canada.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In cases where responses add up to over 23, participants gave multiple responses for the same question.



**Table 5: A Study of Current and Former Garment Workers:  
Paid Work Activities of Participants in their Home Countries (2005)**

<b>Types of Employment Experiences Among Workers in their Home Countries</b>	<b>Number Working in these Positions</b>
<b>Garment-Related Work</b>	
-Dressmaker/Tailor/Pattern-Maker in a Small Shop	3
-Employee in Fashion Design Company	1
-Garment Factory Pattern-Maker	1
-Garment Factory Sewing Machine Operator	10
-Garment Factory Sorter/Packer	1
-Seamstress (Home Business)	3
<b>Non-Garment-Related Work</b>	
-Office Employee	2
-Engineer	1
-Factory Employee	2
-Cashier/Cleaner/Retail	5
-Beautician	1
-Computer-Related Work	1
-None	2

### *Age upon Arrival*

Research participants were between 15 and 46 years old when they left their home countries and first arrived in Canada. Nine interviewees were 25 years of age or younger when they immigrated to Canada, and five of these young women arrived before 1980. Another nine respondents were between 30 and 40 years of age when they came to Canada. At the time of the interview process, the women's ages ranged from mid-twenties to early seventies, and most (18 of 23) were either in their thirties or fifties. The ages of the fourteen women still working in the Winnipeg garment industry ranged from mid-twenties to early sixties, and most (11 of 14) of the participants in this group were age 35 or older. This corresponds to current data that suggests 74 percent of Winnipeg garment workers are between the ages of 35 and 60 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education & Training 2005).

## **Migration Strategies: the Decision to Come to Canada**

Migration is often a major event in a person's life. The decision to leave one's home country and immigrate to another can be a challenging and complex choice to make, with often a number of factors motivating the relocation. One must be careful not to overemphasize the role of constraints and structures in women's decisions to migrate, thus producing the impression that women are simply victims of their circumstances (Anthais and Lazaridis 2000:6). At issue is the importance of addressing the agency of women in studies of migration. Anthais and Lazaridis (2000:6) state, "Introducing agency into migration theory, whilst also recognizing that agency is conducted in given structural and institutional contexts, enables a more multifaceted approach that can pay attention to the lived experiences of migrant women." To Anthais (2000:25), women are both political actors and active participants in economic processes. It is important to consider women as active agents, focusing on the variety of ways in which they manage the migration process (Anthais 2000:25). While one's position in a particular economic and social context can structure the decision to migrate through a variety of motivating factors, the ability of emigrants to actively make the choice to pursue a migration strategy should be addressed. In this study, the immigrant women interviewed gave a number of reasons for their decision to migrate to Canada, including economic reasons, family reasons, and a variety of other motivating factors.

### *Economic Reasons for Migration*

The decision to immigrate to another country is frequently shaped by financial concerns. As Brettell (2002:226) states, "The overriding factor leading to a decision to emigrate is economic." Economic opportunity was described by nine participants in my study as motivating their immigration to Canada. Often, the perception of increased job and education opportunities in Canada encouraged participants in their decision to relocate to this country. Five women decided to immigrate here due to viewing Canada as being able to offer a better life or more opportunity for them than what was available in their own countries. This reflects Brettell's (2002:226-227) view that emigration often is "an active effort to improve one's life."

Four interviewees stated outright that they came to Canada for financial reasons, noting that it was hard to make a living in their home countries, or they came from a poor family and they wanted to improve their financial situation by working and living in Canada. For example, Olga<sup>7</sup>, a woman with pattern-making experience from the former Yugoslavia recalled that she had planned on working in Canada for five years to make some money with the intention of returning to her home country to use that money in starting up her own business. However, this plan to return home did not come to fruition; she has lived in Canada for the last 20 years, and most of that time has been spent working in the Winnipeg garment industry.

#### *Family-Related Reasons for Migration*

Many of the reasons participants gave for deciding to immigrate to Canada were related to family concerns. Eleven of the twenty-three informants noted that having family in Canada influenced their decision to move here, and in six cases, it was the presence of participants' husbands' in Canada that motivated them to join their partners in Canada. In general, Brettell (2002:226) states that one of the reasons many women decide to emigrate, especially in the case of single women, involves the desire to join a family member in another country.

The majority of participants (17 of 23) had friends or family members either living in Winnipeg or other areas of Canada before they moved here. Many informants immigrated to this country by using connections with family members already living in Winnipeg and having these relatives sponsor them to Canada. Seven research participants had husbands living in Winnipeg before they arrived, and almost all of this group (5 of 7) were sponsored by their husbands. In three cases, the husbands or boyfriends of Chinese participants were already living in Winnipeg and planning to sponsor their wives/girlfriends from China. They suggested that their female partners learn how to sew before joining them in Canada because it would be easy for them to find employment in this area since many women work as sewers in Winnipeg. Six of the twenty-three

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<sup>7</sup> All names of participants referred to in this thesis have been changed for the purpose of maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality.

interviewed women had siblings living in Winnipeg before they arrived, and in over half of these cases (4 of 6), a sibling was responsible for their sponsorship. For example, a recent immigrant from Vietnam noted that she was sponsored by her four brothers and two sisters who were already living in Winnipeg.

Other family reasons were given for coming to Canada. Three informants mentioned wanting to help their families back home by working in Canada and sending money to support their family members still living in their home countries. To four interviewees, another incentive to migrate to this country was hope for a better future for their children. This includes two participants who wanted better educational opportunities for their children, as well as one informant who felt Canada could provide a better life for her children, noting that life here is quieter and safer than the countries where she had previously lived. She took comfort in knowing that here her children would be okay. The influence and impact of social ties in the transition to Canada, including the support of family and friends in kin-based and ethnic community networks, will be discussed further in the next section.

#### *Garment Industry Recruitment of Overseas Workers*

The sample of participants also includes a group of workers who came to Canada as a result of the local garment industry's recruitment of overseas workers. Six participants, five of whom came from the Philippines, were intentionally recruited between 1968 and 1985 to work in the Winnipeg garment factories. According to Buduhan (1972:56), recruitment efforts in the Philippines were initiated by two representatives, one representing the Winnipeg garment factory association (the Manitoba Fashion Institute), the other representing the Canadian government, with arrangements made with the Canadian Pacific Airlines branch in the Philippines to assist with recruitment. These participants described their experiences with the recruitment process, including filling out application forms, going for an interview with Canadian industry representatives as well as a trial with an industrial sewing machine, and medical tests. While most of their reasons for participating in the recruitment were economic, desires to travel and see the world were also noted as compelling them to join the program. All of

these women had experience with garment work in the Philippines, either in garment factories or dressmaker and tailor shops. Buduhan (1972:69-70) notes that 114 Filipino workers were recruited and came to Winnipeg in 1968, while 289 came in 1969, and they were given landed immigrant status either upon entry or after several months of Canadian work experience. The vast majority of these recruits were women, with fewer than ten men in both groups. While some of the experiences of recruited Filipino garment workers are unique, a great deal of what they have gone through is also shared by other immigrant women in the garment industry. Since the migration and settlement of recruited Filipino garment workers has been discussed elsewhere, this study will only make note of the unique experiences of this group where it is seen to be markedly different from those of other immigrant women garment workers.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, there are workers who continue to come to Winnipeg to work in the garment industry through programs such as the Provincial Nominee Program. Two of the workers interviewed for this study immigrated through the Provincial Nominee Program, both in the last three years, as Winnipeg garment companies agreed to hire them and the Manitoba government granted these women special work visas to support their employment in Canada. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, the Winnipeg garment industry has often had difficulty recruiting Canadian-born workers due to the low pay and poor working conditions of garment work. Consequently, the industry has recruited immigrant women workers, who often find themselves in this industry due to a lack of English skills and Canadian-recognized credentials that prevents them from pursuing other employment opportunities. As well, in recruiting workers from countries overseas, the garment industry has been able to flood the local labour market with so-called unskilled workers to keep wages low.

### *Other Reasons for Migration*

There were a variety of other reasons given by participants for deciding to move to Canada, including a dislike for the political situation in one's country, and finding it easier and faster to go through Canada's immigration process than that of other countries

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<sup>8</sup> See Buduhan 1972 for an in-depth discussion of the migration and settlement of Filipino garment workers in Winnipeg.

like the U.S. For two participants, their decision to come to Canada was shaped by their desire to travel and see the world, including visiting Canada. Cathy, a woman who emigrated from the Philippines, noted that her father had played a large role in encouraging her to travel because when her father was alive he really wanted to go to the U.S. and abroad. As a result, she and her siblings also had the urge to travel and go abroad. Similarly, Brettell (2002:226) notes that some single women make the decision to emigrate because they want to change their lives, desiring a different life than the one they would have if they continued to reside in their home town. The women in my study often gave multiple reasons for their decision to immigrate to Canada. Lucy, an immigrant woman from South America, described coming to Canada in order to better her life, support her family, as well as help her home community, because there are a lot of very poor people there. She said, "I want to make myself happy, and I want to help my community." Of course, the most notable response to the question of why a participant came to Canada was when one recent immigrant, Sonja, in regretting her decision to immigrate here due to cold winters and a "terrible" transition, stated laughingly, "Because I'm stupid! It was my big mistake." Indeed, the transition to living in Canada presented a number of challenges for most of the women interviewed in this study.

### **Transitions to Canada**

Many research participants described aspects of their transition to living in Winnipeg as difficult. Participants cited the cold weather, language barriers, fear and unfamiliarity of a new place, and homesickness and family responsibilities as making their transition to Winnipeg rather challenging. However, many did have assistance with their adjustment from family and friends, and their positive and negative experiences of adapting to Winnipeg led to mixed views on settling in this city.

#### *Cold Winter Weather*

Almost half of those interviewed for this study described having difficulty adjusting to the cold winter weather in Winnipeg. Some women said they found this weather shocking, while others noted that it was very cold here compared to the weather

in their home country due to the wind conditions that make it colder here in the winter. A woman from Eastern Europe said that it is cold in her country in the winter, but they have mountains and less wind, so it is not as cold as the Prairies. Part of the adjustment to this weather involved getting used to dressing appropriately for the cold winters, such as wearing hats, mittens, and toques, clothing some of the women were unaccustomed to wearing. As a woman from a tropical country stated, "It's very hard, you have to dress and we [were not] accustomed to wear[ing] so many clothes! You have to bundle up so many times!" There was often laughter from participants when I asked about their first experiences of winter in Winnipeg as they remembered the shock and attempts to adjust to this cold weather. A woman from Hong Kong laughed as she recalled wearing high-heels in the Winnipeg snow. In another case, a participant described buying her first coat when she arrived in May – even though the summer was coming, she still felt that the spring weather was cold – and this jacket went down to her ankles because she wanted to be sure she would be warm. Occasionally research participants had a positive outlook on the cold weather, with some of the women from warmer countries sharing their excitement at seeing snow for the first time. One woman from southern China said that she liked the winter here, and it was not too cold for her. Another woman, who is from a Guyana, tried to be positive about the situation, stating, "And the [ice] on the road, if you fall...It's crazy, it's crazy, but, I think it's better you get the snow than you get in a hurricane."

### *Language Barriers*

Language barriers where interviewees spoke little English also made the transition to Canada more challenging for over half (14 of 23) of the immigrant women interviewed. Of the fourteen women who reported having language difficulties when they first arrived in Canada, none spoke fluent English before their arrival, including all participants from East and South Asia, and from Eastern Europe. It was noted by these women that both speaking English and understanding other English-speakers were difficult tasks when they first came to Canada, and this not only created a barrier for pursuing education, but also made it difficult to get around and engage in activities in the

city. In Migliardi's (2001:116) study of the Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba, she found that the lack of English proficiency was a major obstacle to the adaptation of immigrant women to Manitoba. In my study, language barriers often affected the ability of interviewees to participate in daily activities like shopping and banking. One participant stated that if there are no members of her ethnic group in a particular store, it is very difficult for her to get around. As Ng (1988:198) points out, engaging in a large-scale shopping expedition is not an attractive venture for immigrant women who do not know the language or the geography of the city. Language barriers can be very isolating and frustrating for some immigrant women. For example, for the first two or three months she lived in Canada, a participant recalled knowing only how to go to work and come home, which she found very depressing. Another woman recalled the awkwardness and difficulty of getting around in a new place: "When I came here, oh, I don't know, I just said, it's like when you just started to walk, you know, when you're like a small baby and you started to walk, and...you get lost. Because when I came downtown on the first time when I had to go to work, I [got] lost!"

### *Fear and Unfamiliarity*

Fear of being in a new place also has made the transition to Winnipeg difficult. A woman from the Philippines said that while she knew where the city was and had friends who lived here she was still scared to go to Winnipeg. Being afraid of one's new surroundings affected the interactions immigrant women had in the city. Even though Sarita had studied English in her home country of India, she had some difficulty communicating with people in English and did not speak it very often because she was scared. The ability to move comfortably around the city of Winnipeg was also hindered by fear of the new environment. A woman from China told me that when she first came to Winnipeg, she did not dare to go anywhere; she was afraid because it was all new to her. The fear or discomfort of living in Winnipeg for the first time is in part due to research participants' lack of familiarity with the city and having to adapt to a context that was sometimes very different from that of their home countries. As Cathy, an immigrant woman from the Philippines stated, "It was a transition. It was... a different



way of life, let's put it that way. It's a very opposite of what we grew up [with]." Indeed, many described the weather here as being different or opposite to the weather of their home country, and a few said that they found the English spoken here to be different from the English they had learned in school, especially the use of slang and idioms. Some women noted the dissimilarity of daily activities like shopping and taking the bus as compared to the experiences of their home country. For example, Dalila, an African immigrant, found shopping in Winnipeg to be different from her home country where people would go to small street shops, whereas here there are really large shopping malls and stores. Buses were also different here compared to those in her country. Here you pull a cord to tell the driver to stop, but in her country you just tell the driver to stop when you have to get off. Olga, who had been a pattern-maker in Southern Europe, said she noticed the lack of people on the streets and that people here did not dress up like they did in her home country. Thus, when she first came to Winnipeg, she found it sad and empty.

In some cases, women in this study expressed shock at the excess and waste of material goods in Canada. Lucy, an immigrant woman from South America, said she is shocked by how wasteful people are here, noting that people here throw away apples. In her country, it costs many dollars for a single apple, and it is squished up from packing, and you have to share it with others. She stated, "You come here, look how they're throwing [it] away!... I think they're wasting a lot. I see a lot of things that they're putting [into] the garbage can. My country, oh in my village, if they get those things, they're so happy."

### *Homesickness and Family Responsibilities*

Another challenging aspect to the transition to Winnipeg involved changing family ties and responsibilities. Six women said they felt homesick due to the lack of family members in Winnipeg. Those who experienced homesickness had traveled alone and did not have any immediate family members previously living in Canada except, in two cases, their husbands. A pattern-maker from Southern Europe who had no relatives traveling with her or living in Canada when she arrived, said that she found the transition

difficult because she did not have any family here and she was homesick, crying every night. The absence of family members was also reported by immigrant women in Migliardi's (2001:124) study as one of the factors affecting their adjustment to Winnipeg. In my study, three women felt their transition was made even more challenging by being pregnant or having to find childcare when they first arrived in Winnipeg. In one case, an informant said the transition was a little bit hard because she is a single mother and has to look after her daughter, which includes taking her daughter to a babysitter in the morning before work. A second participant described experiencing daycare problems during the transition period due to the high costs of daycare in Canada. However, rather than make the transition to this country more difficult, many interviewees felt that family and friends had been very supportive in their adjustment to living in Canada.

#### *Help with Transition from Family and Friends*

Family and friends can be very helpful in the transition of new immigrants to their host country, highlighting the value of social capital for immigrants adapting to a new place. Twelve of my research participants mentioned receiving help adjusting to their new country, often from friends and relatives. This includes assistance with handling the cold weather, learning English, and getting around the city. For example, a Filipino immigrant recalled finding the cold weather here very difficult, but noted that her sister helped her deal with it by getting her boots and mittens by the time winter came and saying, "Oh, you just bundle up."

Three women in my study noted that they had received help with learning the English language, including assistance from their husbands, friends, Canadian co-workers, and in one participant's case, her Canadian boss at the garment factory where she worked. Nine participants also had help getting used to transportation, shopping and other daily activities in Winnipeg. Those who assisted them included Canadian friends and co-workers, friends and co-workers from their ethnic community, in-laws, service providers like bus-drivers and bank employees, as well as their husbands if they had lived in Canada before these women arrived. Gannagé's (1990:8) study also found that immigrant women workers receive a great deal of help and advice with their immigration

and settlement in Canada from language and kin-based community networks. Similarly, Migliardi (2001:124) notes that the immigrant women in Winnipeg she studied highly valued family connection and interdependence, where family was seen as providing instrumental and emotional support for these women.

As well, two of my research participants who had been recruited from the Philippines pointed out that immigration officials had assisted them with the transition to Winnipeg. A Filipino woman, who was in one of the first recruited groups to Canada, said there were a number of friendly and helpful people from the local Filipino community, as well as people working in the Department of Immigration, who assisted with the transition to Winnipeg. Members of these groups took her and other newly arrived Filipino workers shopping and showed them around the city, sometimes even inviting those without families over for Christmas. Despite the assistance received by many in this study, the transition to Winnipeg was often quite arduous for the immigrant women in this study. As a result, they had mixed views on their first living experiences in Winnipeg.

#### *Mixed Views on Living in Canada*

Four interviewees found their transitions to Winnipeg so unpleasant that they recalled wanting to leave soon after they arrived in the city. This frustration was a result of a variety of factors, including homesickness, language difficulties and disliking the cold weather; these experiences were not associated with any particular ethnic group. As a result of language barriers, unhappiness with work, and feelings of isolation, Susan, an immigrant from Poland, said she cried and wanted to go home when she first came to Canada. Sylvia, who moved here from the Philippines, found the cold weather and isolation from her family very challenging. She recalled being sad and upset while waiting for the bus on cold winter mornings without having any family, wondering why she came to Canada. A participant named Serena, who is originally from the Caribbean, recalled finding the weather too cold here, especially with the wind, such that everyday she would say, "I'm going home, I'm going home."

In contrast to these views, a number of immigrant women interviewed for this study noted that they were happy to be in Canada despite the challenges of transition. For example, an immigrant woman from Italy said she liked everything here better. It is different, but she likes it a great deal. Two women from Asian countries commented on the clean environment in Canada. A participant from China stated that the weather is fine here in Canada and the air is fresher here than in her home country. A woman who had recently immigrated to Canada was excited about the opportunities and possibilities available for her in this country. She said, "Coming to Canada is wonderful. It's . . . [exciting] for me, because my country, it's different from here. Over here, you have a chance to get yourself better, make yourself somebody...you wanted [to be]. You have lots of opportunity over here." She noted that the prices were reasonable here so that it is possible to afford a house and a car, as well as send your child to school. She stated, "And then one thing [that] I love about this country, you've got the best education." As well, she found people in Winnipeg to be very helpful, noting that the people here listen to you, give you things, and help you out. Consequently, she said that, "...Canada here is very good and very nice, and. . . the people in Canada [are] very, very nice. I don't know [about] Toronto, but Winnipeg, they are such a wonderful people."

### **Economic and Employment Outlook upon Arrival in Canada**

The economic outlook and employment possibilities for immigrant women arriving in Canada is related to a number of factors, including whether their educational and work credentials from their home countries are recognized and utilized by Canadian employers. The ability to speak an official language also affects this outlook. Participants discussed their early work and training experiences in Canada, highlighting these factors, as well as noting their awareness of training and work opportunities upon arrival in Canada.

#### *Skill Transfer and Skill Recognition*

Sixteen of the twenty-three women interviewed for this study had experience working with garments before their arrival in Canada, and six participants found their

employment in the Winnipeg garment industry to be in the same field as their previous work. In addition, ten informants thought their work here was somewhat similar to their former employment, but differed in certain areas such as the type of machinery operated, clothing produced, or tasks they were hired to carry out. For example, Sylvia, who had been employed as a pattern-maker at a Winnipeg factory for many years, stated that the work she did here was not really in the same field as her work in her home country, even though this previous work had involved dressmaking. This was because factory work involved sewing small pieces in repetition, which was easier and had to be made quickly. In contrast, Sylvia said that dressmaking in her home country involved the challenge of making an entire dress, which she liked better because she felt inspired to see the finished product. Gannagé (1995:138) notes that, "Today the majority of immigrant workers who obtained or maintained employment were not using their skills, they were losing their skills or their skills were not transferable."

Seven research participants found that their work in Canada was different from the work they had carried out in their countries of origin, and this was sometimes due to a lack of recognition by Canadian institutions for their educational and work credentials from abroad. Nadia, an immigrant from the Ukraine, was university educated as an engineer and had worked in this field for a number of years before coming to Canada. In Winnipeg, she is currently working as a SMO. When I asked her if she would work in her field if she could, she responded that there is a big difference between Canada and the Ukraine, and she would have to learn these skills again from the start here. Nadia said this would be a lot of work and she is not at an age for learning; that's for her children now. According to Ng (1988:189), "...the lack of recognition by Canadian institutions and employers of women's previous education and training is an effective barrier for them to participate as equal members in society." The lack of skill recognition is a challenge facing many immigrants in Canada, and greatly affects the kind of employment they are able to access. Migliardi (2001:120) notes that, "Just like the formally untrained women, these career women had to join the Canadian labour-force in dead-end, low skills jobs, which are undervalued and poorly paid."

### *Language Barriers*

The type of work available to new immigrants is shaped by their language skills. Migliardi (2001:120) notes that in her study of immigrant women in Winnipeg, "Most of the participants did not have the ability to communicate in one of the official languages when they arrived, and they acknowledged that this was the major obstacle to better job opportunities." Sixteen participants in my study lacked fluency in English when they arrived in Canada. For some, one of the key reasons they found employment in the garment industry was a result of their lack of English language skills upon arrival in Winnipeg, which greatly limited their job prospects. Sarita, a recent immigrant from South Asia with a Bachelor of Commerce degree from her home country, noted she was comfortable with her work in the garment industry. She felt that because of her low level of English fluency there was no choice for employment elsewhere, and she needed a job. However, both she and another garment worker who lacked English skills noted that they were taking classes to improve their English, and upon doing so they planned to pursue training and work in a field outside of the garment industry. Thus, in a context of few employment opportunities due to a lack of skill recognition and English fluency, some immigrant women tried to strategise within these structures in an attempt to create more possibilities and improve their situation. Expanding of one's employment options can be difficult, however, given the lack of access and awareness of other training and employment opportunities.

### *Access and Awareness of Training Programs*

Ten of the twenty-three participants in this study said they were unaware of any training programs when they first came in Canada. One woman who immigrated to Canada from Poland in the 1980s did not know about training programs here when she arrived; she pointed out that few programs were available when she came to Canada. Another participant originally from Southern Europe said that when she arrived in Canada in 1974, she did not know about places to get English or job training, and that nobody approached her with information about where to go for training. With its vested interest in having a large immigrant labour pool with few recognized skills outside of

garment work, as well as its desire to keep labour expenses as low as possible, it is not surprising that the local garment industry has historically offered or promoted few training programs to its workers. In some instances the lack of awareness of training programs was due to already having employment and not actually looking for training opportunities, which was the case with several women who came to Canada through the Provincial Nominee Program or other recruitment initiatives.

Thirteen interview participants said they knew of some kind of training when they first arrived in Canada, whether it was job-related or ESL training. Eight of the thirteen participants who were aware of training programs had immigrated to Canada between 1992 and 2005. Five were aware of ESL programs offered at local schools and training institutions, and in one case at the informant's workplace. Two workers were aware of computer training, such as those available at Red River Collage and UNITE.

Training in garment construction also appeared to be limited. Only two out of the twenty-three participants described receiving on-the-job training at a garment factory. In Khatun's (2005:81) report on Winnipeg SMOs, she notes that workers considered, "...the absence of training facilities for SMOs in factories other than Nygård to be a problem for their career. This is especially problematic for workers when they are assigned to work with new technologies without satisfactory orientation and training." In my earlier study I found that few Winnipeg garment companies were able to offer in-house training for new workers due to perceived time and budgetary constraints. Consequently, many local garment factories depended on the SMO training program at the Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI) as a source of skilled garment workers (Mossman 2005:54). In my current study, six participants, all of whom had arrived in Canada in the last six years, knew about the SMO training program at the Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI). Of the five women who had participated in this program, all had arrived within the last six years and had heard about SMO training at MFI through family or friends. However, with the closure of MFI in January 2005, there are now few formal SMO training programs offered in Winnipeg. Previously I noted that the decision to shut down this program reflected the diminished demand for SMOs by garment companies, and also "...sent a

strong message about MFI's assessment of the future prospects for garment manufacturing in Winnipeg" (Mossman 2005:54).

Only seven of the thirteen interviewees who had heard of training opportunities when they arrived in Canada actually enrolled in and completed these training programs. In some cases, participants did not take programs they were aware of nor did they finish programs they had started. This happened for a variety of reasons; there were work related issues (such as being too busy and tired with work), family related issues (such as needing to focus on work to send money home to one's family, or being pregnant), and other mitigating factors (such as the lack of transportation to classes, or having one's desired program – MFI, in this case – close down before it could be accessed). Migliardi's (2001:116) study of immigrant women in Winnipeg also found that economic and social pressure to support their families in Canada and sometimes overseas prevented many immigrant women from attending language classes when they arrived; others often had to withdraw from these courses due to the need to join the labour force.

When discussing training and employment opportunities, some workers noted their frustration with the absence of opportunities they thought would be available for them in Canada. Notably, this included those with higher levels of training in garment construction, like pattern-making and design. A woman from Eastern Europe with post-secondary training in pattern-making and design in her home country has worked for approximately 25 years in the Winnipeg garment industry. While she is currently employed as a pattern-maker, she noted that originally she did not want to work in sewing, but she thought she would work there for a while and then do something more afterwards. She told me that when she came to Canada she wanted "to be someone," and she always loved school. However, she said she had no time for school; she had a child to look after and had overtime at work. She felt that she could not say "no" to overtime without risking the loss of her job. This made it difficult if not impossible for her to take classes. She said it is strange for a person to feel one is always going to lose one's job.



### *Access and Awareness of Employment Opportunities*

Immigrant women's choice of jobs and opportunities is often severely limited (Ng 1988:190). This is due to a lack of recognition for their skills, English barriers, and difficulties accessing training programs. Consequently, immigrant women's awareness of employment opportunities available to them is often quite restricted. Six of the twenty-three participants in my study were unaware of different employment opportunities outside of their own position in the garment industry when they first arrived in Canada. This was particularly the case for women who were recruited from the Philippines since they already had jobs established here and were not looking for other forms of employment. Seven participants, most of whom (5 of 7) came here in the last fifteen years, were aware of other jobs in the garment industry when they first arrived, but not in other fields of work. Four recent arrivals from China, India and Guyana were aware of jobs outside of the garment industry, and most of this work was in the low-skill sector, including positions in produce sorting, factory work, bakeries and grocery stores. Their awareness of employment opportunities outside of garment work is likely a reflection of the decreasing number of work opportunities in the garment industry and their need to start considering jobs elsewhere. Still, three Chinese immigrants who came to Canada in the last seven years knew only about positions available in garment work when they first arrived, suggesting that there continue to be new arrivals of immigrant women who are unaware of work opportunities outside of the garment industry.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The immigrant women garment workers in this study came from a variety of countries and had a range of educational and work experiences before arriving in Canada. Their transitions to living in Winnipeg often involved facing the challenges of cold weather, language barriers, unfamiliarity with the city, and homesickness and family responsibilities. However, many were able to access support from family and friends to facilitate this transition. Most of these women found their employment choices in

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<sup>9</sup> Six participants did not address this question.

Winnipeg to be very limited. This was often due to a lack of English skills, recognized credentials from their home countries, and awareness and access to training programs. As a result of these constraints, as well as recruitment efforts based on the desire for a cheap source of labour, these women found themselves working in the local garment industry in order to support themselves and often their families.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Work Experiences in the Winnipeg Garment Industry**

#### **Introduction**

Winnipeg garment workers are employed at a diverse number of factories and are responsible for a variety of tasks. This chapter draws out the work experiences of immigrant women during their employment in the local garment industry, including a discussion of how they entered the industry and where they work, and their descriptions and perspectives on work duties, compensation, hours of work, work conditions, on-the-job injuries, and work satisfaction. As well, their mobility within and between garment companies is explored, as are relationships and communication abilities between supervisors and co-workers. Discrimination in the workplace is also examined, with a focus on discriminatory behaviour between supervisors and individual workers, and between groups of workers. Finally, garment workers' recent experiences with turnover and job losses during a time of industry instability are discussed.

#### **Work Experiences: An Overview**

##### *Entering the Garment Industry*

Upon arrival in Canada, many immigrant women seek employment opportunities to support themselves and their families. According to Brettell (2002:227), "The great majority of immigrant women, no matter from what country they come or to what country they emigrate, become part of the urban labour force." All of the participants in my study, except for one, found their first job in Canada in the Winnipeg garment industry, and most worked as SMOs. This included women with only a few years of schooling in their home countries to those with post-secondary education, some in pattern-making and design.

Participants frequently noted receiving assistance from friends and families in finding employment in the garment industry. While eight women did describe finding jobs through employment agencies, social workers, and looking in the newspaper, over half (13 of 23) described directly or indirectly finding jobs through friends or family. Montgomery (1991:1408) notes that, "Labor economists have long recognized that many workers find jobs through friends and relatives." In eight cases, friends helped participants to find work, often by introducing them to the owner or supervisor at the company they are working at or by telling participants about work opportunities. As Ghorayshi (1990:283) states, "The most common method of finding a job in this industry is through family and friends of existing workers and employers." Nine participants in my study found their first garment industry job through friends or relatives. Thus, this is yet another example of how immigrant women in this study were able to mobilize their social capital, that is, to take advantage of their social networks and contacts, in achieving their goals in the context of a new and unfamiliar city.

Many research participants started their work with garments soon after they arrived in Canada. Five women reported that they started working in the garment industry two or three days after they arrived, and many (4 of 5) of these women arrived in Canada in 1980 or earlier. Six interviewees who described starting their employment in garment work between two weeks and two months after arriving in Canada all came to Winnipeg within the last ten years. The increasing length of time between arrival in Canada and finding a position in the garment industry is likely a reflection of the decreasing demand for garment workers in the city, given that between 1996 and 2005 the number of garment workers employed in the local industry decreased by approximately 6,000 people (Hilf 1996:16; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education & Training 2005).

### *Garment Companies*

The women interviewed for this study described working at 31 different companies, including Arthur Fashions, Castleman, Celtics, Engineered Apparel, Fleeceline, Freed and Freed, Gemini Fashions, JMJ Fashions, Miami Fashions, MWG

Fashions, Nygård, Pace Setters, Peerless Garments, Prosperity Knit-Wear Ltd, Rice Sportswear, Richlu Manufacturing, Sport Ease Ladies Jacket, Sterling Stall Group, Syntex Bags, Westcott Fashions, and Western Glove Works. Not all of these companies are still in operation today. As well, several larger companies have downsized their production in the last few years, including Peerless Garments and Western Glove Works, while Gemini Fashions has eliminated its manufacturing operations, retaining only those working in the offices, and in sample and design departments (Human Resources Development Canada 2003b).

Five of the seven garment workers arriving in Canada in the mid-1960s to early 70s worked at larger garment manufacturing companies (those employing 100-500 workers) when they first came to Winnipeg, and throughout their careers in the garment industry. The three women from this group who are still working in the industry are employed in larger factories where they had previous work experience. Most (4 of 6) of the research participants who came to Canada in the 1990s worked at medium-sized companies that had approximately 100 employees. Four of the seven garment workers who arrived in Canada in the last five years are currently working at smaller garment companies (employing up to 25 workers) either as SMOs or sorter/helpers. This small-scale study cannot be representational of garment workers in general. However, the decreasing size of factories where garment workers are able to find employment is consistent with Jonasson's (2005:130-131) recent research, which found that large-scale garment manufacturing is expected to decline while small-scale niche production is likely to persist in Winnipeg. Cash (2003:B2) notes that most of Manitoba's 2000 manufacturing companies (which includes those producing garments) are now small-to-medium in size, making them better able to react to changes in the economy than large companies.

## **Components of Work: Descriptions and Perspectives**

### *Work Duties*

Participants working in the areas of design, pattern-making and sample-sewing were involved in the process of creating a design concept, developing instructions for its

assembly, and creating a prototype. According to Sylvia, a former pattern-maker in the industry, the process from design to production of the actual garment involves several steps. First, the company owner requests that a garment be developed that would be marketable and sell well. Then, one of the designers at the factory designs a garment, producing a picture of his or her idea. Next, the pattern-maker constructs the garment from the design, taking into consideration standard measurements and factory standards using a basic pattern, and gives instructions to the sample sewer on how to make the garment. A cutter cuts the material to give to the sample sewer, and the sample sewer has to finish the garment by a particular deadline. Then a model tries the garment on, and a merchandiser examines it to decide what changes need to be made and the costs of different parts of the article of clothing. Should the company decide to produce the garment, SMOs are instructed on the different operations used to construct this garment, and they begin working on these tasks.

Most of the SMO work performed by participants involved sewing seams, darts, and pockets using single- and double-needle sewing machines. Other tasks included adding buttons/snaps and joining pieces of fabric. These activities were often performed on winter coats, as well as jeans, ladies clothing, t-shirts, army clothes, and work wear. SMO positions typically involve the repetition of one operation (i.e., one aspect of garment construction like sewing back pockets on jeans). Often, SMOs are expected to work quickly and proficiently at this one task which entails sewing one part of a series of similar clothing items in an order. However, knowledge of different tasks can be useful for SMOs, who may be moved around to other operations while working at a factory. At different times in one woman's career as a SMO, she added the piping onto coats, sewed buttons and pockets onto jackets and parkas, and joined collars onto coats. Another SMO who sews products made of leather and fur is assigned to different operations, due to her sewing expertise, when the supervisor thinks other SMOs are working too slowly. As a result, her work sometimes involves using a straight-stitch machine, a pleating machine, and a band trim machine. Two women in this study who worked as sorters/helpers had

work duties that included opening and organizing materials for different orders, gluing, and sorting the final products.<sup>10</sup>

### *Work Compensation*

While most (14 of 23) workers were happy or satisfied with the pay they received for their work, seven research participants were unhappy and thought they should be paid more.<sup>11</sup> Ten of the seventeen current or former SMOs worked for hourly wages; the other seven were assigned piecework rates, where an industrial engineer employs a time study to determine the exact time and rate of pay for each piece. As Ghorayshi (1990:286) notes, these rates might change with alterations in style and technology. The SMOs in this study who were paid by piecework rates tended to be given a base rate of minimum wage, with extra compensation on top of this base rate for the completion of operations faster than the allotted time. Participants paid by piecework rate made around \$10.00/hour on average and tended to work at larger factories with 100 or more employees. In contrast, workers being paid hourly without piecework made an average of approximately \$8.00/hour and tended to work at smaller factories that had around 35 employees or less. As the 2005 minimum wage in Winnipeg was \$7.25 per hour, the average pay of garment workers in this study corresponds to Ghorayshi's (1990:284) observation that "Salaries for a large number of workers in the industry remain close to the minimum wage." One SMO who is paid hourly really enjoys her work, but thought that she should be paid more for the arduous tasks she performs.

So I *love* it, but I don't think they're paying us the right fare for that. [With the material we use] you cannot make a mistake because you go into the hole, and when you make the hole... it's damage[d]. So you have to [make sure] your brain is on, your finger is on, your eyes [are] on, your foot is on, the whole part of your body. And you have to make sure you're doing the right thing. So I think our job that right now we are doing, they should...pay us like \$10 an hour. We are getting \$8.50.

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<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, sorters/helpers will be included within the category of SMO; the two research participants in this position worked very closely with the sewing machine operators on the same floor, and earned wages comparable to the SMOs at the factory.

<sup>11</sup> Two participants did not address this question.

Indeed, this brought up a discussion of minimum wage in Winnipeg, and the question of whether garment workers are receiving a living wage in this city. Women working in other aspects of garment work such as pattern-making and design were often paid by salary, and few disclosed this amount. However, one woman who has been employed as a pattern-maker at a larger factory for almost twenty years reported having an annual salary between \$35,000 and \$40,000, and she expressed her unhappiness with this level of income.

### *Hours of Work*

The majority of participants in this study were employed at their garment industry jobs full-time, working eight hours a day, five days a week, for a total of forty hours each week. Of the fourteen women currently employed in the industry, five women regularly or occasionally work overtime, which typically involves an additional one or two hours of work each weekday. Five of the nine women no longer employed in this area frequently or sometimes worked overtime shifts in their last garment industry positions. Most (16 of 23) workers were satisfied or relatively happy with the hours they work or formerly worked at their last position in the garment industry. Five participants, including both current and former SMOs and those working in the area of design, were unhappy about the hours they worked.<sup>12</sup> Some (3 of 5) in this group wanted to work fewer hours due to a dislike of working many hours of overtime, a dislike of their work duties, or feeling tired after working for over twenty years in the industry. Other participants were unhappy with their hours because they want more hours of work in order to increase their income. In these cases, women found there was no overtime work available in their factories, or they were frustrated that their hours had been cut lately due to a slowdown in work. Overtime is not prevalent in Winnipeg factories and actually tends to be quite rare (Khatun 2005:79). With current decreases in local garment production, too few hours and too little overtime appears to be more of a concern for workers than pressure from management to work longer hours.

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<sup>12</sup> Two participants did not address this question.



### *Work Conditions*

Nearly all of women in this study found their work conditions either good or at least satisfactory in terms of having a clean, safe, and spacious work environment. Only four workers described having poor working conditions, which they related to not having enough space, experiencing too much dust in the air from the fabric being used, or finding the work stressful and difficult. Four women commented on finding their work space somewhat crowded, but eleven others said they had ample space to carry out their work. Another four research participants mentioned that dust affected their work activities, but for the most part, workers described their work settings as relatively clean and comfortable. In Ghorayshi's (1990) study of garment factories in the 1980s, she points out many problems with the work conditions and environment, including a lack of basic facilities, high levels of dust and noise, and crowding of the work area with bundles of clothes. While the small sample size of my study may account for the lack of distressing descriptions of work conditions, it is also possible that conditions have somewhat improved in the shops in the fifteen years since Ghorayshi's study. For example, in her recent research, Khatun (2005:90-91) notes that Winnipeg garment workers rarely suffer from breathing problems in the factories due to vacuum machines and exhaust fans that help to reduce dust and maintain air quality freshness. As well, two participants in my study noted that their shop-floors are less crowded today compared to several years ago, although this was a result of a decrease in the number of workers due to layoffs.

### *On-the-Job Injuries and Health Problems*

Garment workers in my study occasionally discussed experiencing injuries and health problems due to their work in the factories. One woman developed asthma due to the work environment of her garment factory, and she had to stop working because of the severity of this illness. Some participants experienced repetitive strain injuries. Mei, a former SMO, mentioned that sometimes her hands would hurt from pushing waistbands through large pairs of pants. Olga, a former pattern-maker who now owns her own business, noted that after years of using scissors and computers for her work, she often

felt considerable pain in her hands. She also had problems with her knee due to an incident at a former factory where she fell down some stairs. Others in this study also experienced acute on-the-job injuries, including one woman's accident with a buttoning machine which permanently scarred her finger. According to Lan, a miscarriage she suffered while working as a SMO in the 1960s was a result of job-related stress and over-exertion from the difficult, heavy work of making winter coats. Most of the severe health problems and injuries participants described occurred over twenty years ago, and today fatigue and eye-strain are the most commonly reported job-related health problems. However, the work-related injuries and health problems experienced by garment workers are numerous. Khatun (2005:90) notes that frequent shop-floor problems experienced by garment workers in Winnipeg and other countries include hearing disorders, arthritis, noise irritation, eye-soreness, pricking of fingers, fatigue, headache and repetitive strain injuries.

### *Work Satisfaction*

Seventeen of the twenty-three participants in this study described being happy and satisfied with the work they did in the garment industry. One current SMO even stated, "Yeah, I love my work." Similarly, Golz et al.'s (1991:54) research on women in the Winnipeg garment industry points out that some garment workers liked their work, felt good about making a quality garment, and expressed pride in their craft. In my current study, two women said they were satisfied with their jobs simply because they were able to make money. In other words, this work was considered satisfactory by meeting their immediate financial needs in a context that offered few options to them at the time. For example, in response to a question about satisfaction with her work, one participant said, "It's work," and laughed. Four women said that they were not satisfied with their work, including two women working in pattern-making and design.<sup>13</sup> This was due to the lack of creativity and challenge in their work that was now predominantly carried out with computers. For example, Susan has worked in a design department for over fifteen years, and she said it now felt "automatic". She noted that for the last ten years she has used

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<sup>13</sup> Two participants did not address this question.

computers in her job, which made this work even more boring. Since the factory workers did piecework, Susan felt she could not be creative, noting that sometimes there was such a rush on her work that she would be asked to fix something and would not have the garment to look at when making modifications. This frustrated Susan because she wanted to be able to see her work. Overall, she dislikes the lack of challenge in her job at this factory. Lepp et al. (1987:163-164) also note the frustration and boredom garment workers experienced in the loss of craft skills through modernization, which resulted in decreased pride in the craft and reduced control over work speed. In light of this, Gannagé (1995:138) states, "For years, the working knowledge and self-expression of tailors and seamstresses had been appropriated by managerial strategies to wrest control of the labour process, to transform it and to break the autonomy of craft workers." It is not surprising, then, that increased automation of the design process and the time pressures placed on production has negatively affected the work satisfaction of those who took pride in their craft and the creative process of making clothing.

## **Mobility in the Workplace**

### *Opportunities for Advancement: Overview*

In Canada, there are certain assumptions about the inevitable upward mobility of immigrants in a new society, including initially working at low-paying jobs such as those in the garment industry, which are presumed to eventually lead to higher-paying jobs. As Golz et al. (1991:52) state, "In theory, new waves of immigrant workers entering the industry start off low and over time improve their skills and move up to top jobs and high earnings. But it often does not work out that way." Only five of the twenty three women in this study experienced upward mobility with respect to position either within one factory or between factories, if one considers some jobs to be lower ranking than others with respect to associated skill and pay. In Khatun's (2005:73-74) study of women garment workers in Winnipeg, employees rank ordered positions from high to low:

- Managers
- Designers
- Supervisors
- Patterners and Cutters
- Supervisors and Quality Control Managers
- Sewing Machine Operators
- Spreaders, Pressers and Bushellers
- Packers, Bundlers and Shippers.

Upward mobility in this context is considered to be advancement from a lower ranking position (e.g., SMO) to a higher-ranking position (e.g., designer). According to Ng (1988:193), in the garment industry, immigrant women are confined most often to the SMO positions, which was the situation for many informants in my study. However, some research participants did experience upward mobility. In one example, Sylvia, a woman originally from the Philippines, had been employed as a SMO setting pockets for ladies clothing and doing finishing work for three or four years at the same company. When she made a garment for an office employee at the same company, this employee was so impressed with Sylvia's work that she encouraged her sister, a supervisor in the design department, to hire Sylvia as a pattern-maker. As a result, Sylvia obtained an interview and was given an offer to work as a pattern-maker, a position she held for over twelve years. In a different case, a woman who arrived in Canada in the 1980s initially worked as a SMO for two different factories. After going from factory to factory to look for a job, she was hired by a medium-sized company to work as a designer and pattern-maker. Both of these women had post-secondary education in design and pattern-making. Except in one case, the only participants able to achieve higher-ranking positions in pattern-making and design in Winnipeg garment factories were those with specialized training or work experience in pattern-making, design or tailoring in their home countries. A total of seven research participants, most of whom were from Eastern Europe or the Philippines and had arrived in Canada prior to 1985, had such specialized training and/or work experience in their home countries. While five of the seven women started as SMOs, after changing jobs several times almost all of these women eventually worked in the areas they were trained in, with three becoming pattern-makers, one a

designer, and one a sample sewer. Two are currently employed as SMOs. This highlights the importance of field-related education and experience in facilitating opportunities for job advancement in the garment industry.

### *Advancement within a Company*

Upward mobility within a company was also addressed in this study. Participants were asked about whether there were opportunities for advancement in the garment factories where they worked, or in the last garment factories at which they were employed. Sixteen participants stated that there were no opportunities for job advancement in their current or former company. Some women found this question humorous in light of the current state of the local industry, including a worker with 25 years of experience as a SMO in Winnipeg. In response to the question about the possibility of moving up in her company, she laughed and told me, "There's no more job! No more advancing on that job, there's no more!"

A study by Lepp et al. (1987) on women working in the Winnipeg garment industry in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, discusses workers' barriers to promotion. They state that most immigrant women garment workers did not see these barriers as related to systematic bias against one's class or sex, but rather against one's ethnicity and language (Lepp et al. 1987:154). In my current study, ethnicity was not mentioned specifically by any participants as a barrier to job advancement, although issues of discrimination, discussed later in this chapter, certainly had an affect on one's relationship with supervisors and co-workers, perhaps further limiting opportunities for upward mobility within a company. However, language, specifically the lack of English fluency, was described as a barrier to moving up in a company, as was a lack of seniority, which would prevent workers from taking advantage of any available advancement opportunities. For example, a woman who had worked as a SMO for a large garment factory noted that there were some workers who had been there for as long as twelve to thirty years, so even though she had worked at the factory for ten years, she was still considered a new employee. She did not think there was opportunity for her to advance at her job since she was always told she was the newer worker.

Six of the interviewed women were already in higher-ranking positions as designers or pattern-makers, and subsequently, some felt there were few higher-level jobs for them to pursue at their companies. When asked about opportunities for advancement, a woman currently employed as a designer stated, "Not in this company... [because] I don't think there's anywhere for me to go there." She also felt that her age prevented her from exploring other available work positions outside of her company. She said, "But because I'm old, there's no place...in Winnipeg to do other stuff." She felt stuck with her current job, stating, "There's no choice." Thus, a lack of language skills and seniority and being an older worker were considered barriers to advancement in a company.

Interestingly, five participants who did not think there were opportunities for advancement at their companies, and even a few who thought there might be, disliked the idea of becoming a supervisor. One higher-ranking individual said she was asked to be a supervisor, but she turned the offer down due to the stress she associated with the job:

So I said to my floor-lady, 'No thank-you. I'm happy where I am, and I don't want to be a supervisor. I don't want to have a headache.'... You try your best, but the people [are], especially people...on piecework, they want to be [taken care of] especially right away. Just boom, like that. When you are working on some other place and they're calling you and then, you cannot come right away and then some people, 'Come on, I need you now!' I said, 'Will you please hold your horse.' But that's what I don't like.

Several others repeated this sentiment, noting that the headache, pressure, extra stress, responsibility, and hard work of being a supervisor dissuaded them from wanting to work in that particular position. Only one participant who worked as a SMO for a small company producing a niche product thought there were advancement opportunities she was interested in pursuing. She stated, "Yeah, I think I can see myself moving up later as a supervisor." Most women had little choice about their current positions due to having few opportunities for advancement within their particular company. In this context of relative "choicelessness", however, an aspect of choice was inserted into this work situation, as workers described their decision not to be a supervisor whether it was a possibility for them or not. Although few actually had the opportunity to advance to a

supervisory position, participants essentially described choosing not to pursue these higher-ranking positions but to keep their current jobs, which they framed as lower ranking, but preferable to being a supervisor.

### *Movement between Factories*

Many participants in this study had worked at a number of different garment factory positions in Winnipeg. Over half (13 of 23) had worked at only one or two garment industry jobs in the city. Nine participants had four or more different work experiences at different companies during their employment in the Winnipeg garment industry; eight of these women came to Canada in 1985 or earlier, and this includes all of the participants who had been recruited to work in the local industry. Some of the women interviewed had particularly long careers in this industry. Three women had worked on and off as SMOs for over twenty-five years in four or more positions at different companies. All had arrived in Canada between the mid-1960s and 1980, one from Hong Kong, the other two from the Philippines, and both of these Filipino women are still working as SMOs today. More recently, three women who came to Canada in the last three years continue to be employed in the same position at the same garment factory they first worked for in Winnipeg, while two participants in this study are now unemployed after being laid off from their first garment industry jobs in the city.

There were a number of factors associated with workers' movement between factories. Often, workers had little choice in leaving their work position due to layoffs and plant closures, something almost half (10 of 23) of participants had experienced at one point in their careers. For example, due to plant closures and her union involvement, a woman who emigrated from the Philippines in the 1980s had been laid off a total of five times during her career in Winnipeg as a SMO. Occasionally, workers decided to leave their jobs at a company pre-emptively because of impending layoffs and plant closures. In a few cases, illness or pregnancy made it difficult to perform the work at a factory, motivating workers to quit their positions. However, women in this study often described making a personal choice to change jobs due to their desire to seek better opportunities and conditions at another company. Four women noted that they had left a

job because they were offered another position for higher pay, or because they were unhappy with their wages at one job and left to look for another with higher wages. A SMO named Teresa described how she was moved from one operation to another at one factory, making it hard for her to improve her skills on one operation so that she had difficulty achieving the piecework rates. As a result, she decided to leave this job, noting that she knew of many companies that were hiring at that time in the early 1980s. Several other women who started working in the industry before the 1990s also commented that years ago there were many factories and sewing jobs, and if one wanted to, one could easily change from one to another. A woman from Southern Europe who arrived in Canada in 1966 pointed out that today you cannot find work at sewing factories, but before, there were many of these factories in Winnipeg. Lepp et al. (1987:161) state that, "In the 1970s, it was easy to get jobs in the industry, and thousands of immigrant women did so." They attribute this not just to market forces and individual choice, but also the government's role in supporting this industry by providing a steady supply of cheap labour through the recruitment of immigrant women.

Other reasons were given for the decision to move from one factory to another. Three participants described personal conflicts with those they worked with, including co-workers, supervisors, and bosses, as motivating their decision to seek work elsewhere. Others described quitting a job due to a dislike for the tasks they had to perform. Dalila, a participant who had recently immigrated to Canada, reported leaving three different SMO positions because she found the work difficult, heavy, or she was unfamiliar with the machinery. While few had any choice in leaving jobs due to layoffs and factory closures, many women also actively decided to change their jobs as a strategy to find improved working conditions and pay.

### *Social Relationships and Upward Mobility*

Social relationships and networks also play an important role in career advancement and upward mobility. Podolny and Baron (1997:673) state, "...informal social relations provide an important source of task advice, can affect the content and quality of decision-making, and often become valued personal relationships for many



workers.” For example, one woman who had completed high school and worked as a SMO in a garment factory in the Philippines was able to move up to a higher-ranking position than that of a SMO in a Winnipeg factory after working in a variety of SMO positions for three years at the same company. She credited her supervisor with facilitating this move. “She was our floor-lady, and she was so nice, eh? She help[ed] me to move from pocket department to joining, to up to the bottom part of the finishing everything, and then I learn everything from her. She’s so nice, yeah.” She recalled her floor-lady telling her, “You are a screw that fits in every hole,” due to her ability to take on different tasks in the garment factory. She has now worked at this company for over 25 years. She was the only participant without previous education or experience in design or seamstress/tailoring work in her home country that had found employment in the Winnipeg garment industry beyond that of SMO. Thus, her use of social contacts and skill in garment work played an integral role in her upward mobility at the company. Indeed, the social relationships in the workplace were an important aspect of garment workers’ experiences in the local industry.

## **Relationships and Communication in the Workplace**

### *Relationships and Communication between Workers and Supervisors*

When I asked participants how well they knew their supervisors, fourteen women responded by discussing their on-the-job relationships with their supervisors.<sup>14</sup> Six participants described their relationship with supervisors as good or satisfactory. One woman felt very positive about this relationship, noting that she gets along really well with her supervisor and other managers. She stated “...we treat each other like brothers and sisters.” Another informant said she got along with her supervisor, but was not good friends with this woman because this was her superior, and she had to follow her instructions. Six other workers noted that they did not get along with or like their supervisors. In some cases of these cases, supervisors were described as not nice, mean, pushy, and sometimes in a bad mood. According to one participant, her supervisor is not as nice as the supervisor she had at another factory; her current superior watches the

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<sup>14</sup> Nine participants did not address this issue.

clock and does not let anyone leave until the clock says exactly the right time. In Khatun's (2005:80) research on Winnipeg garment workers, she too found that, "The interviewed workers characterized management people as too bossy, overly bureaucratic, rigid in their decisions, and inconsiderate of unintended mistakes made by workers."

The majority (14 of 23) of participants said that they communicated well or did not have any problems communicating with their supervisors. Two women who did not have high levels of English described communicating adequately with their supervisor or boss through hand gestures and body language. The three women who said they found it difficult to communicate with their supervisors had all arrived in Canada in the last six years, and did not speak fluent English, so the language barriers between them and their supervisors were pronounced.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Relationships and Communication with Co-workers*

Participants generally spoke positively about their relationships with other workers. In their current or last work experience in the garment industry, twelve women stated that they got along or were friends with their co-workers. As one woman responded when asked about friendships with workers, "I get along with anybody! I don't really have a problem with that!" Similarly, another woman noted, "Everybody's my friend. Even though I don't know you, even though you're a new one." Six participants were less positive about their relationships with their co-workers, but felt that they generally got along with their colleagues. For example, a current pattern-maker said that she gets along with her co-workers, although because everyone is different there might be the occasional disagreement. Lan described being on friendly terms with her co-workers, although not really good friends with many. Her co-workers would help each other out, and she mostly just focused on her own work, since she was not there for conversation. Two other women, both of whom used to work as SMOs but are no longer employed in the garment industry, shared this view. While co-workers were friendly, these participants felt they were at the factory to work, not socialize.

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<sup>15</sup> Six participants did not address this question.

Not all participants were on friendly terms with one another. Two women described having negative experiences with other workers, and this was largely due to communication barriers. One woman emigrated from Eastern Europe and is now a sample sewer, the other is a recently laid-off SMO originally from China. Both had worked at their jobs for a short time, and felt left out and were at odds with the other workers. This was because they felt their predominantly Filipino co-workers were friendly to each other and spoke together in languages – English and Tagalog – these participants could not understand.

The ability to communicate with one's co-workers was a challenge for a significant number of informants. Nine participants had difficulty communicating with other workers in their factories. Two of the five Filipino workers mentioned finding it hard to communicate with workers from China and Vietnam who do not speak English. For example, a Filipino worker named Cathy said that language barriers are a matter of getting used to, and that most of the people do not speak English anyway, being Chinese. A lack of English makes it more difficult to communicate with them. On the other side, three of the five Chinese workers and three other women noted that their lack of English skills made communication difficult with other ethnic groups, particularly with the Filipino workers. Shun, a recent immigrant from China, said that most of her co-workers are Filipino, and she finds it extremely difficult to communicate with them. Communication barriers in the factory setting can often lead to divisions amongst workers. Ghorayshi (1990:285) found that workers tended to congregate in factories where some workers or a supervisor speak their native language, which creates different cliques of workers. While divisive, these cliques can be helpful in providing support to workers. To Golz et al. (1991:52), "...segregation at work along ethnic or language lines helps new workers to get by," through social support and transmission of information through their own language. However, such divisions also have their drawbacks. Working in ethno-linguistic enclaves limits opportunities to learn an official language, contributing to the vulnerability of these immigrant women workers (Seward 1990:10; Gannagé 1990:16-17). As well, it can prevent cohesion and bargaining power of workers in a factory setting (Ghorayshi 1990:285).

Despite the segregation described by some participants, workers did attempt to close language gaps between them. For example, Mei, a Chinese immigrant, noted that most of her co-workers emigrated from the Philippines, and since she spoke little English, she found the first year very difficult in terms of trying to communicate in English. She spoke only about work issues with her co-workers, using simple language. However, some of her fellow employees taught her some English, and after a few more years, she felt more comfortable communicating in this language. Other workers also talked about trying to deal with language barriers by using hand gestures and pointing to understand each other. Due to these attempts to communicate, as well as having co-workers who share the same language or speak some English, over half (14 of 23) of participants said they communicated reasonably well with their colleagues.

### **Discrimination in the Workplace**

Discrimination in the workplace was cited by many garment workers in my study. This often took place between supervisors and workers, and between different groups of workers. This discrimination was based on a number of factors, including ability to speak English, ethnic background, and newness to the work environment. I will now discuss several common experiences mentioned by participants.

#### *Supervisors and Individual Workers*

Supervisors were described as discriminating against individual workers for a variety of reasons, making the job situation particularly difficult for these workers. A woman who had been involved and very active with the local union noted that her “troublemaker” status with the management of some of the companies resulted in her being moved around to different departments, different factories, as well as occasionally being laid off. In some cases, Canadian-born supervisors discriminated against immigrant workers. A Polish immigrant named Susan recalled that when she started working as a SMO in the 1980s, some of her supervisors “weren’t nice.” She noted that one Canadian-borne supervisor would throw her coat off the hanger and Susan would find her jacket and boots strewn across the floor of the coat room. She was not sure why the supervisor

did this, but she thought it may have been due to the supervisor's dislike for her because she was taking a Canadian job or because she could not speak English. Khatun (2005:80) notes that all of the garment workers in her study felt there was a suppressed racism between management and the workers, where managers typically look down on the immigrant employees and show partiality to the Canadian workers.

One's ethnic background was also the basis for discriminatory behaviour on the part of supervisors. Three participants noted that they were favoured over other workers by their supervisors, such as where one Filipino woman, Cathy, described how she and her sister were treated like pets by two different supervisors. Due to favourable treatment from one supervisor, after a few months Cathy was moved from heavy work with jackets to lighter work involving small pieces to sew, which was not as difficult. Some participants thought their supervisors were showing favouritism towards certain workers, resulting in individuals feeling left out or that they were not given the same work opportunities as others. Sonja, a recent immigrant from Eastern Europe, felt that her supervisor and most of her co-workers know each other on a personal level and are friends with each other since they are all from the Philippines. As a result, she feels that the supervisor treats these other workers differently, and is very critical of Sonja's work, looking to find any mistake. As Gannagé (1995:133) states, "Ethnicity can be used by management to favour one ethnic group over another for special treatment or privileges."

Some workers experienced more discrimination on the job than others. Serena, a woman from the Caribbean, came into conflict with her South Asian supervisor and was eventually let go from the factory where she worked. Serena was told by this supervisor that she might be asked to come in to work again, but she never was called back, and had heard that others had been hired instead. In her opinion, this supervisor did not like "Black people", and she showed favouritism towards workers of the same South Asian background, giving them the lighter finishing work to do. Serena was upset with this supervisor's behaviour and thought it was unfair. She suggested to me that they should have someone at the workplace to make sure people are impartial. Similarly, Gannagé's (1995:133) study found that, "Black immigrant women reported differential treatment in terms of layoffs and recall."

### *Groups of Workers*

Discrimination was experienced not only on the part of supervisors, but also between groups of workers. Several workers described negative views about other groups of workers, or had experienced discrimination from their co-workers. Much of this was related to the animosity of senior workers towards newer workers of a different ethnic background. Lepp et al.'s (1987:160) research on Winnipeg garment workers found that senior workers, threatened by the new workers who might accept lower wages, felt a mixture of sympathy, competitiveness, and racism towards these new immigrants. In my study, a woman from Yugoslavia recalled that when she arrived in Canada in the 1980s, Canadian-born workers thought she came to take their jobs, and it was scary for her to work in this context. More recently, seniority was also cited as the cause of discriminatory behaviour between groups of workers. Mei, a recent immigrant and SMO at a local factory, said that the older workers would want to use the better fabric due to their seniority. Sometimes there was not enough work, and the more senior workers in her section would ask the supervisor to send her home, which Mei thought was unkind, especially since she has her own children to feed too. Nonetheless, Mei was sometimes sent to another section, or sent home when there was not enough work. In another example, a woman originally from Southeast Asia who had worked in the garment industry for over thirty years disliked the influx of new workers. She stated, "The one thing I don't like is now it's too many Chinese in the shop, eh?" She cited the Chinese supervisor as being responsible for hiring these Chinese workers, and she had multiple problems with them:

And one thing is they are not very good in English, and they work like uh, "Work, work, work. Money, money, money." But, they didn't even make the job good, eh?... That's why it's difficult, now. But, after 36 years, eh, that's what I find. You know. It's different from the way the first time [I] came here. The first time [I] came here is so friendly, so nice, and everything. Now . . . I don't know what I'm going to say. Thank God I'm going to retire!

Interestingly, three recent emigrants from China also described conflict with other workers who spoke more fluent English than they did. Ying, who moved to Canada from

China in the late 1990s, found that different workers who spoke English discriminated against her since she could not communicate as easily with them. Ying told me that she has friends amongst the other Chinese workers there, but with other ethnic groups relationships are just “so-so”. She said these other groups laughed at the Chinese workers for not speaking English. A few Chinese workers also mentioned conflict with Filipino workers who had been at the factory longer and spoke English more fluently. Conflict between co-workers also affected the work performed on the job. Some piecework operations are considered better than others, being better paid or easier to perform (Ghorayshi 1990:284). A recent Chinese emigrant, Shun, said that she and other workers who do not speak English well take the work that has lower piecework rates associated with it. They let those who speak English well take the material with which one can get higher piecework rates. She noted that by operating in this way, there are fewer arguments and quarrels, and people get along with each other.

### *Gender Issues*

Experiences of discrimination based on gender were not discussed by the participants in this study. However, gender issues have been found not only to influence women’s entrance into the garment industry, but also affect the positions they are able to attain in this industry. A division of labour based on gender often exists in garment factories, where upper level management positions and those in pressing, cutting, shipping and handling tend to be filled by men, while lower-level manufacturing positions are largely carried out by women (Stephens and Mossman 2005:106). Gendered ideas and practices encountered by Winnipeg garment workers in the workplace are discussed in more depth elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> For those participating in my study, a much more pressing concern at this time involves current and impending job losses in the Winnipeg garment industry.

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<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of gender issues in Winnipeg garment factories, see Khatun (2005) and Stephens and Mossman (2005).

## **Job Turnover and Job Loss in the Garment Industry**

Workers participating in this study expressed their concerns about job turnover and the loss of jobs in the garment industry. Eight informants reported a significant amount of job turnover at the factories they currently or formerly work for, while twelve participants did not notice any drastic changes in turnover at their company. According to Ghorayshi (1990:287), "The garment industry has one of the highest rates of turnover in the manufacturing sector." However, for many workers, the prevalence of job loss was a more pressing concern than that of job turnover in the industry. Almost half (11 of 23) of the participants in this study had noticed a great deal of job loss at their factories recently or in the last few years they worked at a particular company. This job loss was often attributed to the work being sent overseas, as several workers stated that the labour was cheaper in other countries like Mexico, India and China. One woman said that all of the SMOs and cutters at her factory were now gone because of free trade. She stated, "It hurts the garment industry in Winnipeg, let's put it that way."

Eleven participants had noticed a drastic decrease in the number of workers in their factories from when they started working compared to today or when they last worked at a company. This drastic decrease involved a reduction of up to half or more of all workers since participants started work at these factories. Most (8 of 11) of the informants who noticed these significant job losses are or were employed at large factories that originally had over 100 employees. Seven participants said there is approximately the same number of workers when they started in comparison with today or when they left a particular plant. The informants who noticed little change in the number of workers at their factories largely included those working in design who did not notice any change in the number of workers in their department, and those working at smaller to mid-sized companies. Four women noticed an increase in the number of employees, almost all of whom worked at a small factory of around twenty workers. Significant job losses were more frequently reported by informants working in larger garment factories, while little change or increases in the number of employees tended to be observed by workers in smaller factories. This suggests that larger manufacturers are having more difficulty retaining their workers than smaller producers, which is consistent



with the trend of declining large-scale garment production in Winnipeg as a result of increased overseas competition (Jonasson 2005:130-131).

Nine of the twenty-three participants in this study are no longer working in the garment industry, and the time between their last job in this area and the interview spanned from fifteen years down to the day of the interview itself. The majority (6 of 9) of those no longer working in the garment industry had their last work experience in this field within the last five years. Five of these women were no longer working in this industry because they were laid off. At the time of the interview, two women who had previously worked as pattern-makers were no longer working in the industry; one was on disability, and the other owned her own clothing design and alteration business. The other workers who were previously employed as SMOs were now working in other manufacturing jobs, in food preparation, or as cleaners. Two former SMOs are currently unemployed; one is a full-time ESL student, and the other is taking an English class while getting some employment counselling. One woman, Li Ming, had lost her job the day of the interview and had only a week or two of work left as a SMO at the factory. She did not have any particular plans yet for how to proceed after this work period terminates.

## **Conclusion**

In their work at different garment factories and in different positions, the workers in this study often experienced many challenges. While many were able to gain employment in this industry through family and friend connections, changes in the garment industry mean that it now takes longer for new immigrants to find work in this area, and they are more likely to find work at smaller rather than larger factories. Work conditions appear to have improved in recent years, but low pay, long hours, and job-related fatigue and strain to their eyes and joints continue to be difficult aspects of this work for garment workers. Many garment workers had difficulty advancing in the companies they worked for, although some were able to use their social networks or past work and/or educational experiences to move up at their companies. Workers frequently moved between factories because of layoffs, but they also relocated to pursue better job opportunities in the industry. In the garment factories, workers are subjected to

discriminatory behaviour of superiors and co-workers, often based on ethnicity, language, and seniority. As well, many have noticed recent layoffs at their factories; in some cases, these layoffs have resulted in the participants themselves losing their jobs. Thus, garment workers experience many constraints and challenges in working in this industry. However, the strain of working full-time for low pay and dealing with other work difficulties is further compounded when one considers the housework and childcare tasks for which these working women are responsible. These issues are the focus of Chapter Five.

## Chapter Five

### Household Responsibilities of Immigrant Women Garment Workers

#### Introduction

The work immigrant women garment workers carry out is not limited to their activities in the factory. Considering that, on average, participants described spending approximately fifteen hours per week on housework, effort spent on work in the home should be viewed as a significant investment of time and energy. As well, nine women who have children under the age of thirteen reported spending an average of forty hours a week on childcare.<sup>17</sup> Lamphere (1987:17) notes that “Both anthropologists and historians have tended to study the workplace, without contemporary attention to the role of women workers in their families.” There is a need, then, to consider women’s work outside the home and the roles women workers play within the home. However, women’s household work is often undervalued. Miller describes how male work outside the home was observed as a fully acknowledged activity through wages and through an endorsement of its central importance to the maintenance of the home, as noted in the phrase “bringing home the bacon” (Miller 1998:22). In contrast, women’s work in the home has been unpaid, and most, including the homeworkers themselves, tended to downplay the incredible amount of labour involved in running a household (Miller 1998:22). Indeed, the effort women garment workers direct towards carrying out household tasks while also working full-time outside of the home is substantial. In this chapter I will address the issues related to this double day of work, including the reasons women workers gave for being responsible for most of the housework and childcare in their households. The housework activities of women in this study will be examined, as will the chores of

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<sup>17</sup> As one participant pointed out, some of the housework and childcare are carried out at the same time, a reminder that these two task areas cannot be easily separated.

others in the home and the gendered division of household labour. In addition, this chapter will explore the ability of these women to access additional household help and the potentials for change to their housework responsibilities.

### **The Double Day: Responsibility for Housework and Childcare**

Ghorayshi (1990:283) describes the double day of work as a fact of life for women in the clothing industry, as it is for most women in the paid labour force. She states that “Women are, for the most part, responsible for their children’s care and for basic domestic chores. They often leave their factory work to raise their children. Many continue to work with the help of family and friends” (Ghorayshi 1990:283). Most of the women with children in my study combine, or did combine, the tasks of raising their children with working full-time, as well as taking care of general housework activities. In fact, many of these women are responsible for the majority of the childcare and housework tasks carried out in their households, in spite of their work in the garment industry.

Almost all of the women interviewed for this study are currently working outside of the home. Nearly all research participants, including all fourteen women presently employed in the garment industry, work full-time; some also work overtime during the week. As a result of this work, many participants noted feeling physically tired after eight or more hours on-the-job. A former SMO who now works in a different manufacturing field said that she does more cleaning on weekends than weekdays; during the week she works so hard that at night she needs rest. Except for one woman, all of the participants lived with one or more relatives. Including themselves, the average number of people in a participant’s household was 3.4. Most garment worker households had between two and four people. Nineteen counted their husbands as part of their household, while fifteen reported living with one or more of their children. Only one woman lived with her siblings, and while a few lived with their mothers, just one participant lived with both her mother and father. A small number lived with their mother-in-law or sister-in-law.

Despite their fatigue from working outside of the home, as well as living with a number of other capable individuals, fourteen of the twenty-three women interviewed for

this study said that they are responsible for most of the housework in their households. The remaining women stated that their mothers perform most of the housework, or described sharing household duties evenly with their husbands or sisters-in-law. This is also the case for many women outside of Canada. Acero's (1995:82-83) study of textile workers in Argentina and Brazil also found that "The burden of housework was carried mostly by the female textile workers in these households." Acero (1995:83) notes that childcare was usually the responsibility of the women in the households studied, whether or not these women were also working outside of the home. Similarly, of the nine participants in my Winnipeg study with children under the age of thirteen, five said they are responsible for most of the childcare in their households. The other women mentioned splitting childcare equally with their husbands, or said that their children are mostly taken care of by their husbands or mothers. Five of the nine women with children over age thirteen chose to comment on their childcare responsibilities when their children were younger. Of these five women, three said they were largely responsible for childcare, while two described evenly dividing childcare duties with their husbands. The reasons participants gave for carrying out most of the household tasks, including housework and childcare, will now be discussed.

### **Explaining Women's Housework and Childcare Responsibilities**

Participants gave numerous reasons for why they, and women in general, tended to be responsible for most of the housework and childcare in their households. While some mentioned that availability played a role in the assignment of tasks, deeper issues related to ideas about gender roles often emerged in discussions with participants about their unequal responsibility for household chores. Some of the issues discussed included beliefs about traditional women's roles, a woman's place in the household, as well as gender-associated household skills and knowledge.

#### *Availability for Household Tasks*

Research participants frequently noted that issues of availability caused them to have a larger share of housework and childcare responsibilities. Five of women in this

study described being at home and able to do the housework more frequently than their husbands. For example, one participant said that she does more than her husband because he is always away on business, and when he comes home he is tired. Another said that she performs most of the household chores because she is home more often than her husband. An additional woman said her husband works and goes to school, so he does not have time to do the housework, but she gets home from work early and can do the household chores.

Availability was the most common reason given for why a woman in this study, or sometimes her mother or husband, is responsible for most of the childcare. Frequently, the work schedules of adults in the household meant that one person, often a woman, was home more often and looked after the children more frequently than other adults. Sometimes, however, availability was given as a reason for women to carry out most of the housework and childcare, even when they themselves had busy work schedules. Xiang noted that she was responsible for much of the housework in her home since her husband studies during the day and works during the night. Even though Xiang works full-time as a SMO, she said that “someone” has to look after the children, so she has to. Despite the fact both women and their husbands work outside of the home and are physically fatigued from this work, it is women who continue to be responsible for most of the household tasks. Considering women’s disadvantaged position in the workplace, it may be strategic for immigrant women to provide financial and household support for their husbands’ educational and work pursuits since these men are more likely to attain jobs with higher incomes for the household. In addition, women’s unequal responsibilities in the home are often related to the continuation of traditional gender roles where women are expected to take care of the household and those who live in it.

### *Traditional Roles for Women*

In Oakley’s (1974:93) view, there is a persistence of traditional views of masculine and feminine roles. Ideas about the traditional roles of women were also present in participants’ explanations for performing the majority of household chores and childcare tasks. Although both she and her husband have jobs outside the home, Cheryl, a

Chinese immigrant, continues to do most of the housework. She said this is because she is a woman, and women do more work. Several other Chinese women also commented on the traditional role of women in the household. Mei, a woman who emigrated from China in the mid-1990s, said it was traditional for women to carry out more household tasks than men, noting that the majority of women do most of this work, even if they and their husbands both work outside the home. One Chinese participant said that traditional Chinese women do more housework than men, while another woman commented that, as a traditional Chinese woman, she likes housework. Women from other backgrounds also said that traditional female roles shape the amount of housework they do. For Christine, an emigrant from Greece, it is traditional for women to do more housework. She said that is how it is for Greek people; as a woman, it is her home and “[I] have to do it myself, everything.”

#### *Women's Roles in the Household*

Gender roles involving a woman's obligation to her husband and children were also reported by research participants as a reason for their responsibility for the majority of the housework. An informant who is currently unemployed and on disability leave stated that she does most of the housework because, in a sense, she is a housewife, and it is her obligation as a wife to make her husband happy. Ideas about women's roles in the household were present in notions that wives needed to “earn their keep” with respect to the household income provided by their husbands. As one woman noted, “He's giving me money, his pay, so I need to do more.” When I noted that she too worked full-time and provided money for the family, she acknowledged the point, but this issue was not pursued further because her husband was present during the interview. Lamphere's (1987:260-261) research on Colombian and Portuguese immigrant workers also found that both groups saw the husband as the primary provider, while the wife was viewed as the specialist in domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, sewing and laundry, as well as being the primary child raiser. Indeed, certain ideas about women's roles in the household also were stated by participants in my study as reasons for being responsible for most of the childcare. One participant noted that while her husband helps around the

house, overall she does more. She said that the woman is more responsible for household tasks, and that this is especially the case if one has a child, because it is the woman who takes care of the children.

### *Gender Roles: Household Skills and Knowledge*

Our ideas about nature and biological determinism often shape the expectations that women are responsible for most household and childcare work (Mies 1986:45). Women's household and child-care work are perceived as an extension of their physiology, such that the fact they have a uterus and give birth to children "naturally" makes them the best suited to caring for the household (Mies 1986:45). A number of women in my study noted that their husbands had little innate or learned ability in performing household duties, leaving this work as women's responsibility. A woman who emigrated from Italy stated that her husband cannot take care of the house, stating laughingly that this is because he is a man. Reena said she and her sister-in-law from India do more of the housework than their husbands; in their country, men do not cook, only women do. Another participant from India said that her husband does not know how to cook, and if he does cook, everything is messy. Feeling that their husbands are not as competent in performing household tasks, many women chose to do this work rather than have it done poorly.

Some participants described having superior household skills and knowledge compared to other female relatives. Cathy said she does most of the housework because she is a perfectionist, and since she doesn't like how her daughter cleans, Cathy has to do it herself. Susan, who lives with her teenage daughter and mother, said that she wants to do most of the housework since she can do it faster, and she can organize better than her mother. In these cases, informants felt they were more skilled and agile than younger or older female family members.

Women's advanced knowledge of household needs was also given as a reason for their responsibility for most of the housework and childcare. When asked if she thought women usually have more housework responsibilities than men, a Filipino participant, Alice, said yes, and proceeded to explain her views:



The woman is the one who is budgeting everything, and then taking care of the children...and the one thinking about, 'I have to buy this winter coat for them, I have to buy the boots for them, maybe they don't have any more underwear'. [The men], they didn't even know that... But, for me, when it comes to the house, and for taking care of the children, I think woman is the one, the first one that do it, [the one] who knows more.

In this study, participants described having greater skill and knowledge of household tasks than their husbands, using this to rationalize having the largest share of housework and childcare responsibilities in their households. It may be that through experience and interest in these areas these women are more adept at carrying out household chores than others, and perhaps they find it easier to do the work "correctly" rather than have conflict with other household members who do not perform the tasks as well. By acknowledging that they have superior household skills that prevent others from engaging in certain household activities, women garment workers display a sense of pride for their household abilities, as well as some possessiveness over the domestic domain. Reiter (1975b:281) states that, "In modern industrial capitalist states, the privatized kinship realm is increasingly defined as women's work. It is their area of expertise, but also their limitation." Thus, women's knowledge and skill in housework and childcare gives them the status of having authority over this sphere, but often also confines them to being the sole person responsible for household tasks.

### *Choice and Choicelessness in Housework Responsibilities*

While women in this study noted their dislike for certain household chores, many also enjoyed carrying out some of their housework responsibilities. Eleven research participants said they enjoyed cleaning, while another eleven said they like to cook, and several others stated that they enjoyed doing the dishes. Eight women mentioned that they enjoyed doing the laundry, vacuuming, or decorating their homes. Four women in this study said that they like all of the housework they do, and one participant even emphatically declared, "Oh, I love housework." For some women, the enjoyment of carrying out these households tasks was the reason why they did most of the chores in their homes. Nadia stated that while she was sometimes busy with work, when she stays

home she wants to do the housework because she likes her house. One participant, Marianna, said that she does most of the housework because she likes to; she does not want the house to become dirty and desires that everything to be nice and smooth. In one case, a participant responded to the question of why she was responsible for most of the childcare by simply stating that she likes her daughter. Thus, some choice was evident in the discussion of carrying out housework and childcare; a number of women decided to perform these tasks because they found enjoyment in carrying out these activities.

In some cases, however, participants felt that they had little choice but to perform the majority of the household chores. Two descriptions of why women garment workers are responsible for most of the housework and childcare involved the perception that no one else in their household would perform these tasks, so they had to do it. One woman said she does more than her husband because “he just doesn’t do it.” Similarly, a Chinese woman noted that if she does not take care of her children, no one else will. Mei, who lives with her husband and three children, said she is left to take care of the housework and childcare because her husband is always busy at work, so there is no choice. She said that if her husband does not do work in the house, then she has to take care of it. This expresses a sense of choicelessness among immigrant women in this study, since some noted that their responsibility for most of the housework and childcare was a result of other family members’ lack the ability or interest in carrying out household tasks.

## **Housework Responsibilities of Participants and Other Household Members**

### *Responsibilities for Housework*

In this research project, I asked participants to describe the housework activities they are responsible for in their households. Almost all explicitly mentioned being responsible for cleaning activities in their household, with some specifically mentioning washing bathrooms, floors and drapes, as well as tidying, dusting and doing the general cleaning of their homes. All except four women stated that they do the cooking. Most women reported doing the laundry and dishes, and eight out of twenty-three respondents said they were responsible for vacuum cleaning. In response to the question of which chores they were responsible for, four participants stated that they do “everything” with

respect to housework, with one woman noting, "Everything is mine." A small number of women said they do the shopping for the household, including grocery shopping. Two women described painting, renovating or decorating the inside of their homes. Another two women also mentioned doing outdoor work, such as shovelling the driveway, doing outdoor painting and yard work.

While the majority of women in this study described being responsible for most of the housework and childcare in their homes, many did mention that other household members assisted them by regularly performing a number of work activities. Fourteen participants noted that their husbands help with household chores. This often includes cleaning and cooking, as well as sometimes washing dishes and vacuuming. Two participants said that their sons do some housework, such as washing the dishes. In one case a participant noted that her son helps out a great deal with housework, and he does some of the cooking, cleaning, dishes and laundry because he gets home from school at 3:30 pm, one hour before she arrives home from work. Four women noted that their daughters do some household chores, including doing the dishes, cleaning, and helping with vacuum cleaning and washing the laundry. Five of the interviewed women said their mothers take care of some of the housework, which mostly involves cooking and cleaning. Having others contribute to the running of the household shows that some flexibility in task assignment is possible, and is likely a result of families strategizing to deal with both men and women's participation in the paid labour force. However, even the sharing of some household chores with other family members shows an underlying ideology of distinct gender roles within the domestic sphere.

#### *Division of Household Labour: Men and Women's Work*

Participants tended to describe the location and nature of the chores their husbands carry out to be different from their own, highlighting a division of labour based on gender roles in the household. Seven participants described their husbands as taking care of outdoor chores, such as snow shovelling, gardening, working on the deck, and mowing the lawn. In one case, a woman from Italy described how she did everything when it comes to household chores, including cleaning, doing the dishes, washing the

drapes, and sometimes painting and renovating. She referred to these tasks as “the inside work”, and described the chores her husband does, including mowing the lawn and shovelling, as “the outside work”. Two women said that their husbands do the heavy or hard work in the household. For example, a woman originally from the Philippines said that she does the cooking, cleaning, laundry, and dishes, which she calls “the easy work”, while her husband, fixes her old car, and works on the deck in the summer. Sometimes her brother-in-law helps her husband with these chores, and she said that when it comes to household tasks, they do “the hard ones.” Similarly, Lamphere (1987:283) notes that Portuguese and Colombian immigrants followed a traditional division of labour after relocating to the U.S. such that, “Wives were responsible for cooking and cleaning while the husband took care of household repairs and the car.” In my study, diverse, culturally-based ideas about gender roles were often transplanted from immigrant women’s home countries to their new country, Canada, especially in the previously discussion of traditional roles for women. Furthermore, it is notable that women’s housework tended to be classified as indoors, easy, and light work, and men’s housework was described as outdoors, heavy, and hard work. While men do assist with household labour, their activities often conform to ideas about masculine ability. In contrast, women’s work in the home adheres to ideas about their “naturally” feminine capabilities.

### **Ability to Access Additional Household Support**

According to Lamphere, family strategies for allocating labour within and outside the home, “...can be thought of as ways of coping with the exigencies of the labour market at a particular time; their goal is to support the whole family.” To deal with the varying pressures of paid work commitments, women often seek assistance with their household responsibilities. In my study, participants were asked about their ability to access additional support in the completion of household chores and childcare during busy times at work, such as when they are working more overtime hours or feel particularly fatigued from their jobs. Paid assistance or help from family and friends were the sources of support most frequently discussed by participants.

### *Housework*

None of the women interviewed for this study reported ever paying someone to help with the housework. Few gave specific reasons for this, although one woman noted she could not afford to pay someone for housework; another stated, "I don't like other people cleaning [my house]!"

Most women did note that members of the household would help out more with household activities during their busy times with work. Lan, who is originally from Hong Kong, at one time had eight people living in her household; she said there were a large number of people in the house to help with housework. Most of the garment workers in this study mentioned that one or two people help out more with chores when faced with busy periods at work. Twelve participants said their husband assists more with housework when these women become particularly busy with their work outside the home. Five women from a variety of cultural backgrounds also mentioned that their mother or mother-in-law take on more of the household tasks. In one case, a participant said that her friends assisted her with housework activities during stressful times at work because her husband is busy with his own job, with school and an ESL course. For a small number of women, a daughter, son, or sister-in-law who lives with them does more of the housework if needed. Thus, many of the women in this study were able to utilize kinship networks and social contacts to find assistance with housework when extra help was required. However, several participants noted that they do not get extra help from others when they work overtime at their jobs. Laughing when asked about who might assist her with completing household tasks, one woman stated that during busy times at work there is no one to help her with the housework.

### *Childcare*

Paid assistance with childcare was not commonly accessed by research participants. Eighteen women had children previously or currently living with them, and nine of these women do not pay for childcare and have not paid for it in the past. The rest of these women have or had paid previously for childcare. Of the nine women with children under age thirteen, six pay for childcare, and half (3 of 6) of this portion pay for

babysitters and the other half pay for daycare. Of the nine women with children over the age of thirteen, two had paid for babysitters and one had paid for daycare.

There are many barriers to paying others for childcare. Sarita, a recent immigrant from India, has had difficulty gaining access to childcare for her son when she first arrived in the country. She found daycare to be expensive in Canada, and while she said her pay from garment work was satisfactory, she still would need more money to pay for daycare, which costs \$330 a month. Besides the expense, another barrier to accessing daycare for Sarita was transportation. In the summer, she could walk to the daycare with her son, but a problem with her leg meant that the ice in winter makes it too difficult for her to walk there. She would drive, but she does not have a driver's license, which one can only get only after living for nine months in Canada. Consequently, while her son went to daycare in the summer, he no longer went there in the winter due both to transportation difficulties and expense. According to Oakley, certain socio-structural factors maintain the connection between women and domesticity, such as inequality in the paid labour force, and a lack of institutional childcare facilities (1974:93). In Canada, Prentice (1999:137,140) notes that childcare is assumed to be an "individual parental responsibility to be purchased privately." The lack of adequate public provision of childcare means that care is left to women as mothers and poorly paid childcare workers (Prentice 1999:138). To Prentice (1999:151), in an era of deficit reduction and increased dependence on private solutions, childcare services in Canada have been eroding and are becoming more expensive, to the detriment of women, children and families. In her view, "Under such conditions, women's burden to provide low and unpaid care for children at the expense of their own social, political and economic participation continues unmitigated." Since childcare is often considered the responsibility of women in the household, difficulties accessing paid childcare can mean little reprieve from these responsibilities for women who also work outside of the home. However, childcare assistance women receive from family and friends can often lessen the burden of working the double day.

Given their demanding roles in the workplace and household, immigrant women workers engage in a number of non-paid strategies to manage their hectic lives, including

taking advantage of family and community support. Gannagé (1990:8) states, “Even though women workers, on a daily basis, lengthen their working time to meet the demands of work and home, they also push against the insularity of the household to cope with their social designation as primary care givers.” She refers to the use of reciprocal relationships with other women to assist with childcare due to their low-waged class position and the restrictions it places on their access to paid childcare support systems outside of the household. In my study, many women did receive assistance with childcare during busy times at work. Of the fifteen women who have children living with them, almost all reported having friends or relatives who currently help with childcare, or used to help in the case of children now over thirteen. In three cases, mothers or mothers-in-law of the informants were described as helping to take care of the children. Four women mentioned having sisters or a sister-in-law who help or helped, and in one case, a participant said when needed, her brother-in-law and sister-in-law look after her daughter. Two women said they have friends who help with babysitting, and only one participant said that there was no one else who helped her with childcare when her child was young.

One woman, a recent immigrant and single mother, relied on her parents and a babysitter for childcare assistance for her daughter while she was at work.

I’m new, just one year, and it’s a little hard, like because I’m a single mom, I have to take my daughter...[at] 5:00 in the morning, I have to wake her up, walk to my babysitter. I have to put her [with a] babysitter...[as] daycare is not open [until] 6:45 in the morning. I have to put her over there, then the babysitter [has] to take her school. Now, I’m lucky she’s in grade one, so she spends most of her time in school. Then the babysitter takes her back, because my sister’s working too....then my parents get home, then they pick up the kids from the babysitter and then take [her] home...So, if I don’t have my parents, it’s going to be *very* difficult for me here.

She especially noted that her mother helped out a great deal with housework and childcare, stating, “Yeah, if I didn’t have her, I couldn’t work.”

Gannagé (1995:140-141) says in her study of Canadian garment workers that “Childcare was viewed as a basic necessity; unemployed women relatives, older

daughters and grandmothers traditionally provided childcare when government programmes were inaccessible or nonexistent.” This is also true for the women in my study, many of whom often relied on female relatives for support with childcare. However, it should be noted that five of the fifteen participants living with their children said that their husbands help or helped with childcare. One woman stated that her husband works nights and looks after their son during the day when she is working at the garment factory. In her study of Columbian immigrant workers, Lamphere (1987:244) found that “Kinship was most important with respect to child care, with most couples working on alternating shifts to provide child care within the nuclear family.” A number of garment workers in my Winnipeg study reported that their husbands help with childcare either regularly, or when their wives need extra support due to the time and energy demands of their paid-labour positions.

### **Envisioning Change in Household Tasks**

McDaniel (1988:127) notes that, “The Canadian family and women’s place in it have been changing and continue to change.” It is her hope that these changes allow the family to grow out of its patriarchal form into a flexible institution (1988:127). With the assumption that changes in housework activities might be possible, the participants of my study were asked whether they would make any changes to the housework activities they do, in an attempt to get their views on how they might or might not change their roles in the household. Fourteen women said that, if they could, they would make any changes to the particular chores they do, while eight women said they would not make any changes.<sup>18</sup> Those who would make changes mentioned not doing certain tasks or doing less of them, such as cooking less or not waxing the floors, or trying to get their husbands to take on some of the chores. Some said they would do more of one task, such as washing more dishes or cooking more. Several others described wanting to change the way they do certain chores, including having more appliances and cleaning devices to make housework easier and more comfortable, like owning a vacuum cleaner or a dishwasher. One woman from the Ukraine said that if she could she would occasionally

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<sup>18</sup> One participant did not address this question.



have one day to do her housework with no one in her home so that she could clean faster and better.

Participants were also asked about changes they would make to the amount of housework they do in general, and if it were possible, whether they would do more, do less or do the same amount of housework. Four women said they would do less housework if they could, and two said that they would do less or none of their housework responsibilities. In fact, five women said they would do none of the housework if they did not have to, while three women said they would do more, including one who said she would do more of the household chores, but illness prevents her. Five others said they would not change the amount of housework they do, but keep it the same.<sup>19</sup>

Ideas about choice were also expressed in discussions of changing housework activities. With many study participants stating that they would not change their household tasks and several noting they would keep the amount of housework they do the same, these women articulated their wish not to alter the work they carry out in the home. For some, this was because they enjoyed their household chores and having their homes cared for in a particular way. In some cases, however, this had more to do with the perception that change was not possible than personal desire to continue to carry out the same household activities. Although questions about changing housework activities were hypothetical, some women felt so bound to the household chores they are responsible for that discussing the possibility of change in this area was not a reasonable topic of conversation. An Italian participant was asked if she could, whether she would change anything about the housework for which she is responsible. Her first response was, "How can I change it?" This was a rhetorical question, emphasizing her view that changes could not be made to her housework duties. Similarly, a number of women felt that, since they could not change anything, this topic was not worth discussing. Sometimes this issue was difficult to broach with research subjects because of the sensitive nature of discussing roles in the household and a lack of constructive discourse on my part in what changes might be possible. In hindsight, this occasionally led to a somewhat superficial examination of potential changes to household duties.

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<sup>19</sup> Four participants did not address this question.

Numerous (13 of 23) participants were able to imagine ways to change their activities, even though none discussed these changes as if they were achievable at this time. As one woman stated, "If I can help it, I wouldn't do it," revealing her desire for change but perceived inability to create change in this area. For some, the only way to change their current set of responsibilities was through virtually impossible means. When asked whether she would change anything about the housework she does, Teresa said, "If I win [the] Lotto 649, I'll stop working and get rest, and then look after the kids only!" Her wish was to carry out housework no longer, but this goal was described as a highly unlikely fantasy. Another woman said that if she could she would have a remote control for the housework and it would be done. However, some participants did discuss more realistic ways to accomplish these tasks. Cathy, a Filipino woman who currently works in design, said that in the Philippines she could just come home and supper would be ready, with different family members doing housework, like making dinner and doing dishes. She said, "If I could do it [share the housework with family members] here, I would do it!" In the Philippines, though, she had a large family with eleven brothers and sisters sharing in the household tasks. In Winnipeg, she has only a daughter and a husband often away on business, leaving Cathy with most of the housework. With more family members, there is likely more work, but also more people with whom to share the household chores. As was explored earlier, reciprocal family relationships can lighten the burden of housework for women dealing with the double day. Thus, most women in this study discussed potential changes to their housework activities, but in a context of prevailing gendered ideas about women's household responsibilities, few felt these changes were currently achievable.

## **Conclusion**

The work carried out by immigrant women garment workers both in the factory and in their households involves a large time and energy investment. Brettell (2002:229) points out that "Immigrant women have very little time for anything beyond their work and their domestic chores." The need for a dual income means that often women and their partners both need to join the paid labour force. However, it is mostly women who must

deal with the challenges of balancing the double day. They often find themselves responsible for the majority of the housework and childcare in their households despite also working outside the home. These unequal responsibilities are related to gendered ideas about women's and men's roles in the household, which also shape the division of household labour. Often, women workers turn to others for support with their household tasks. While the support of family and friends is significant, especially with childcare, access to affordable daycare is sometimes difficult. Numerous garment workers expressed the desire to change their household responsibilities, but few discussed these changes as achievable goals. Although both women garment workers and their husbands deal with the challenges of working outside the home, the housework and childcare expectations of these women mean that further time and energy constraints are placed on their day. Only through significant changes to the structure of production inside and outside the home and a re-envisioning of women's roles in the household can a more equitable sharing of household tasks occur.

## **Chapter Six**

### **WTO Elimination of Quotas: Worker Views on Impacts**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will explore workers' experiences in a context of decreased job security and bargaining power in relation to the WTO-stipulated elimination of quotas on clothing and textiles. I will examine the strategies workers have employed to deal with this situation, including an examination of the other employment activities they would consider engaging in, and the barriers they face in pursuing these jobs. As well, participants' awareness of the WTO ATC and views on its effects will also be discussed, as well as their opinions on this international decision and the loss of jobs to workers in other countries.

#### **Experiences with Job Security in the Garment Industry**

The current work context of the Winnipeg garment industry can be described as rather unstable, and as was mentioned in Chapter Four, many of the women in my study had noticed or experienced layoffs at their garment factories. Fourteen women were employed in the Winnipeg garment industry at the time of the interview. Almost half (6 of 14) of those currently employed described feeling secure or very secure in their current positions, i.e., they did not foresee losing their jobs in the near future. Six of these eight participants worked for medium to smaller-sized garment companies (i.e., around 100 employees or less) or had higher-ranking positions. A research participant who works in quality control at a large factory said, "I'm not worried, especially even though they lay off everybody, I am sure that I can retire there." She noted that this is so because her job is different. She stated that upper-level managers know her work, and while there is a new person they can lay off, they will not fire her.

Another six women described feeling mostly or somewhat secure in their garment industry jobs; they tended to think they would be employed in these positions for the next several years, most for another three to five years. These women also tended to have higher-ranking positions in larger companies or to be working in smaller factories. A designer at a large Winnipeg garment factory noted that since she is the only one doing her kind of work, she is fairly certain they will not get rid of her “just like that.” However, because of recent job losses in manufacturing, she felt less confident about her own job security:

It's not easy to tell because if they can close [a manufacturing] department just like that, no notice, no nothing, they can do anything... I know we have work. And as far as I know, they're still there, and we're having some more. But, whether they're going to have me stay there or not, I cannot be sure... For me, I think I'm Ok. I can still be there. . . if I don't quit, I will still be there.

In another example, a SMO at a small factory that manufactures unique, specialty garments, said she is 85 percent secure in her job. However, she won't say she is 100 percent secure, because, “I don't know too much.” Since she knows that the company has some contracts and is producing goods for customers in other countries, she believes she will have around ten more years of employment at the factory.

In contrast to the participants who felt relatively secure in their jobs, two women, both SMOs, said that they currently have no job security in their work in the garment industry. One woman works at a small company that produces large cargo bags. She said that for the time being the employees at her factory still have work, but she had heard of lots of factories moving to China, so there is less work for people here. She said that if the Canadian government allows for more clothing imports, then her factory will close down. The other woman works at a large local factory that has already laid off many of its employees who work in manufacturing, and she noted that the contract they were working on is now over and finished there. Consequently, in response to a question about how secure she felt in her employment at the factory, she stated, “Zero. No more security.”

Concern for future employment at a company can greatly affect the emotional well-being of workers. A number of participants in this current study said they were uneasy or felt stress due to a lack of job security. A woman who works in design said that with her extensive training and job experience, it was a difficult experience to still feel insecurity with her current job. She thought that this was a very stressful situation, noting, "It's hard for me to say 'I'll be here tomorrow', because you don't know what tomorrow will bring." In Khatun's (2005:81) recent study of Winnipeg garment workers she states, "Although massive job cuts had not taken place at the time of the interviews, the interviewed workers spoke of their growing apprehension about job loss and probable need to search for another job." She notes that some workers expressed fear about the impending closure of their respective factories, while rumors that factories were moving overseas created tension and a sense of job insecurity among garment workers (Khatun 2005:78, 88).

### **Union Involvement and Bargaining Power**

In Manitoba, it is reported that approximately 60 percent of the garment industry is unionized (Manitoba Industry, Economic Development and Mines 2006). However, only two participants in this study mentioned their membership in a union. One local union, the Union of Needletrades, Textiles and Industrial Employees (UNITE) was formed in 1995 through the merger of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (UNITE HERE Canada 2004). In 2004, UNITE merged with the international union of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) to form UNITE HERE (UNITE HERE Canada 2004). One of the reasons for this merger was likely a loss of members working in the clothing and textile area. According to a research participant who had been heavily involved in this union for many years, union membership of garment workers in Winnipeg had fallen from over 1,000 to 400 in the last few years.

Not only has there been a decrease in membership numbers, but unions have also experienced a decrease in bargaining power in this context of plant closures and layoffs. According to Gannagé (1995:134), "The threat of factory closure has spelled trouble for

unions. Some firms have sought to undermine already established collective agreements through wage freezes or capital flight across provinces and to low wage economies in the United States, the Caribbean and the Far East.” In a related example, a participant in my study who is involved with another union representing local garment workers, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), reported that workers at her factory are now in negotiations with the company for a new contract, and she is a member of the negotiations committee. She said that the company lawyer told them that if they asked for more money, the factory would close. In her view, if everyone agrees to not have a monetary increase, they will still have a few more years of work left. She thought that the members would agree with this because, “...there’s no work around, and we’re old already.” As well, she wanted to push for separation pay in the new contract because she was unsure when they would close down the factory.

Workers in general have experienced a loss of bargaining power. In another example, a woman recounted how there had been a decrease in work at her factory, and she and her co-workers demonstrated, as they wanted their work back. In discussions with their boss, he told them that he pays less to workers overseas, and that if he continued to pay workers here the way he has been, the work will move to these other countries. Their boss now wants to renew the workers’ contract, giving them two different pay-rate options to choose from, both of which will result in lower pay for workers. This underscores Collins’ (2003:184) finding that garment companies have habitually used the threat of relocation to discipline workers in their different production sites. The growing use of relocation threats against workers throughout the world can be considered a “pervasive form of harassment” that is particularly insidious as workers have no legal grounds for redress (Collins 2003:184).

### **Garment Worker Strategies**

Participants engaged in a number of strategies to deal with their low pay and lack of job security in the garment industry. This includes working overtime at their garment industry position, being employed at more than one job, and training for or actually switching to employment in a different field.

As was mentioned in Chapter Four, five of the fourteen research participants currently employed in the garment industry regularly or occasionally work overtime at these jobs in order to generate higher earnings from this employment. For example, two women who emigrated from China noted that they often work an extra two hours of overtime at their medium-sized factory for an average of ten hours each weekday. One of these women, Shun, also worked for seven hours each Saturday, working a total of 57 hours as a SMO each week. She noted that gaining this overtime work was related to her beneficial relationship with her supervisor. Shun said that three days after she started working at the factory her supervisor asked her to work overtime because she liked Shun and her work. Thus, Shun was able to achieve her goal of working more hours and increasing her income through her connections with a well-placed work contact.

Three women in this study also work at more than one job. One woman noted that, while working in a factory as a SMO, she also works as a seamstress at home doing alterations for family and friends. Another woman works full-time as a SMO as well as being employed in housekeeping at a nearby hotel. During most of her career as a SMO in the local garment industry, Teresa has worked full-time at one position, eight hours a day, five days a week, as well as a part-time job at another factory where she worked for four hours each weekday. Today, she works full-time as a SMO, as well as owning her own commercial cleaning business where she works for a few hours before her SMO job. If she were to lose her SMO job, she would instead do her cleaning job full-time. These extra jobs not only supplement their income from working in the garment factories, but also provide a contingency plan in case they are laid off from their positions in the garment industry.

Other study participants have started preparing themselves for work in a different area through training programs. Mei, who was recently laid off from her position as a SMO, is now enrolled in an ESL course to improve her English so she can take a college health care aide course and find employment in this area. Another participant, Reena, is taking ESL classes while working in the garment industry, hoping she can eventually take a beautician course and work at a beauty parlour as she did in India.



Five participants have switched to different fields of work after leaving or being let go from positions in the garment industry. For example, Serena now cleans offices on weekday mornings after working for over seven years as a SMO. Ying worked as a SMO for Western Glove for six years before she was laid off. After being unemployed and receiving Employment Insurance for eight months, she was able to find employment at a small factory that makes parts for transport vehicles. Both of these women had social contacts who were previously employed at these companies who helped them to find work at the same firms, revealing their use of social connections in gaining new employment. These cases make it evident that participants have engaged in strategies to deal with the low pay and eroding job security that exists in the garment industry.

### **Employment Outside of the Garment Industry**

In the interest of exploring employment areas that garment workers might move into if faced with the loss of their jobs in the garment industry, participants were asked which jobs they would seek if considering work outside of the garment industry. The occupation areas most commonly discussed included work in the health care, restaurant, retail, and cleaning fields.

#### *Health Care*

Five participants, all current or former SMOs, expressed an interest in working in the health care field. This included working as a health care aide, as a nurse, as a nursing aide in a nursing home, and in home care. A number of reasons were given for wanting to be employed in this area. Some women noted having education or experience working in health care in their home countries, as well as viewing the work as enjoyable. One woman said that, while working part-time at a factory in the Ukraine, she took a course and received a certificate in nursing. She also said she liked this kind of work and liked helping people. As a result, she stated that she would consider going into medicine to be a nurse if no longer working in the garment industry. A few women noted that they had friends who had taken health care aide courses and/or now work in this field, so that they knew more about this line of work, and had heard that it pays well. As well, the

availability of work in the health care field was described as making this an attractive area in which to work. A recent immigrant said that she thought there always would be a job for nursing aides, stating, "I'm thinking if I go there I [will] always have a job until I retire." Finding employment in a field where workers are in demand is likely very appealing to those employed in an industry where many workers have been losing their jobs.

### *Restaurant Work*

Six participants, including three recent Chinese immigrants working as SMOs, said they would consider looking for employment in the restaurant industry, either by opening their own restaurant or working in a restaurant. Some of these women noted that their interest in this area was related to their enjoyment of certain aspects of this work, such as cooking, an activity they also enjoyed performing in their own homes. They also noted that this work was more comfortable than garment work. Xiang, who is currently employed as a SMO, said that working in the garment factory makes the eyes really tired, so she would rather run her own restaurant because there would be less pressure, money is more easily earned, and her eyes would be more relaxed.

### *Retail Work*

Four women mentioned being interested in working in retail or as a cashier. This was due to having past experience working in this area, or in two cases, due to a desire to improve English fluency. Sarita, a recent immigrant from India, said she likes the idea of working at a grocery store because she can speak to people in English and learn the language better. At the garment factory where she now works, she and the other Indian workers speak to each other in Hindi. She would like to try working in a different setting in order to focus on improving her English. For Lucy, who is presently employed as a SMO, working as a cashier would be an improvement over garment work because of the increased number of job opportunities. She said:

I think there is always a job, because if you get fired from one place, you can go if you have the experience, you have the knowledge, you have to know what to do. But the sewing industry, [I'm not] 100 percent sure in that, because they're closing it down, and if they run bankrupt, what can we do? We are on the street.

### *Cleaning Work*

Five women, mostly current SMOs, said they would consider working in housekeeping at a hotel or at a cleaning job elsewhere. For some, this was because of past experience working in this area, as well as feeling that their lack of skills restricted them to this area of work. Alice said she might consider working in housekeeping at a hotel, even though she feels she is too old already for that, and also too tired from her own cleaning to clean up for others. However, she said that she would consider this work because she does not have many other skills, and has only completed high school. In her opinion, now you need to go to school and have computer skills to find jobs. She stated:

But if you are not qualified on those kinds of jobs, like me, I came here, I just work in the garment factory. Then I go to the office, what [am] I going to do there? Throw the garbage [out]? That's all. They're going to give it to me, because what do I know?

Similarly, Lien noted that since she has no skills, cleaning would be an easy job for her.

Other areas of employment participants were interested in included work as a beautician, an office worker, a teacher of clothing design, and a teacher's aide. Three older women in their 50s and 60s noted that they were not presently looking for work in other areas, feeling that they were too old and too tired to consider work in a different field.

The employment areas in which garment workers considered seeking work coincide with the type of jobs Ng says most immigrant women carry out. Ng (1988:190) points out that, "Non-English speaking immigrant women are commonly recruited into three kinds of services and industries." These include private domestic and janitorial service, and work in the lower strata of the service industries, including employment in cleaning and janitorial services, restaurants, and the food industry. As well, they are found in the lower levels of the manufacturing industries, particularly in areas of light

manufacturing such as plastic, textile and garment factories, and in the retail trade. The restaurant, retail, and cleaning fields that my study participants considered working in likewise reflect the typical jobs available to these women. The only difference appears to be their interest in the health field, which is a growing area in demand of labour at this time.

### **Barriers to Working Outside of the Garment Industry**

The garment workers in this study described many barriers to finding employment outside of the garment industry. A woman who is no longer employed in the garment industry as a SMO now works at a restaurant cleaning tables. When asked where she would work if she could find employment in any area of her choosing, she said that needing money limits one's choices and this question asks for dreams that you cannot have when you are restrained by finances. Similarly, in Mohiuddin's (2004) study of garment workers in Bangladesh, he describes a range of socio-economic stressors that affect these workers. In his view, garment workers' lack of social, residential and occupational security has resulted in worker "choicelessness", meaning that, "...the stressors and distresses encircle them from every direction, making it difficult for them to select a better livelihood option" (Mohiuddin 2004:205). Indeed, the women in this Winnipeg study experienced a number of obstacles limiting their choices of employment in areas outside of garment work. This includes a lack of English language skills, education and work-related skills, as well as the advanced age of workers and limited employment opportunities in other fields.

#### *Employment Barriers for Garment Workers*

Thirteen of my research participants noted that a lack of English skills would be a personal barrier to finding a job outside of the garment industry. For Ying, the number one barrier for her to find a new job would be language and not speaking fluent English. Similarly, Sonja, a recent immigrant from Bosnia, said that when one does not speak English well the jobs that one can apply for are really limited. While a lack of English was not necessarily an impediment to working in the garment industry, it could make it

difficult to find other work. Mei, a Chinese participant, said her English was not very good, and as a SMO, she did not need to know a lot of English. For another job, such as one at a grocery store, she would need to have more English. She thought that a lack of English would be a barrier for her, but so would be her lack of education, because many jobs often required a certificate of some training. In their research on women workers in the Winnipeg garment industry, Golz et al. (1991:54) found that language barriers were seen as the greatest problem in limiting job opportunities for non-English-speaking immigrant women. They state, "It not only eliminated the possibility of obtaining other types of jobs, but also forced them to take jobs where little if any English is required" (Golz et al. 1991:54).

Twelve of those interviewed described a lack of education and/or skills as barriers to working in a different area. One participant noted that education would be the number one problem in finding another job, while a former SMO, who is currently employed as a cleaner for a retail store, mentioned that a barrier for her could be that she would need to be trained in a new job. For two women, a lack of recognition of education and skills credentials from their home country is a barrier to being employed in other areas. A woman noted that her business degree from India is not recognized in Canada, which could make it difficult for her to find work in the business field because she is not considered to have a Canadian education.

Garment workers in this study noted that after working for long time in the garment industry it could be difficult to find work elsewhere due to their lack of skills in other areas. Teresa, who is presently employed as a SMO, said that for some garment workers, these are the only skills they know, while Dalila, another SMO, said that many people get used to working in one place, and then it is difficult to find work elsewhere. Ahmad (1988:71) points out that the skills of textile, clothing and footwear workers are not readily transferable to other areas of employment.

Four women in their 50s and 60s felt that their age would be an impediment to finding employment in areas outside of garment work. A 63-year old SMO described her age to be a barrier to finding a new job. She felt that being older affected her work speed, and not being fast enough to do the assigned tasks would make it difficult for her to find

employment elsewhere. A sixty year old woman with a higher-ranking position at a large factory found her age to be a barrier in finding new work opportunities, “Because before they hire an old one like me, they’re going to get a young one.” In her view,

There’s lots [of barriers], you know, but like I tell you, we are too old – too young to retire, but we are too old to compete. Because especially this time, it is different from the first time we came here, you know... The first time we came here the jobs are all over the place. Now, even though you go everywhere, no hiring. [They say] ‘We are not hiring any more. We don’t need anybody.’

Indeed, the lack of jobs, especially in the garment industry, was considered an obstacle to finding new jobs. Six participants in this study described the lack of employment opportunities and their limited awareness of where to find jobs as making it difficult to move into other areas of work. One woman stated, “We’re pretty sure there’s no work around.” A participant who works as a SMO said that it is harder to find a job in Winnipeg now than it was a few years ago. Earlier in her career, she would be called back the next day for an interview and asked to work, but now that is not the case. A lack of awareness of other employment opportunities was also cited as a barrier to finding employment. One former SMO said that when she was laid off, she did not know where to go. Similarly, a woman who works as a pattern-maker at a large company said that the garment factories are gone, and she did not know where she would go if she did not have this work. For participants, lacking an awareness of employment opportunities was a barrier to finding employment.

Those employed in the garment industry find themselves in contexts where English is often not required and their skills are not applicable to other fields of work, making it very difficult for them to find employment outside of this industry. As well, being an older worker was seen as limiting work opportunities, what few were considered to be available outside of the garment industry. Finding the time and money to pursue training in other areas is also difficult for many garment workers, given the fatiguing labour and low wages associated with this work, as well as their responsibilities in the home. As these barriers made it challenging for garment workers to find employment outside of the garment industry, they are also largely responsible for keeping these

workers in the industry, supplying this sector with a large immigrant workforce that had difficulty pursuing other employment options. As Lepp et al. note (1987:161), once in the garment industry, most of these women workers have been kept there by lack of money, language difficulty, exhaustion from working a double-day, discouragement, and systemic discrimination. Now that many garment workers are losing their jobs and are forced to find work elsewhere, they are finding that their years of work in the Canadian garment industry have not prepared them well to compete for other Canadian jobs. To improve their opportunities in the job market, some of these workers have pursued training in local programs. However, another barrier to finding employment stems from a lack of awareness of training programs available for laid off garment workers and difficulty accessing training programs. If improved, both factors could be valuable in the pursuit of new jobs for these workers.

### **Awareness of Training Programs**

A large majority of women in my study (18 of 23) had participated in some form of training while living in Winnipeg. In most cases, this involved ESL training; fourteen participants had taken some ESL classes in the city, mostly at local schools, through Workplace Language and Training, and Winnipeg Adult Education, and a few mentioned taking ESL classes that were offered at the garment factory where they worked. As for employment and job-related skill training, five had taken the SMO course offered by MFI before they had closed their doors, and a few participants mentioned going to a high school to upgrade their schooling through Winnipeg Adult Education. Informants also discussed their awareness of training programs for immigrant women in general. Eleven women indicated they were not aware of such programs, while seven others, namely current or former SMOs, did know of training programs available to immigrant women. This included English conversation classes at International Centre, ESL courses offered by Winnipeg Adult Education and Workplace Language and Training, and schools where one can upgrade one's high school education.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Five participants did not address this question.

While a number of research participants were aware of training programs for immigrant women, their awareness and access to training programs that assist laid-off garment workers are greatly lacking, including those that help with their transition to different areas of work. Fifteen out of twenty-three informants replied that they were not aware of any such programs. The four participants who were aware of training programs available for laid off garment workers were all current or former SMOs, and they mentioned retraining opportunities through Employment Insurance and Red River College, computer and ESL classes offered through UNITE HERE, and a healthcare aid course at a local collage. A participant who had recently lost her SMO position at a small factory is currently taking classes at Employment Projects of Winnipeg (EPW). She knew that other laid off workers had sought assistance from EPW, but she was unaware of any other training programs available to them.

There are barriers, however, beyond awareness that prevent women from participating in training programs. One participant pointed out the expense of some of these programs, stating, "But if you don't have money, how can you go to school?" In her view, you need money first to support yourself, and then you can go to school. Gannagé (1995:144) notes that accessibility is an important factor in a democratic educational program, and in the case of immigrant workers, training programs need to consider language and childcare needs of the workers, including the double day that most of them work. The time constraints faced by workers through work and home commitments may make training less accessible. Indeed, not all workers are prepared to invest a significant amount of time in upgrading through literacy and language training programs (Picot and Wannell 1987:105). For some participants, age was another constraint to enrolling in a training course. A former pattern-maker said there was no choice in taking on a new skill; people didn't want to go back and learn at an older age. On this point, Picot and Wannell (1987:105) note that older workers might feel that, "...retraining is not a rational choice, since they have relatively few years of work left to accrue the benefits." For Winnipeg garment workers, greater awareness and access to informative, accessible programs could be valuable tools to finding new forms of employment in the current context of job losses and factory closures in the garment industry.



## **Awareness of the WTO Elimination of Quotas**

Hale and Burns (2005:226) note that leading up to the implementation of the WTO ATC, workers did not know about the impending changes. They state, “Millions of garment workers continue[d] to sit at sewing machines completely unaware that a major catastrophe... [was] about to happen.” However, in my Winnipeg study, seven of the twenty-three research participants were aware of the WTO elimination of quotas on clothing and textiles. Interestingly, those who were aware of this process included SMOs involved in union activities, those previously or currently working in the area of design, and several recent Chinese immigrants. A designer said she knew all about the WTO agreement from her work with imports at a garment factory. In her view:

If they stop [the removal of quotas], then we'll be able to have companies here that do the garments that they're sending outside Canada. But because now they don't have any quotas, they go to Mexico, they're cheaper, go to China, they're cheaper, go to India. And everybody works there for almost nothing.

Six women said that they knew some of the aspects of the WTO decision. This includes participants who had heard something about the WTO phase-out of quotas, but were not aware of the specifics of this agreement and what it entailed. Six participants did not know about the WTO decision. This group consisted of current and former SMOs, including three women who were presently working at smaller factories that had not experienced major job losses. Four other women, including two former SMOs and two recent immigrants, were unaware of the actual WTO agreement, but did point out that they were aware more garment production was moving overseas because of the cheaper labour there.

## **The Impact of the WTO Elimination of Quotas on Local Factories and Workers**

### *Effects on the Work and Factories of Research Participants*

After discussing the WTO decision to eliminate quotas on clothing and textiles with participants – in some cases giving a brief explanation to those unfamiliar with this issue– research participants were asked if they thought this decision had affected their

work or the work of others at their company. While five participants who no longer work in the industry did not deal directly with this issue, four women who had been laid off from SMO positions within the last year noted that they thought the WTO decision had affected their work at these factories. This mainly involved job losses and a decrease in work for the employees. Mei, a former SMO at Western Glove, said that her company had moved to China and Mexico, and she thought that the WTO had directly affected her job because she and other workers were laid-off.

Of the fourteen women presently employed in the garment industry, six did not think the WTO agreement had affected their work or the work of others in the factories in which they worked. Five of these six participants had arrived in Canada in the last five years, and most worked in smaller companies. Eight participants who continue to work in this industry did think that the WTO decision had an impact on their work and the company that employed them. One woman noted her shock at the recent job losses in her company,

So I said, when they laid off last January and then another layoff, I said, 'Jesus Christ! I am here for [over 30] years, never a lay off.' We never had a shut-down. No, we are always working. If even holiday pay, you don't want to take a holiday, you make double money.

A few others noted that their companies had experienced job losses, including those working at Gemini and Peerless who pointed out that Gemini's manufacturing had shut down and moved overseas, and Peerless had recently closed their leather department. As well, less work for employees in the company was also mentioned as an effect of the WTO elimination of quotas. According to a SMO at Richlu, they have imports where the garments come back and the only task for workers here in Winnipeg is to sew something on it like the security label. Another SMO stated, "They lifted the quotas. That's the main reason why there's no more work for us." Other participants noted that reduced bargaining power has resulted in workers having to take a cut in pay. One SMO who works at a small factory that had not experienced many negative effects of the WTO decision still felt that it affected her personally due to stress caused by the precarious situation of garment manufacturing in Winnipeg:

I'm worried if this job closes down, what can I do? Because I have a mortgage to pay, I have my daughter to take care [of]... and sometimes I worry when I work that they're, you know . . . if this is going to close down... because sometimes I hear, you know, rumours that the sewing industry is going to close down and I'm worried if my company is going to close down, what can I do?

### *Effects on Other Workers and Factories*

Almost all of the informants in this study (20 of 23) felt that the WTO elimination of quotas had affected the work of other garment workers and factories in Winnipeg, often noting the movement of local factories overseas, factory closures, the loss of jobs and work, and the creation of a very difficult employment context for workers. According to Cathy, the phase-out of quotas had a big impact on the industry, affecting it a great deal and causing a big change. She stated, "That's why everything is being done overseas. That's when they all jumped." Indeed, four others pointed out that clothing imports were leading to more factories moving to other countries. Beth, who thought the WTO decision had a significant impact on Winnipeg, said, "I think it's really hit bad on the garment industry, because they just go."

Ten participants connected the WTO agreement to the closure of a number of Winnipeg garment factories; Nadia, a current SMO, noted she had seen buildings downtown that used to be garment factories but are now closed. To Christine, a recently laid-off SMO, the WTO decision had affected local companies and workers, noting, "All the factories are closing for that." In her view, "That's why the factories [are] closing and you can't find [a] job." Certainly, most informants described major job losses to be a result of this WTO decision. For example, Alice noted that lots of other workers had lost their jobs, like at Western Glove, where there used to be 800 workers, and now there are 80. She said it is so shocking, and some people have no work and they are still young. When Teresa was asked if she thought the WTO decision resulted in job losses in the industry, she responded, "The first thing is the free trade and the quota. Now the lifting of the quota[s] . . . , that makes it really 100 percent no more jobs." Another effect of the WTO elimination of quotas discussed by participants involved the reduction of work available to presently-employed workers. It was pointed out by one woman that the

workers at JMJ were working less because of this agreement, and a JMJ employee confirmed this by reporting a recent decrease in total work hours for employees at her factory.

As a result of these layoffs, there are not as many jobs in the garment industry, and finding new employment was considered to be very difficult in the present context of WTO removal of quotas. This current situation in the industry was regarded as particularly difficult for garment workers. In one case, a recent immigrant said that it is harder and harder to get a job, and because all of the factories have moved overseas, it is very hard for new immigrants to get started here; life is generally very tough.

### **Opinions on the WTO Elimination of Clothing and Textile Quotas**

Participants' opinions about the WTO decision and how it has affected the local garment industry tended to revolve around a number of identifiable themes, which will now be explored.

#### *Sentiments about the WTO ATC and its Effects*

Many participants had negative views about WTO ATC and its resulting impact on the local industry. In response to being asked for their opinion about the removal of quotas, two women simply stated, "I hate it." Eight participants from a range of backgrounds thought that it was sad, not good, or said they were not happy about it. To Olga, the situation was sad, as people had worked in the industry for many years and were losing their jobs. Christine said that she feels badly about what is happening because people do not have jobs. In contrast, one participant who no longer works in the industry noted a positive aspect of the WTO decision. She pointed out that China brings clothes here that are cheap, and everybody likes cheap clothes. As a result, she thought it was positive that there is greater access to inexpensive clothing, but unfortunate that people have lost their jobs.

### *Effects on Immigrants*

Four research participants, mostly recent immigrants, cited their concern for the influence of the WTO agreement on new immigrants. Dalila, a woman who immigrated to Canada from Africa in the late 1990s, was concerned that more people were coming to Winnipeg, stating they will need money but there are no jobs in the industry or elsewhere. Serena, a recent immigrant from Jamaica, said that people are wondering where their next meal will come from, and that immigrants did not come here to live off of the government. They came here to do better, send money home and improve their lives. She felt that immigrants in particular have a difficult time; they do not know the loopholes and are “strangers in the land.” Consequently, Serena was concerned about the many immigrants who arrive in Winnipeg each year and the government’s inability to assist these immigrants with jobs. She was worried that one day the frustration of these immigrants, due to not having their employment expectations met in Canada, would cause them to try to get back at the government by turning the province upside down. In her opinion, the government should either not bring in as many immigrants, or should ensure that they can live comfortably in Canada. She wants to live at peace and does not want there to be problems here. Another participant, Susan, said that more people who are coming to Canada will not be happy. There might be more crime since people have to live, and possibly more drugs. She said that if people are not well-educated and working in certain positions, the government will not care about you. She felt that exactly the same thing was happening before the revolution in her home country of Poland, and if it continues, there will be a revolution here, which she does not want.

### *Concern for Other Workers*

Two participants pointed out that their jobs have not been affected by the WTO ATC, due to conditions in their particular factory or being close to retirement. These women were not concerned for themselves, but they were concerned about the future of the other workers. Lien, a SMO at a small factory, said that even though she still has her job, she sees lots of her friends losing their jobs, and it is very sad. In another example, Alice stated,

I have only five years to work, eh, so it's ok for me. How about the others?  
... There are lots like- I tell you, the Chinese people, huh?... they don't know how to speak English. They just learn to work like that here. And they are trying to work hard to . . . make money. And then, there is no more work. Where you can get the work, you know, where [can you] get those things?

However, one participant, Lan, said she was not concerned about garment workers and how they were affected by the WTO agreement. She had worked at a number of different SMO positions over the span of 25 years, but had not worked in the industry for over ten years. She said that she is only really concerned about her own issues, not those of others, and that people need to deal with changes as they are affected by them.

#### *Justification and Frustration with Factory Relocation*

Different approaches ranging from justification to allegations of inequality were taken towards the relocation of Winnipeg garment manufacturing to other countries. This often was associated with one's age, one's sense of security in their factory position, and whether or not one was still employed in the industry. Some participants justified the movement of companies overseas, noting that in order to compete, companies needed cheaper sources of labour. Participants who justified the job losses in the garment industry included those ranging in age from early 50s to early 70s who have not worked in the industry for several years, or who are in higher-ranking positions with greater job security, such as designers. For example, when asked her about her opinion on the WTO elimination of quotas, a woman who last worked as a pattern-maker fifteen years ago stated that even though an owner wants to hire more people, he/she is limited by not having enough to pay for labour in Winnipeg. In her opinion, companies want to make money, but if they stay in Canada, they will go bankrupt. If they go overseas, they will make a profit, so they need to go to survive. She said the main reason for going overseas was money, as labour is so expensive here, and some people work so slowly they cannot make the quota. A woman who is currently employed as a pattern-maker said that China was not selling its own garments, it was producing them for us with their cheaper labour, and they need to have a customer order to have the clothes made there. She said that if

Gemini still did its manufacturing here, it would go bankrupt, because what it would produce would be too expensive and not sell. Similarly, in Cohen's (1994: 231) study of workers in a Philadelphia lighting-fixture plant, she found that workers reacted differently to the decline of the factory; for example, "Older, longer-term workers tended to accept management's explanations and efforts at ameliorating the effects of decline." This was because they were insulated from these disruptions due to their increased seniority (Cohen 1994:247).

In contrast to workers who were more understanding of the situation, Cohen found that younger workers in her study were more like to resist the changes that had a greater influence on them due to their dependence on the work at this factory (Cohen 1994:231, 247). In my study, only one worker, a SMO in her 30s, described demonstrating with her co-workers in an attempt to bring work back to their factory. However, other workers did discuss the inequality of the loss of jobs and the decline of the industry. Instead of justifying or defending the loss of garment industry jobs to overseas workers, several participants – all current or former SMOs ranging in age from late 30s to mid-50s – thought that this process was unfair and unjust. Teresa, a SMO involved in the union who has seen many layoffs take place at her factory, felt that the plant closures and job losses tied to the elimination of quotas were inevitable. However, rather than excuse this situation, she blamed it on the existing power inequalities between industry owners and workers:

I can't do anything because the rich people wanted it and I'm one of the people, the workers, the immigrant workers, the women who come in the garment industry, we don't have that uh, strength or whatever, because we are all poor, and the people, the employers, they are all rich, they want more money, and they can get that more money sending the work there because of the cheap labour there, and I think it's a huge. . . , it's a huge enemy, and we're the small people. Poor people against the rich people; we cannot do anything.

Other participants also shared their views about the unequal nature of this process. Nadia told me that if the companies go, people stay here and have no jobs, and this is not good. It is good for the boss, but not for the people and the economy of Canada. These

views are in line with Hale and Burns' (2005:220) understanding of this process; they point out, "It is Northern workers, not major business interests, who will experience the negative effects of the eventual phase-out." Another SMO, Lien, focused on the role of the Canadian government in this decision, stating that it was very, very unfair of the government to allow more imports so people here have no work and life is very difficult. As SMOs, the participants in this study who discussed the inequality of the situation were more sensitive to the potential loss of manufacturing jobs than those in higher-ranking positions such as design.

### *Future Outlook for Workers and the Local Garment Industry*

One's position and experience in the garment industry also shaped one's views about the future outlook of this industry and that of workers employed in this area. Some women in this study wondered how garment workers are to survive these changes to the industry, and in some cases, whether the industry itself will survive. All who shared these concerns had immigrated to Canada from the Philippines over twenty years ago and had observed the changes taking place in the industry over the last two decades. Most were close to retirement or were no longer working in the industry. Beth, who currently works as a SMO, said that, in her opinion, "It's not helping us workers, like in the garment industry. And we used to have, like, a brighter future with the garment industry, but this time, as what I've said, and what I told you, I think the garment industry is dying these days." When asked what should be done about this situation, Teresa responded, "What do we do? We're changing, I'm quitting." When asked what choice there is for her and other workers, she responded, "There's no choice. No choice at all." Sylvia also felt there was little that could be done about the job losses, and asked rhetorically, "Well, how can we improve it?" Not all shared this sense of defeat. A woman who emigrated from China in early 2005 was determined to make the best of her situation despite the loss of her SMO job and the decline of this field of work. She said that her family decided to make a life here, so it does not matter how difficult it is, they are going to make it through.

As opposed to some of the negative views expressed, a number of women hoped that the garment companies and jobs would stay in Winnipeg, and some shared their



suggestions for keeping garment manufacturing jobs in Canada. All who expressed these views were current or former SMOs and most had arrived in Canada in the last ten years. One of these woman said she hoped there was a possibility for things to go back the way they were. When she was asked what we should do to make things better, she said, "Can we have it back, the same thing as it was before?" Several others hoped that the WTO decision and its effects could in some way be reversed, suggesting that the government implement measures to keep the work here. A new immigrant employed as a SMO felt that local companies should not be moving to other countries; instead, she suggested that companies be brought back to Winnipeg and be given tax breaks to bring in their materials so that companies can produce here. She said the government is supposed to support the industry here, and make the people happy in this country. Similarly, a former SMO said that she wanted to see sewing jobs come back to Winnipeg, as well as other jobs, and she suggested that limits be imposed on the work sent to other countries so that there is a restriction on how many garments are made overseas. She questioned why the government is not doing something in this regard. Another former SMO noted that some garment factories are still here, and the government should create agreements with other countries such that Canada can export clothing to them and create jobs here.

### **Opinions on Losing Lobs to Workers Overseas**

Overall, the phase-out of quotas will lead to an increase in the movement of jobs from industrialized countries in the North to developing countries in the South (Hale and Burns 2005:220). In general, China expected to gain the most from the WTO agreement, with some analysts predicting that through this process the country will increase its overall clothing and textile exports by 150 percent, and achieve almost 50 percent of the world market (Hale and Burns 2005:218). India and Pakistan are also expected to benefit from the phase-out (Hale and Burns 2005:218). Many of the participants interviewed for this study originally came from China, India, and other countries in Asia, and some even gave specific examples of garment workers who emigrated from a particular country and were now losing their jobs to workers in their home country. For example, one informant

pointed out that a local garment factory, Gemini, had many Indian women working there, but now all of their jobs were being taken away and sent to India while Peerless Garments is operating in China and India, countries from which a number of its former Winnipeg employees originated. Consequently, all interviewees were asked their opinion about the loss of garment industry jobs to workers in countries overseas, which in some cases are the same countries Winnipeg garment workers had originally left in their immigration to Canada.

### *Sentiments about Losing Jobs to Overseas Workers*

Participants had mixed feelings about workers from other countries gaining the garment work they are losing. Four women said that it was good for garment workers overseas, but bad for garment workers in Winnipeg. As one Filipino woman noted, "Because if will they go to the Philippines and then the Philippine people will be good, but how about the people here in Canada?" Cheryl, an immigrant from China, said that, on the one hand, she is happy that workers in China get work and improve their living, but on the other hand, she would like to keep the jobs here too. She noted that in China they have jobs so they are happy, but here they have lost their jobs, and she is not very happy about it. She said that she would like to see any other country continue to prosper and continue to have jobs in the garment industry and otherwise. Others shared this desire for everyone to have employment, including Ying, who said that she wants everyone to have a job, because that would be the best situation.

The loss of jobs to workers in countries Winnipeg garment workers had emigrated from was also viewed as a very negative, frustrating, and unfair situation. Sylvia had worked as a designer for over fifteen years in the local industry, and in response to being asked for her opinion on this issue, she exclaimed, "That sucks!" She stated:

Actually, it's not fair for them to take all these people as a recruit and then just drop them like nothing. And I don't know if there's anything that the government is doing about it, because, like I said, they took all these Vietnamese people, or Chinese people, they recruit them from there. And now, there's nobody that's actually doing something. If they lose their job, I don't know if there's somebody helping them find any.

In a similar fashion, Beth, a SMO of over 30 years of age said, "It's really awful." She wondered why these workers have to come here, and then these jobs are taken away. A pattern-maker named Susan also felt that it was not fair for the people here. She said that people work for so many years and it is devastating to be let go. While there may be the creation of more work in other countries, she said the government did not care about people, just their own pockets, and that maybe the government thinks this work is not important. She asked, why bring more immigrants in to Canada if there is no work? When it was mentioned that a worker from China who lives here lost her job to workers in China, a recent immigrant to Canada stated,

"It's horrible. It's horrible to hear that...It's very horrible, because what she's going to do here? Now in her country, her job is over there, and if she goes back there, she cannot make that money she's making here. Because they're cheaper over there. So I think that's not fair."

In one case, a participant felt that countries overseas should have their own jobs and should not be taking the jobs of workers here.

#### *Negative Views about Overseas Conditions and Work Quality*

In discussions of the loss of work to overseas workers, garment workers in my study pointed out some issues they felt were problematic with sending work to other countries. This involved concern about overseas working conditions and the quality of clothing produced in these contexts. A few women were concerned about the work conditions of the overseas garment workers. One woman had heard about a factory in the Philippines with 7,000 employees, working "24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Look how lucky they are." In another case, a Chinese immigrant said that garment workers are not paid as well in China. She has a cousin in China who works morning to midnight at a garment factory and is not paid very much for this work. This participant also said that there is no overtime pay in China. Another participant did not think it was right to send the work overseas, "Because they're working the people as a dog over there, and they're paying [for] cheap labour. And you are over here, what you going to do here? I don't think that's right." According to Hale and Burns (2005:222), there is reason to be

concerned about the working conditions of overseas garment workers. They note that workers in the Chinese garment industry are prevented from organizing, and, “Women garment workers typically work 10-14 hours a day, seven days a week and gross neglect of industrial safety has resulted in numerous factory fires (Hale and Burns 2005:222). In addition, the phase-out of quotas will likely be accompanied by downward pressure on labour conditions everywhere, due to increased competition and pressure on countries and manufacturers to reduce costs (Hale and Burns 2005:223).

A number of garment workers interviewed in this study thought that the garments produced overseas were of a lower quality than the garments produced in Canada. According to one pattern-maker, the clothing from overseas is “trash”, and that here sewers have more experience and produce better quality work. A former pattern-maker that now owns her own shop said that, as with NAFTA, cheap labour makes cheap clothing. She thought the quality of clothing made overseas was not as good; it was not as well made and did not use quality fabric. She mentioned that she had seen many of these lower-quality clothing items brought in to be mended and altered at her shop. However, not all of the participants shared this view. A woman who is currently employed as a SMO felt that the quality of the clothing made overseas is very high based on what she has seen herself. She said that they just happen to be paid less.

### *Thoughts of Return*

Since work is being relocated to other countries, sometimes those same countries from which Winnipeg garment workers emigrated, some participants thought that immigrants would question their move to Canada. Serena, a woman from Jamaica, said that if she came to do sewing and the work was sent back to her home country where she could have stayed and done this work, she would wonder why she came here and would think she should have stayed home. According to Dalila, a participant from Africa, if they sent work to her home country, she would go back there; while she would not be paid as much, it would be less expensive to live there. Another woman, Susan, said that in her view more poor people are coming to Canada, and they will not be happy and will want to go back to their own country. Not all participants agreed with this view. Lucy, a recent

immigrant, said that these immigrant workers never will go back, while two Chinese immigrants, Ying and Shun, stated that they will not return to China. One of these women, Ying, noted that, while this situation was very bad, she is now a Canadian and would like to make a life here, and she has no intention of going back to China.

### *Inability to Change*

Some participants thought that it was strange or ironic that some Winnipeg garment workers are losing their jobs to workers in their home countries, and thought that it would be a shock to these local workers. However, while noting their concerns about the loss of jobs to workers overseas, a number of participants felt that there was little they could do to remedy this situation. They thought that it was not possible to change the current movement of work to other countries, including one participant who commented that there is nothing she can do about it. Another woman said that it is too late to change anything, but suggested that those in charge be asked why they brought in these immigrant women to work in the local garment industry in the first place, only to have these jobs now sent overseas.

### **Conclusion**

Garment workers are becoming increasingly concerned about the future of their jobs and the garment industry itself in a context of growing numbers of layoffs and factory closures. While this insecurity has an impact on workers' emotional well-being, it also affects their bargaining power with employers in the garment industry. In strategizing to deal with low pay and industry uncertainties, some women have pursued employment in other fields. However, the work most would consider turning to tends also to be in low-pay, under-skilled sectors. As well, many of these women face barriers to finding other forms of employment due to the lack of required English fluency and transferable job skills associated with work in the garment industry. These constraints have long kept these women working in the industry, but now that many will need to pursue other areas of employment because of decreasing job opportunities for garment workers, they are directly confronted with these barriers to alternative employment.

Many garment workers were aware of the WTO elimination of quotas, and while sharing different views about the situation, their frustration and concern for their future and that of other workers was evident. Some were able to justify the movement of work overseas. Others conveyed their views on the inequality of the WTO agreement, where garment workers felt that this decision built on the power differential between workers and employers, the result being that company owners profited while local workers lost their jobs. Frustration and concern were also expressed about the loss of jobs to overseas workers, although Winnipeg garment workers also shared their concern for the livelihoods of workers in other countries. The women in this study face many difficulties adjusting to the impacts of the WTO ATC. While some hold out for improvements in the industry, many feel they have no choice in the matter and are unable to change the situation.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

#### Discussion

This study of immigrant women garment workers draws out their experiences in coming to Canada, working in the Winnipeg garment industry, dealing with household responsibilities, and encountering the effects of the WTO elimination of quotas in their work environment. Their experiences were shaped by a number of wider issues, including the global, national, and local contexts of the garment industry, and the challenges they face due to issues of ethnicity, gender, and class. In further understanding the experiences of immigrant women garment workers, theories of globalization and agency have been employed to draw out some of the principal issues and themes.

#### *The Global, National and Local Context*

Today, the garment industry can be considered global in scope. As one of the most widely distributed industries in the world, it employs millions of people around the world in both less developed and industrialized nations. In this global context, manufacturers worldwide compete with each other, often seeking to reduce labour costs that are considered to be one of the most significant production costs in the garment industry. Restructuring of the garment industry in recent years has meant that most of these companies can locate or subcontract their production in almost any part of the world in the pursuit of cheaper labour. Consequently, workers in one country are forced to compete with those in many other countries, and labour groups have experienced a significant loss of bargaining power.

The World Trade Organization (WTO)'s Agreement on Clothing and Textiles (ATC) has encouraged further trade liberalization of this industry through its ten year

transitional process for the ultimate elimination of previously imposed import quotas on clothing and textiles, which took place on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005. This has heavily impacted industrialized countries like Canada that had used the quotas to protect local producers from overseas competitors. It is expected that this WTO agreement will lead to a greater concentration of production in a few low-cost sites and an overall shift of production to China. Companies from other Northern countries are also likely to profit from reduced restrictions on their global operations. In contrast, it is mostly workers who will suffer from the impacts of the elimination of quotas through massive job losses and downward pressure on wages and working conditions.

In the past, the Canadian government has implemented a number of measures such as tariffs and quotas to protect manufacturers in the Canadian garment industry. Trade agreements such as NAFTA, and more recently, the WTO ATC, have led to a dismantling of these protections. Due to increased competition from low-cost producers in other countries, Canadian garment companies have reacted by closing down, shifting to a different target market, or focusing on subcontracting to other countries and importing garments. The WTO agreement has been linked to massive job losses in the Canadian garment industry, leading to questions of whether or not Canada will consider implementing safeguards to protect local companies against a flood of overseas imports, especially those from China.

The global operations of the garment industry take place in many different local spaces and involve local workers and economies. Winnipeg is a significant producer of garments in Canada, and generally consists of several large firms and a variety of smaller companies that target niche markets. The WTO elimination of quotas has resulted in the closure of a number of Winnipeg garment factories and many layoffs, with some firms relocating to countries with cheaper labour costs. Thousands of jobs have been lost in this sector within the last few years, and it is expected that most garment manufacturing will eventually move offshore.

In Winnipeg, the garment industry has a long history of providing jobs for new immigrants. This was largely due to the poor working conditions and low pay associated with the industry that few Canadian-borne workers were willing to accept. To this, the



garment industry has claimed that it is difficult to find skilled, experienced workers in Canada, and pushed for the recruitment of immigrant workers, mainly women, through the help of Immigration Canada. Not only was this fuelled by the notion of women's inherent ability to sew and construct garments, but also the industry's interest in hiring new immigrants as beginners and paying them low beginning wages. It is through these strategies that employers attempted to recruit and administer an efficient, low-cost, and orderly labour force.

Today, the work force of the Winnipeg garment industry largely consists of immigrant women who were either recruited from their home countries by the local industry and the Canadian government, or were driven to find work in this area due to having few other economic opportunities. While profiting from the low wages accepted by immigrant women workers, many companies are now closing their local garment factories to pursue cheaper labour cost overseas leaving their workers to try to find employment elsewhere. Despite working for many years in this industry, garment work typically offers few transferable working skills and opportunities for the development of English language skills, such that immigrant women in this industry are finding that they continue to have limited access to other areas of employment. In the 1980s, sector-specific labour adjustment assistance was available to garment workers, including pre-retirement and re-employment programs. However, today there are few resources and programs available to laid-off garment workers beyond those available to other immigrant workers in general. The lack of assistance for these workers is ironic given the Canadian government's involvement in encouraging many of these immigrant women to find employment in the local garment industry. As well, it is troubling to note that the government has provided many other forms of assistance such as subsidies and grants in support of the garment industry, and yet it fails to provide assistance programs for garment workers who are now losing their jobs.

### *Immigrant Women in the Winnipeg Garment Industry*

Immigrant women garment workers face many difficulties that not only push them into low-paying garment industry jobs, but often keep them there by providing few

other opportunities for training and employment. As immigrant women, most of the participants in this study came to Canada with hopeful expectations of improved living conditions and economic opportunity. However, many found the transition to Winnipeg rather difficult, and were compelled towards finding employment in the low-skill, low-pay area of the local garment industry, either through direct recruitment, or due to a lack of training in other fields, skill recognition, English skills, or awareness of alternative training and employment opportunities. Often, workers dealt with these structural constraints through the support of family and friends. This mobilization of social capital was used not only to gain assistance with the transition to Winnipeg, to learn about potential training opportunities, and find work within the garment industry, but also to immigrate to Canada in the first place through sponsorship programs.

As garment workers, average pay in the industry remains low, and long hours, job-related fatigue and eye and joint strain continue to be difficult aspects of this work. In addition, few research participants were able to advance within or between companies. Those who did experience some job mobility were either able to utilize their education and work experiences in garment construction in their home countries, or take advantage of beneficial social contacts within a particular company. While many workers in this study noted their enjoyment of work relationships and tasks, some also discussed discrimination and communication barriers with co-workers and supervisors. Most women interviewed for this study had noticed and were concerned about major layoffs at their companies in recent years.

In their position as women workers, research participants worked long hours at the garment factory and then found themselves spending many more hours on housework and childcare, two areas they were largely responsible for in their households. This double-day of work was often related to certain ideas about gender roles in the home, and some participants felt that they had little choice in the matter. Their responsibilities inside and outside of the home involve a great deal of time and energy, making it more difficult for these women to pursue training and explore job opportunities in other areas. In some cases, however, women were able to access additional support for housework and childcare from family and friends during particularly tiring or long workweeks.

Given the recent layoffs, eight of the fourteen women currently employed in the garment industry noted that their jobs were not completely secure, or said that they had no job security in their work at the garment factories. While some research participants strategically attempted to increase their pay or find more stable forms of work, many experienced major barriers to finding new forms of employment, including a lack of access and awareness of training programs for laid-off workers. Almost half (8 of 14) of those currently working in the industry felt that the WTO ATC had affected their jobs and the work of others in their factories, while most felt that the WTO agreement had affected the work of other garment workers and factories in Winnipeg. Views on the WTO decision were often shaped by one's position in the garment industry and time spent working in this area. Older workers with greater job security or those who had not worked in the industry for several years justified the WTO agreement, while others – mostly SMOs who are more vulnerable to the loss of manufacturing jobs – discussed the inequality of the situation. Overall, many interviewed for this study conveyed their frustration about the WTO phase-out of quotas and their concern about its negative effects on workers, especially new immigrants. They also shared their mixed feelings about the loss of jobs to overseas workers who in some cases live in the same countries in which Winnipeg garment workers once resided. Considered unfair and difficult for workers here, research participants felt it was positive for workers overseas to have work, but did note their concerns about overseas working conditions and the quality of the garments produced in other countries.

### *Structures and Strategies*

These research findings highlight the many structural barriers encountered by immigrant women. Their need to support themselves and their families in a context that provides few employment opportunities causes these women to find jobs in areas such as the garment industry, which tend to involve long hours, low pay, strenuous work activities, and little opportunity for advancement. Those interested in pursuing other jobs or training programs are constrained by their need to generate income through working many hours in the factory as well as their housework and childcare responsibilities in the

home, and the time and energy required for these activities. In this context, however, immigrant women garment workers employed strategies to deal with the challenges they encountered. This often involved the use of social networks of family and friends, who helped these women to immigrate and adapt to Canada, find work, advance in the workplace, and manage their household responsibilities. Thus, immigrant women tried to navigate the constraints and opportunities of the social structures in which they live through their practices in everyday life.

With the recent WTO phase-out of quotas, these women shared a sense of having little individual ability to change the large-scale structures and forces affecting them, including this WTO agreement and its impacts. As well, in this current context, efforts at collective action have been hindered by the loss of bargaining power experienced by unions representing garment workers. However, many workers in this study did have a grasp of the issues confronting them, and were aware of the WTO agreement itself and its current or impending effects on their lives and those of other workers. Mostly new immigrants shared their suggestions for the Canadian government on how to remedy the situation, while those who had worked in the garment industry longer were less optimistic about the potential to change the situation. Even though few thought they had the power to make changes on the scale of international agreements, most women strategized within their own realm of personal possibilities in an attempt to deal with the challenges facing them because of the WTO ATC and the decline of the industry. This involved the use of social networks for support, which was often an important resource in finding new jobs, working at more than one job, and becoming aware of and accessing training programs.

It is important to note the strategies of these workers not only to have a richer understanding of their experiences but also to see them not as passive victims of circumstance, but as real people interacting with the systems in which they live. This is not to deny the significant challenges that they face, but to take account of their acts of agency to demonstrate opportunities for change through people's everyday practices.

### *Issues of Globalization*

With the WTO ATC, there has been a rapid loss of jobs in the Winnipeg garment industry, especially for those working in the manufacturing area. Globalization characteristically involves the integration of national economies into a global capitalist free market system, and often takes place through national and international policy measures encouraging trade and economic liberalization. Clearly, the WTO phase-out of quotas on clothing and textiles through the ATC is an example of the spread of global capitalism whereby an international agreement has removed barriers to trade in this sector in an attempt to bring about increased liberalization and free market competition on a world-wide scale. Through this process, there has been an increase in the movement of Northern companies to countries overseas, especially to China, in the pursuit of lower labour costs since their operations are now less constrained by import quotas. Now, they encounter fewer restrictions in producing garments more cheaply in other countries and importing them into Northern nations like Canada.

Global processes involve activities in different localities. Agreements such as the WTO ATC and companies' decisions to shut down plants to relocate elsewhere take place in specific spaces and involve real people, as do the experiences of garment workers who face job losses and other challenges exacerbated by the WTO agreement. In the Winnipeg context, the liberalization of the garment industry through the WTO ATC has increased the power imbalance between the working class and factory owners in the garment industry, where owners are profiting from cheaper overseas labour and local garment workers are losing their livelihoods. In their need to find new jobs because of this international agreement and its related effects, many garment workers are forced once again to directly encounter structural barriers related to gender, ethnicity, and class that limit them to jobs in other low-pay, under-skilled areas. In fact, the logic of Winnipeg garment companies in hiring immigrant women workers is most evident in the current context where the low status of these women in Canadian society means that the massive layoffs of mostly immigrant women garment workers has been given little attention by the Canadian government and society-at-large.

## **Policy Implications**

The research findings of this study suggest the need for a number of policy initiatives regarding Winnipeg garment workers. The instability of the local garment industry and the high rate of worker layoffs suggest that initiatives to draw current and former garment workers into training programs for more stable areas of work are required. Currently, there are no specific programs for laid-off garment workers, and accessible training that considers women's work responsibilities inside and outside the home would greatly benefit these workers. As well, a pre-retirement program for those close to retirement would prevent older garment workers from having to find low-paying, menial jobs due to a lack of transferable skills from the garment industry, and allow them to retire instead. Few research participants were aware of training programs outside of ESL and most knew about and accessed training programs through family and friends. This raises the question of the effectiveness of official channels of communicating information related to training, including that of the government and local agencies in immigrant communities. More social workers able to speak the languages of immigrant workers could be useful in encouraging garment workers to find employment and training in other areas. As well, ESL classes should be offered at the workplaces of industries with high numbers of non-English speaking immigrants as a useful resource for these workers, considering the work and social barriers they face in not speaking an official language.

Immigration policy issues are also raised through this study. The provincial government continues to bring immigrant women to Winnipeg through the Provincial Nominee Program to work in the garment industry. Considering the uncertain future of the local garment industry, the continued recruitment of immigrants to work in this field is questionable. If immigrant workers are brought in to work in the garment industry as they have in the past and in some cases the present, it would seem that the government bears some responsibility to ensure they have access to stable, safe employment that offers a living wage. One important step in this direction would be to recognize the work and education credentials immigrants have obtained in their countries of origin, allowing them to work in the fields where they have previous training and experience. On a larger

scale, the Canadian government should consider following the examples set by the U.S. and E.U. in implementing safeguards against Chinese imports. This may provide some protection for manufacturers in the Canadian garment industry. However, considering that many industry members are already taking advantage of outsourcing in countries with cheaper labour, it is unlikely that safeguards will completely stop the flow of jobs to sites overseas. Still, a slow down in the loss of jobs would provide a useful opportunity to transition garment workers into other areas of work. Overall, there needs to be a change in how immigrant workers, especially immigrant women workers, are viewed and valued. Certain ideas about their skills and abilities, inside and outside the home, as well as the type of work appropriate and acceptable for them as new entrants to the Canadian labour force, need to be re-examined. Immigrant women garment workers face many barriers, which are directly related to their positions as immigrants, as women, and in many cases, as visible minorities. Thus, the deeper issues of class, gender and ethnicity are raised in the study of immigrant women in the garment industry, pointing to the need for further examination of these issues and how they play out in people's everyday lives.

### **Directions for Future Research**

My study points to a number of other research areas that deserve further examination. A consideration of immigration policies and trends in the next few years, including numbers and countries of origin, would bring insight into the Canadian government's vision of Canada, how immigrants fit into this vision, and how these ideas shape the economic prospects for immigrant women in this country. As well, in the years following this study, it would be valuable to follow-up on the employment areas garment workers said they would pursue, exploring where these workers did find other jobs and their views on how their new employment compares with garment work. An overview of the companies that continue to operate in Winnipeg, including their size, types of garments produced, and target markets, would reveal some of the longer-term impacts of the WTO removal of quotas on the local industry and the strategies some companies have employed to remain in Winnipeg.

Since many Winnipeg-based companies are subcontracting and relocating their factories overseas, it would be useful to study their operations in these other countries and compare garment workers' experiences with pay, work conditions and other factors with those of Winnipeg garment workers. This leads to questions about the work standards in other countries like China, how they can be improved and regulated on an international scale, and whether Northern-based companies with factories overseas should comply with the standards of the country in which they are manufacturing goods or those of the country in which their main offices are based.

A significant area of research that should be pursued is the examination of the WTO agreement on the garment industry and workers in other localities, especially those in countries like Bangladesh, which is expected to experience the greatest loss of production, and China, which is expected to gain the most in terms of production. Exploring how WTO decisions play out in these countries and affect the experiences of local workers would further our understanding of how global processes interact with local spaces and local people and how strategies are employed to navigate these changing contexts, all of which are central themes of my thesis research.



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## Appendix 1

### Letter to Community Organizations

Insert Date

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Kathryn Mossman, and I am currently a master's student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba. In conducting my thesis research, I will be exploring the experiences of immigrant women who have recently worked, or are working, in the manufacturing sector of the Winnipeg garment industry. Participants will be asked to share their experiences of coming to Canada, working in the garment industry, and balancing work and home life. They will also be asked for their views on the current decline of manufacturing in Winnipeg, how it has affected them and their co-workers, and where they may be looking for other job opportunities. The goal of this research is to examine the work and home life experiences of immigrant women garment workers in today's Winnipeg garment industry.

This study will involve in-depth interviews with 20-25 current or former garment workers, including those currently working in the garment industry, and those who have worked in this industry in the last five years. These interviews will be approximately one-hour in length, and if necessary, an interpreter will be found to help with the interview. Participation in this study will present no risk beyond what people face in day-to-day living. All attempts will be made to respect participants' privacy, and the confidentiality of all personal information will be maintained. Notes may be taken during the interview, and with the participant's full permission and consent, the interview will be recorded on an audio-tape and transcribed. Only I will have access to subjects' identity and the information gathered from these interviews.

In the recruitment of participants for this research project, it is my hope that your organization will consent to its use as a recruitment site. Forms of recruitment may include posting notices about the research project at your organization's work site, requesting staff recommendations of potential participants, or my own interactions with organization members. If this is agreeable to you, a signed letter outlining the forms of recruitment acceptable to your organization would be much appreciated, as well as necessary, before any recruitment activities at your community organization take place.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of this matter, and I look forward to hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me at (204) 474-2099, or

Sincerely,

Kathryn Mossman

(Please note: This research has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board, University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail [margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca)).

## Appendix 2

### Interview Schedule for Research Participants

#### A) Questions about coming to Canada:

1. What country are you originally from?
2. What made you decide to move to Canada? Were you recruited to work in the garment industry? Any other industry?
3. Through what process did you immigrate to Canada? (i.e., are you considered to be an independent or sponsored/family class immigrant?) Were there any immigration programs (ex: provincial nominee program) that helped you immigrate to Canada?
4. When did you first arrive in Canada? In Winnipeg?
5. Did any family members accompany you to Canada? Were any of your family members already living in Canada? Did you have any other friends or contacts in Canada?
6. How did you find the transition to living in Winnipeg? Easy? Difficult? Please explain your response.
7. What was your educational and work experience before coming to Canada? Were you able to work in your chosen field? Why or why not?
8. What kind of employment and training was available for you when you arrived in Winnipeg? From which organizations? Did you participate in this training?

#### B) Questions about working in the Winnipeg garment industry:

1. How and when did you first get involved with the Winnipeg garment industry?
2. Which garment companies have you worked for? What position and job responsibilities did you have at these companies? Which companies did you like working for the best/worst? Why?
3. a) Are you currently employed in the garment industry? (If the answer is no, go on to question #4). If yes, where, and what work do you do there? What do you like/dislike about your work? (ex: pay, hours, work conditions, work satisfaction, friendships with co-workers, opportunities for advancement, etc). Please explain.  
b) How many garment workers were employed at your company when you started working there? How many garment workers currently work at your company? Do you think there is a lot of job turnover?  
c) Have many workers lost their jobs at your company in the last few years? If so, why do you think that is?
4. If you are no longer employed in garment industry, where what was your last job in the garment industry? What did your job involve? How long did you work in this position? Why do you no longer work at this company as a garment worker?  
b) How many garment workers were employed at your company when you started working there? How many garment workers were employed at this company when you last worked there? Was there a lot of job turnover?  
c) In the last few years you worked at this company, were many garment workers losing their jobs? If so, why do you think that is?  
d) What did you like/dislike about working in the garment industry? (ex: pay, hours, work conditions, work satisfaction, friendships with co-workers, opportunities for advancement, etc).
5. How well do you know your co-workers or managers? Do you find it easy to communicate with them? Why or why not?

**C) Questions about balancing work and home life:**

1. How many people live in your household? What is their relationship to you?
2. Who is responsible for most of the housework and childcare in your household? If you are responsible for most of this, why do you think that is?
3. What household tasks are you responsible for? Approximately how much time do you spend on housework and/or childcare every week?
4. When do you usually find time to do your household tasks? (i.e., weekdays, weekends, before or after working in the paid workforce, etc.)
5. During busy or stressful periods of working in the garment industry, are there household members who will help you with housework and/or childcare? Are their members outside of your household who help you? Do you pay anyone to help with childcare or housework?
6. What do you like/dislike about the household tasks you do?
7. If you could, would you change the amount and/or type of household tasks you do? Why and how so?

**D) Questions about the impact of Winnipeg's declining garment industry:**

1. If still working in the Winnipeg garment industry, how secure do you feel about your future employment in the garment industry? How much longer do you expect to have work in this area?
2. If you are currently, or soon-to-be, no longer employed by the Winnipeg garment industry (or even if you are not worried about losing your job as a garment worker), would you consider looking for employment in another field? If so, where, and why would you be interested in working in this area?
3. Are you aware of any retraining opportunities/programs for garment workers looking for different jobs? For immigrant women in general?
4. Are there any barriers that might make finding a new job difficult? Please explain your response.
5. What can you tell me about the recent World Trade Organization's decision not to limit the amount of garments imported into Canada?
6. (After explaining WTO elimination of garment quotas) Do you think the elimination of quotas has affected your work and that of your co-workers in the garment industry?
7. What are your views and opinions on the removal of quotas and its impact on Winnipeg's garment industry?
8. A lot of garment manufacturing in Winnipeg is moving overseas because of the WTO's removal of textile quotas. How do you feel about the movement of these jobs overseas to garment workers overseas?

**E) Wrap-up**

1. Is there anything else you'd like to add to our discussion?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time!

Also:

1. Would you like a copy of your transcript?
2. Would you like access to the final thesis?
3. Do you know any other current or former workers who would be interested in participating in this study?
4. Do you have any suggestions on where I might be able to find more participants?

## Appendix 3

### Interpreter Confidentiality Form

**Research Project Title:**

Immigrant Women in the Winnipeg Garment Industry

**Researcher:**

Kathryn Mossman, Master's Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba

**Sponsors:**

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada Graduate Scholarship;  
Manitoba Graduate Scholarship.

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This confidentiality form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, represents your agreement to act as an interpreter for the interview conducted by Kathryn Mossman. It also acknowledges your agreement to keep confidential all personal information disclosed and issues discussed during the interview. By signing this form, you agree not to reveal any of the personal matters or details of the person being interviewed to anyone outside of the interview process. This form should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask me. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This research project will explore the experiences of immigrant women who have recently worked, or are working, in the manufacturing sector of the Winnipeg garment industry. Participants will be asked to share their experiences of coming to Canada, working in the garment industry, and balancing work and home life. They will also be asked for their views on the current decline of manufacturing in Winnipeg, how it has affected them and their co-workers, and where they may be looking for other job opportunities. The goal of this research is to examine the work and home life experiences of immigrant women garment workers in today's Winnipeg garment industry.

This study will involve in-depth interviews with a number of garment workers. These interviews will be approximately one-hour in length. Notes may be taken during the interview, and with the participant's full permission and consent, the interview will be recorded on an audio-tape and transcribed. As an interpreter, you will be asked to verbally translate the statements of both interviewer and interviewee into the different languages understood by the two parties. You will be asked to do this in a clear and precise way that captures the ideas and information stated as closely as possible to the original statements.

In acting as an interpreter in this study, it is imperative that you agree to maintain the confidentiality of all interview subjects by not disclosing personal details that could identify the participant to any person not directly participating in the interview.

Compensation for acting as an interpreter for this interview will be discussed before the interview takes place. If monetary compensation is preferred, the amount will be determined and agreed



upon before the interview. Otherwise, I will attempt to show my appreciation for your time and effort in assisting with this research project in other ways that I hope you find beneficial.

Contact Information: Kathryn Mossman, Master's Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. Telephone: (204) 474-2099. Email:  
Supervisor: Dr. Raymond Wiest, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. Tel: (204) 474-6328. Email: [wiest@cc.umanitoba.ca](mailto:wiest@cc.umanitoba.ca)

This research has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board, University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail [margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this confidentiality form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

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Interpreter's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4

### Consent Form for Research Participants

**Research Project Title:**

Immigrant Women in the Winnipeg Garment Industry

**Researcher:**

Kathryn Mossman, Master's Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba

**Sponsors:**

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada Graduate Scholarship;  
Manitoba Graduate Scholarship.

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This research project will explore of the experiences of immigrant women who have recently worked, or are working, in the manufacturing sector of the Winnipeg garment industry. Participants will be asked to share their experiences of coming to Canada, working in the garment industry, and balancing work and home life. You will also be asked for your views on the current decline of manufacturing in Winnipeg, how it has affected you and your co-workers, and where you may be looking for other job opportunities. The goal of this research is to examine the work and home life experiences of immigrant women garment workers in today's Winnipeg garment industry.

Your participation in this study will involve one in-depth interview where I will ask you to share your experiences and views on working in the Winnipeg garment industry. This interview will take place at a time and location that you find both comfortable and convenient, and will be approximately one-hour in length, depending on your schedule. If any follow-up information is needed from you after the interview, with your approval I would contact you personally.

Participation in this study will present no risk beyond what people face in day-to-day living. All attempts will be made to respect your privacy, and the confidentiality of all personal information will be maintained. Notes may be taken during the interview, and with your full permission and consent, the interview will be recorded on an audio-tape and transcribed.

If you consent, please initial the following statement:

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to have my interview recorded on an audio tape

Confidentiality and anonymity of your identity and personal details are guaranteed throughout this research. I will take a number of steps to ensure this. All interview transcripts and related research documents, including my thesis manuscript, will use pseudonyms and disguise personal information that could be used to identify participants in the study. The audio tapes used to record the interviews will be locked in a secure location, and each tape will be destroyed after being transcribed. The issues discussed in documents resulting from these interviews will mostly be

written in general terms, and any bibliographic statements expressed will not reveal anyone's identity. All attempts will be made to prevent unintentional or inadvertent breaches of participant confidentiality and anonymity. As a result, only I, Kathryn Mossman, will have access to your identity and the information gathered from your interview. Please note that you may retract or give special instructions for any piece of personal information at any point before the first draft of my thesis, which is to be completed by May 30, 2006. You also have the right to withdraw from this study at any time up until this date.

Your input and views on the direction of my research project are valuable to me. If so desired, I will be happy to provide you with a copy of your interview transcript and listen to feedback you may have, including clarification, comments, or questions about the interview or research in general. If you are interested, I will also ensure that you have access to my thesis manuscript once it is finalized.

There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this study, although personal expenses such as transportation costs directly associated with the interview may be reimbursed. I will attempt to show my appreciation for your time and effort in participating in this research project in other ways that I hope you find beneficial.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Contact Information: Kathryn Mossman, Master's Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. Telephone: (204) 474-2099. Email  
Supervisor: Dr. Raymond Wiest, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. Tel: (204) 474-6328. Email: [wiest@cc.umanitoba.ca](mailto:wiest@cc.umanitoba.ca)

This research has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board, University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail [margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

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Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_