

The Winnipeg Garment Industry: Industry Development and Employment

**A report for the
Manitoba Research Alliance
on Community Economic Development
in the New Economy**

Project #4
*Assessment of the Impact of New Technologies on
Composition of the Labour Force in the
Garment Industry in Manitoba*

Raymond Wiest, Editor

November 2005

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Research Team

Manitoba Research Alliance, Project #4

Raymond Wiest, PhD, Professor of Anthropology, University of Manitoba (team leader)

Cory Willmott, PhD, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Manitoba;
currently Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL (sub-team leader)

Leigh Hayden, BA, MA, Anthropology, University of Manitoba

Erin Jonasson, BA, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba

Amena Khatun, MA, Gender & Development, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok

Temperance McDonald, BHE—Clothing and Textiles, University of Manitoba

Kate Mossman, BA Advanced, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba

Aaron Pettman, BA Advanced, Global Political Economy, University of Manitoba

Sara Stephens, BA, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba

Sara Komarnisky, B Com, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba

Asfia Gulrukh Kamal, BA, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba

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Raymond Wiest

November 2005

Introduction to the Winnipeg Garment Industry Study: Objectives, Methods, and Training

Raymond Wiest and Kathryn Mossman

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This case study of the garment industry and fashion industry in Manitoba approaches two issues: 1) labour availability, recruitment and treatment; and 2) labour implications of technological innovation in the industry. The study documents and assesses structural and technological changes in the industry and impacts of these changes on the composition of the labour force. Composition of the labour force in this study involves identification of the gender, ethnic and class character of the industry.

Building upon the garment industry's impact on labour, the study also explores existing and potential relationships to Community Economic Development (CED) in line with the larger project to which this study relates.¹ Initially seeing a disjuncture between the garment industry and CED, the research team modified its objectives to include attractive and promising Aboriginal fashion initiatives. This decision added significant

¹ This project is Project #4 of the Manitoba Research Alliance on Community Economic Development in the New Economy. Project #4 is titled "Assessment of the Impact of New Technologies on Composition of the Labour Force in the Garment Industry in Manitoba". The team leader and entire Project #4 team are pleased to acknowledge the generous financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, grant #538-2002-1003, via the Manitoba Research Alliance on Community Economic Development in the New Economy.

complexity and breadth, but also provided opportunity for informative and provocative theorizing.

The project explores labour implications of new information technology introduced into the industry. By examining and questioning the background to heavy reliance on offshore labour recruitment, the project explores relations with and predispositions within industry and government regarding potential labour living in the vicinity. In the context of an underemployed inner city population, the objective was to investigate garment industry labour recruitment practices in Winnipeg, current skill requirements and skill training, and labour relations in the industry. The garment industry in Winnipeg, as elsewhere in North America, has been built upon immigrant labour. Until recently there has been an active engagement by the industry in offshore labour recruitment that has involved governmental support for special immigration policies designed to attract investment and a competitive edge for the industry. In many areas of the world (e.g., see Ross 1997), and to some extent in Winnipeg, this has translated into wage concessions and work conditions generally not tolerated by workers who are not legally constrained by temporary worker agreements, and these labour conditions have contributed to profit margins deemed essential by the industry to remain competitive. In Canada, both federal and provincial governments have made concessions and considerable investments in order to hold and expand the industry, generally with the argument and defence that a local industry, well-known for its special products and for its innovation, has generated and maintained important research and development investment and local employment. In recent years, however, new job creation in this industry has been linked systemically and systematically to outsourcing opportunities which are designed to address rising labour costs and the gradual phase-out, and January 2005 discontinuation, of protection under the MFA (Multi-Fibre Agreement). Hence, labour recruitment abroad has slowed down, although the local industry continues its heavy reliance on immigrant labour, the reasons for which we hope to make clear in this collection of essays. One of the principal questions addressed in the research is the relation between immigrant labour and under- and unemployed inner city residents, particularly those of First Nation origin, and the connection to the garment and fashion industry of Manitoba.

To broaden upon comparisons based in the literature and some of our own research, we explored industry engagement in CED approaches, the assumptions about people and work, about labour recruitment policy and practice, and about sense of community participation. This led to a closer examination of the ready-made garment industry in the context of the new economy and introduction of information technology—ranging from global integration of fashion design, production decisions, inventory monitoring, and production and delivery information processing on the one hand, to technological innovations designed to improve quality control as well as reduce labour costs, e.g., computerized fabric-cutting technology. The project put a challenge to CED to address the problem of an industry predicated upon an “entrapped” labour force. What kinds of incentives can be brought to government and industry to integrate and build upon a local labour force, and not continue to rely on an imported labour force encumbered by constraints on its social and economic mobility?

While the industry in North America has moved more and more to “home-work” (sewing done in the sewing machine operator’s own home) to avoid increasing labour costs associated with unionized labour, the Winnipeg ready-made garment industry (RMG) has continued with the on-site factory production model. It used to be argued that this was because of Winnipeg’s emphasis on winter garments that necessitate heavy duty equipment. However, most Winnipeg-based RMG production does not demand such heavy equipment, so other reasons for continuation of on-site factory production were explored. Another factor is the clearly established impediment to labour solidarity that arises from disinterest among temporary immigrant labour in labour union activity, or to interference among those who may be interested. In light of recent plant closures, how long the local industry will continue its consolidated site production is a question posed by the project.

The project also explores the historical involvement of governments. One explicit example is the 1999 announcement of the establishment of a Winnipeg-based \$8.6 million International Fashion Technology Centre (IFTC), to be funded by the local

industry, and the federal and provincial governments.² However, plans for this new facility were rejected and cancelled by the Doer government in Manitoba in 2002.³

In sum, this project was designed to contribute a case study of the garment industry to the larger project—including New Economy and IT initiatives in some sectors of the industry—in relation to a potential Winnipeg inner city labour force. Explicitly, the project explores labour implications of new information technology introduced into the industry. By examining and questioning the background to heavy reliance on offshore labour recruitment, the project probes industry relations with potential labour living in the vicinity, as well as predispositions (beliefs and attitudes) within industry and government regarding such potential labour pools. To research these issues we endeavoured to work with current garment workers, potential labourers living in the vicinity of plants, the employing sector, and policy-making government agencies.

The project builds upon earlier work on the Winnipeg garment industry (e.g., Ghorayshi 1990; Golz *et al.* 1991; Lepp *et al.* 1987), upon the work of Ng (1986; 1990; 1998) and others in the Canadian context, including Wiest's participation in a proposal to study the garment industry in four Canadian cities (Ng *et al.* 2001; Migliardi and Wiest 2001); upon Wiest, Khatun, and Mohiuddin (2003) and Wiest and Mohiuddin (2003) based on a recently completed project among garment workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh; and upon a select global literature on the garment industry (e.g., Bonacich *et al.* 1994; 2000; Ong 1987; Rath 2001; Ross 1997).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WINNIPEG GARMENT INDUSTRY

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, the first clothing factory in Manitoba was the Winnipeg Shirt and Overall Company, which was

² Nygard International. 1999. Garment Firms Hail Significance of New Facility. Retrieved August 29, 2005 from the World Wide Web: http://www3.nygard.com/corporate/garment_firms_hail_significanc.html.

³ CBC. 2002. Politics Blamed for Demise of Fashion Centre. Retrieved October 3, 2003 from the World Wide Web: http://winnipeg.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=mb_fashioncentre020711.

established in 1899 (Ghorayshi 1990: 274, 290). Historically, this industry produced work clothes for railway and farm workers as well as military uniforms (Ghorayshi 1990:274). Eventually, however, the Winnipeg garment industry became best known for manufacturing outerwear, sportswear, work wear and jeans (Ghorayshi 1990:274). Largely involved in the production of standardized garments, this industry flourished early on, resulting in 129 companies by 1943 (Ghorayshi 1990:274).

This industry has long provided jobs for new immigrants. Ghorayshi 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” (1990:275). Indeed, in the 1920s and 30s, 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 led 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.* 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” (1987:150). 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.* 1987:150). Lepp *et al.* 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” (Lepp *et al.* 1987:156).

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 (Lepp *et al.* 1987:157). Thus, between the year of 1966 and 1970, numerous trips were made to Italy and Philippines, bringing in a total of 700 workers, most of which were single women, all

of which were skilled (Lepp *et al.* 1987:158). This trend of recruiting workers from overseas continued into the 1970s. Lepp *et al.* note that, “After 1978, at least 26 percent of the three thousand workers added to the industry were overseas recruits” (1987:161).

In the 1980s, the workforce continued to be made up of women, most of whom were immigrants. According to Ghorayshi, 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 (Ghorayshi 1990: 278, 282). 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 had shifted. Instead of mainly coming from Eastern Europe as they had in the 1920s and 30s, by the 1980s, 60 percent of garment workers at this time came from South Asian countries, such as India, China, Vietnam, Pakistan and the Philippines, as well as a few of Aboriginal background (Ghorayshi 1990:281).

During the 1990s, the garment industry prospered in Manitoba, and it continued to rely on immigrant labour. In 1996, Hilf reported that apparel manufacturing was the second largest industry in Manitoba, with 115 companies employing 9000 workers, 87 percent of which were visible minority labourers (Hilf 1996:16).

Recent Trends

While overseas competition due to the low wages and government subsidies available in a number of less developed countries has already had an impact on the Winnipeg garment industry, 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, which had allowed for the application of quantitative restrictions on the import of certain textile and clothing products by the importing country, was replaced by the WTO’s Agreement on Textiles and Clothing

(ACT).⁴ For the period from 1995 to the end of 2004, the ACT set out the transitional process for the ultimate elimination of these quotas, which took place on January 1, 2005.⁵ This has heavily impacted industrialized countries like Canada that had used the quotas to protect their manufacturers from having the domestic market flooded by cheaper goods from developing countries.

Leading up to the tariff and quota reductions, a number of Winnipeg garment companies shut down local plants and laid off many of their workers, often to relocate overseas and take advantage of lower wages in places like Guatemala, Mexico, Bangladesh and China.⁶ For example, in 2002, Western Glove Works, a large and well-known garment company in Winnipeg, had 1,200 employees.⁷ However, by 2004, this number was reduced to 700 workers after the company closed down two of its three plants in 2003, with the expectation that there would be only 250 workers by January 2005.⁸ As well, in April 2003, another large Winnipeg garment company, Gemini Outwear Ltd., closed its domestic garment manufacturing operations in favour of using its offshore production facilities located in Bangalore, India and a number of other Asian cities.⁹ Indeed, the elimination of quotas has led to decreased local production, resulting in the December 2004 closure of a major training centre for sewing machine operators

⁴ World Trade Organization. 2005. Textiles Monitoring Body (TMB): The Agreement on Textiles and Clothing. World Trade Organization. Retrieved August 1, 2005 from the World Wide Web: http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/textile/textintro_e.htm.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. 2004. Labour Market Bulletin-Winnipeg, October, 2004. Retrieved August 1, 2005 from the World Wide Web: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/mb/lmiquarter4_04/wpg10.shtml&hs=mb0.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Human Resources Development Canada. 2003a. Labour Market Bulletin-Winnipeg, March 2003. Retrieved November 6, 2003 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.mb.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/lmi/03-q1/wpg0303.shtml#MAN>. Human Resources Development Canada. 2003c. Labour Market Bulletin-Winnipeg, September 2003. Retrieved November 3, 2003 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.mb.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/lmi/current/winnipeg.shtml#manufacturing>. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. 2004. Labour Market Bulletin-Winnipeg, October, 2004. Retrieved August 1, 2005 from the World Wide Web: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/mb/lmiquarter4_04/wpg10.shtml&hs=mb0.

⁹ Human Resources Development Canada. 2003b. Labour Market Bulletin-Winnipeg, April 2003. Retrieved November 6, 2003 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.mb.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/lmi/03-q2/wpg0403.shtml#MAN>. See also "Local production ends at Gemini: Global-trade changes prompt offshore focus" by Martin Cash, *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 10, 2003: B4-B5.

(SMOs) offered by Manitoba Fashion Institute, an industry association, and the eventual termination of the organization itself.¹⁰

The loss of jobs for garment workers in Winnipeg has been drastic. In 2004, there were 5000 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.¹¹ However, the estimated employment of SMOs in 2005 is 2,965 positions, with the long term trend being that work in garment manufacturing will move offshore.¹² This corresponds with Social Development Canada's report that the gradual shift to the worldwide removal of quotas has resulted in the elimination of over 2000 jobs in Winnipeg (2004). The influences of the past are still present in the composition of today's workforce, however, as 94 percent of SMOs are women, and 70 percent are visible minorities, with low average earnings of \$21,000 per year.¹³ As a result, it will be largely 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 in Winnipeg originally left to find work here.

RESEARCH METHODS

This project is based in an anthropological approach to research, and is the cooperative product of a research team made up largely of anthropologists. In the study, a political economy approach informs the relationship between components of this study—industry, labour, government, and community—in the assessment of industry characteristics, organizational changes, and impacts of new technology. Specifically, our

¹⁰ Social Development Canada. 2004. Labour Market Bulletin-Winnipeg, December 2004: Manufacturing. Retrieved August 1, 2005 from the World Wide Web: http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/mb/lmiquarter4_04/wpg12.shtml.

¹¹ Manitoba Fashion Institute. 2004. About the Manitoba Apparel Industry. Retrieved January 6, 2004 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.apparel-Manitoba.org/mfi/About.aspx>.

¹² Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education & Training. 2005. Manitoba Job Futures: Sewing Machine Operators (NOC 9451). Retrieved August 1, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://mb.jobfutures.org/profiles/profile.cfm?noc=9451&lang=en&site=txt>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

examination of the labour force is carried out with awareness of power differentials based in gender, ethnicity and class differences marking the industry.

An anthropological research methodology typically involves a range of procedures to approach a variety of constituencies and sources. In this study the procedures include compilation and examination of media reports, industry documents and government documents; selected interviews with industry management and spokespersons; workplace observations in selected plants; tours and explanations of industry technology, including assessments of ergonomic features, productivity, and efficiency; interviews with fashion designers; interviews with personnel associated with training of sewing machine operators as well as designers; interviews with labour union personnel; interviews with garment workers (generally outside the workplace to avoid conflicts with on-the-job responsibilities); interviews with government officials responsible for labour and economic development in this area; interviews with inner city un- or underemployed residents, and inner city community spokespersons; and discussions with community participants in CED regarding strategies for modifying the employment and work practices in the industry.

Interviews with managerial staff, government officials, training personnel, fashion designers and small-scale entrepreneurial producers were for the most part structured, yet informal, i.e., based on questions set in advance, with the interviewer encouraging open-ended response to general questions. Interviews with garment workers were more informal, and also more in-depth in character to capture employment histories and experiences; perceptions of job, workplace, and working conditions; expressions of domestic responsibilities and societal supports; and perceptions of employment futures and options.

The selection of garment workers for interview was initiated through contacts with known employees of the garment industry and with labour union personnel; subsequent selection utilized network connections and referrals of previously interviewed garment workers and plant employees. Efforts were made to interview workers of varying ethnic and/or national background, but attention to gender was overshadowed by the preponderance of women as sewing machine operators and limited time to carry out interviews with workers. Consequently, examination of labour in this project focuses

mostly on sewing machine operators (SMOs), although attention is given both to SMOs in industrial plants as well as small-scale operations. Interviews were conducted with employees in different plants, but mostly with SMOs. Several interviews with union personnel and managerial staff offered views on different positions within the industry, both within the same plant and across different plants. Although limited in number and scope, these interviews provided the project with some comparative views on garment industry employment, including working conditions, job security, position promotion, and ethnic relations within the immigrant workforce.¹⁴

Initially our objective was to give considerable attention to residential location in order to gain some understanding of the involvement of inner city residents. An explicit attempt was made to address Aboriginals in the garment industry workforce, but the team had little success in locating Aboriginal SMOs currently employed, in part because of legal restrictions on industry and government agency disclosure of personal information. At one point in the project the team prepared a poster to solicit participants in focus group discussion, but this announcement received only one reply, and attempts to follow up this single reply were unsuccessful. The team was able to obtain only general information about the Aboriginal workforce in the industry through interviews with training organizations and plant supervisory personnel.

Data Management and Processing, and Data Limitations

Documents (including Internet sources) and media reports were assembled, catalogued, and stored in a single file drawer accessible to research team members. These documents and reports were accessed and analyzed by team members in relation to their responsibilities in the project, although one team member (Kathryn Mossman) began in the project with primary responsibility to oversee, examine, and abstract selected documents, building upon and adding to a base set of materials previously abstracted (Migliardi and Wiest 2001).

¹⁴ Interim Report on Interviews with Winnipeg Garment Workers, January 25, 2004, by Amena Khatun. Ten informants were drawn from six different Winnipeg factories and interviewed in thirty sessions. All of these informants are landed immigrants from developing countries who had gained experience in garment work in their home countries. See selection 6, *Worker Views on Changes in the Winnipeg Garment Industry: In-depth Interviews with Ten Immigrant Garment Workers* by Amena Khatun, this volume.

Tape recorded interviews were transcribed and made available to team members for analysis and incorporation into the research objectives of each team member. With an explicit commitment to maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of interviewed participants, the project safeguards confidentiality and anonymity in the presentation of research findings by eliminating use of identifying names, or through assignment of pseudonyms, except for reference to publicly recognized individuals (e.g., plant owners and/or spokespersons for public organizations) already identified in the media and in the public domain.

Interview data are more limited than expected. With an original plan to interview between twenty or thirty garment workers, we had to settle for ten in-depth interviews with SMOs conducted in the first phase of the project,¹⁵ and several additional interviews in the last phase of the project. Participating student team members were limited in the amount of time they could spend on the project because of academic responsibilities, and our principal interviewer of garment workers faced health and family matters that severely curtailed mobility and scheduling flexibility necessary to achieve our original objective. However, another project objective—training—compensates for some of the drawbacks faced in the collection of original data.

TRAINING AS PART OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

Training

Developed and coordinated by Raymond Wiest, this project was designed to offer training for student and community participants as well as to provide data and analytic insights into the impact of technological and structural changes in the garment industry on the composition of the labour force. The project was begun in mid summer 2003 with one undergraduate participant, later to become a graduate student in the MA program of Anthropology (Kathryn Mossman), two MA graduate students (Erin Jonasson and Leigh Hayden), and one MA graduate with garment industry interviewing experience in Bangladesh (Amena Khatun). In spring 2004 the team was expanded to include another

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

professor with research experience focused on textiles and Aboriginal fashion design (Cory Willmott), two Aboriginal community members (Aaron Pettman, Advanced BA in Global Political Economy, and Temperance McDonald, BA in Clothing and Textiles). During the summer of 2005 the team added three additional MA graduate students, one with community economic development interests (Sara Stephens), and two others (Sara Komarnisky and Asfia Gulrukh Kamal) who would assist in specialized interviewing to gain interviewing experience and assist with reaching data collection closure on the project.

After team discussions on interviewing techniques and styles, live interviewing opportunities offered students a chance to discover the complexities of introducing project objectives and making participants comfortable with the process. A student with interviewing experience always accompanied students without prior interviewing experience. Pairs of interviewers conducted a number of the interviews, and notes were prepared by each individual interviewer to compare and generate a composite set of interview notes.

Telephone interviews were conducted with some government personnel and with several prominent fashion designers. Most of these interviews were tape-recorded.

Tape-recorded interviews (with participant consent) gave student team members experience with transcription of interviews. They gained an appreciation for the amount of time transcription can take, especially when they had to use the original tape recorder as a playback device because dedicated transcription devices were limited to short-term access. Transcription of interviews provided a valuable learning process, highlighting for each interviewer their positive, as well as distracting, mannerisms and expressions. In general, although very time-consuming, tape-recorded and transcribed interviews offered an excellent opportunity to challenge and improve interviewing styles and habits.

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS, AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

Research team contributions

Raymond E. Wiest (PhD, Professor of Anthropology, University of Manitoba) developed the project based in prior work on a garment industry project in Bangladesh and involvement with a four-city project proposal directed by Roxana Ng (OISE, University of Toronto). As overall team coordinator and project supervisor, he carried responsibility to oversee training and organize and oversee the production of project reports, including assembly and editing of the set of selections in this compilation.

Cory Willmott (PhD, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Manitoba; currently Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville) was invited to join the project in the second year because of her interest in, and research experience with, Aboriginal fashion design, her interest in economic development models, and her strengths in theory. Cory contributed to interview training and research methodology, to the integration into the project of Aboriginal fashion design and small-scale production initiatives, and to the critical assessment of CED initiatives in relation to a changing Winnipeg garment industry.

Leigh Hayden (BA, MA, Anthropology, University of Manitoba) participated from the beginning of the project with a clear vision of focusing on technology and technological changes in the garment industry. She conducted interviews with training personnel, with plant managers and union personnel, and assisted in the focus group discussion initiative. Having gained prior interviewing experience, Leigh assisted other team members with interviews. She organized and carried out several plant tours, some of them together other team members. Her participation was limited by her entry into a doctoral program at McMaster University. Leigh's report focuses on technology in the industry.

Erin Jonasson (BA, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba) participated in the project from the beginning to gain interviewing experience and to assist the project coordinator in review of literature. Her participation was limited by her own MA thesis research in Mexico. Erin's report addresses global changes in the garment industry and the implications of alternative visions of the participation in garment production.

Asfia Gulrukh Kamal (BA, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba) joined the project in the last few months to broaden her interviewing experience, and to assist the coordinator in a comparative analysis of garment industry employment.

Amena Khatun (MA, Gender & Development, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok) participated over the first year of the project. Bringing considerable experience with garment workers in the Bangladesh garment industry, and a period of participation in a Bangladesh project supervised by the coordinator, Amena focused on interviews with Winnipeg garment workers. Her participation was interrupted by health and family considerations, and unanticipated return to Bangladesh interfered with timely submission of a final report. Amena's interim report¹⁶ is the basis for many of our project observations on women garment workers. An edited version of her final report is included in this volume.

Sara Komarnisky (B Com, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba) joined the project voluntarily for a short while in the last few months to gain interviewing experience prior to her own MA thesis research project in Alaska. Sara also contributed two interviews to the project with Nokomis Clothing in Edmonton.¹⁷

Temperance McDonald (BHE, Clothing & Textiles, University of Manitoba) joined the project to assist Cory Willmott with interviews among fashion designers. As a student of fashion, and a member of the Aboriginal community, Temperance offered the team perspective on many of its research questions. Temperance also participated with other team members in carrying out several key interviews.

Kathryn Mossman (BA Advanced, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba) participated in the project from its inception to the end, and decided to continue her work in the area for her MA thesis research. Interested in both CED and immigrant labour, Kathryn assisted the coordinator organizationally and conceptually. She regularly participated in meetings as well as student conferences of the Manitoba Research Alliance. Kathryn contributes a selection on training of labour for this report,

¹⁶ Interim Report on Interviews with Winnipeg Garment Workers, January 25, 2004, by Amena Khatun. See selection 6, *Worker Views on Changes in the Winnipeg Garment Industry: In-depth Interviews with Ten Immigrant Garment Workers* by Amena Khatun, this volume.

¹⁷ See www.nokomisclothing.ca.

and joins Sara Stephens in a critical assessment of varying perspectives, biases and beliefs regarding the garment industry. Kathryn also joins the project coordinator in this Introduction through her preparation of the overview of the Winnipeg garment industry.

Aaron Pettman (BA Advanced, Global Political Economy, University of Manitoba) joined the project as a student participant in the second year of the project as he was completing his BA Advanced degree. Upon graduation, Aaron continued on the project as a community participant of Aboriginal background. His research focus was on government programs relating to the garment industry, but he also assisted Cory Willmott in her research on Aboriginal fashion and the project team in general through efforts to locate Aboriginal workers in the industry. After a sojourn in Japan, Aaron returned to continue research on governmental programs, which is the focus on his selection in this report.

Sara Stephens (BA, MA Student in Anthropology, University of Manitoba) joined the project voluntarily for a short while in the last few months to gain interviewing experience prior to her own MA thesis research project. The project proved especially interesting, offering important contacts for her own research plans, and the coordinator recruited her to pull together several important areas of research in the last months of the project. Sara contributes a selection on labour recruitment strategies and joins Kathryn Mossman in a critical assessment of varying perspectives, biases and beliefs regarding the garment industry.

Organization of the Report

This compilation consists of separately authored selections that reflect the research foci of each of the team member. Selection 1 (Wiest and Mossman) provides an introduction to the report, with attention to project objectives, methods and training, as well as a brief overview of the garment industry in Winnipeg. Selection 2 (Pettman) addresses government programs in relation to the garment industry, with particular attention to labour recruitment, immigration policy, training, and industry subsidies. Selection 3 (Hayden) covers technology and technological change in the industry, with special reference to labour implications. Selection 4 (Stephens) discusses labour recruitment strategies. Selection 5 (Mossman) addresses the training of labour in the

garment industry. Selection 6 (Khatun) offers probing observations of the Winnipeg garment industry based on experiences of ten immigrant garment workers that are conveyed through in-depth interviews and discussion sessions. Selection 7 (Stephens and Mossman) draws upon research participant narratives to offer insights into the biases and beliefs that are an integral part of perspectives on the garment industry. Selection 8 (Jonasson) addresses some of the implications of a globalizing industry, and probes the implications of alternative visions of productive organization. Selection 9 (Willmott) probes this theme further to theorize on alternative visions of economic development. Selection 10 (Wiest) is a review of the major findings of the project, and a discussion of select implications.

Although each of the selections stands as a relatively independent piece, the respective selections are intended to contribute to the whole in complementary fashion.

Citations in this report are separated into 1) bibliographic references that are cited in the text and listed at the end of the volume as References Cited, and 2) footnotes that list newspaper citations and World Wide Web sources, and that acknowledge interview sources and other personal notations.

Government Programs and the Garment Industry

Aaron Pettman

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a brief description of recent government involvement in the Manitoba garment industry. The report is the result of information gathered from a variety of sources, including interviews and literature, over the period spring 2004-summer 2005. Government involvement in the industry can range from direct grants and various subsidies under specific programs, to broader, indirect activities such as its roles in shaping the overall macro-context in which the industry operates. The report focuses largely on involvement of the Provincial government due to limitations of scope. For example, the role of the Federal government—in international trade and currency policy, and the negotiation of international agreements—for the most part is beyond the scope of this report. However, the recent Federal-level “Canadian Apparel and Textile Industry Program” (CATIP) is directly referred to in this report. The report focuses on what has been one of the central aspects of government involvement in the industry—labour training and recruitment. Two other technology-focused initiatives, the defunct International Fashion Technology Centre and the current Federal level CATIP program, are also described. The report concludes that a pattern is observable of more pronounced government support for the industry occurring in the mid and late-1990s.

Macro Issues

The Maquila Solidarity Network has provided a good overview of the macro-level dynamics beyond this report’s scope. The Network’s 1999 study (Yanz *et al.* 1999) describes that fundamental restructuring of the industry has occurred with the elimination

of protections for the industry through the Canada/US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1989, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, and the gradual lowering of tariffs and phasing out of quotas at the international level through the WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC), which resulted in the phasing out of apparel quotas under the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) in 2005. The lowering of tariffs on imported textile inputs used by the Canadian apparel industry is also an example of a macro-level issue beyond this paper's scope. Reducing costs by lowering these tariffs has been an ongoing goal of the industry, as demonstrated by Peter Nygård in 1992, when he publicly voiced concerns about the survival of Winnipeg's clothing industry under NAFTA and advocated reducing these tariffs in order to make the industry more competitive.¹ This issue of "tariff relief" has recently become an aspect of the Federal government response to changes in the industry through the Canadian Apparel and Textile Industry Program (CATIP).

One interviewee commented that there have been three international-level agreements that have "broad sided" the Winnipeg garment industry, and noted that these are to large extent beyond the reach of the Provincial government.² The agreements are the NAFTA, the LDC ("Least Developed Countries") initiative and the WTO-ATC quota removal in 2005. Canada was committed to the LDC initiative in 2003 by then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, and this involved the immediate elimination of quotas and tariffs for the Least Developed Countries' garment exports. "Developing Country" quotas were subsequently removed on January 1st, 2005, and tariff reduction continues until 2010. These agreements are widely seen as creating a system of global competition and contributing to the offshoring of production, ultimately resulting in the shedding of garment production positions in high-wage jurisdictions.

Currency value is another largely macro-level issue which has impacted the Winnipeg garment industry, but is beyond this paper's scope. The increase in value of the Canadian dollar relative to the American dollar has recently had great effect upon exporters. A Federal-level issue involving the Bank of Canada and interest rate spreads

¹ "Canadians to Become Fashion Victims", *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 11, 1992: D32.

² Interview: July 19, 2004.

between Canada and the U.S., this increase has had a great effect on the garment industry³ since the U.S. is by far its most important export market. Interest rates and monetary policy are beyond the scope of this report, however.

Manitoba

With reference to Manitoba's garment industry, Ghorayshi (1990:280) asserted 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". Ghorayshi described programs that encouraged (or subsidized) technological changes, training programs that offered substantial subsidies and immigration policies that encouraged the import of cheap immigrant labour. She stated that the Manitoba Fashion Institute (industry association) had been heavily subsidized by the government, and mentioned that the industry had benefited from lucrative government contracts.

Ghorayshi's assertions and descriptions have been to some extent reflected in the evidence gathered here. In the present, for example, CATIP has provided contributions to Winnipeg garment companies for technological upgrades. Training programs in the industry have enjoyed substantial government contributions and support, and government contracts continue to be lucrative for the industry with Winnipeg companies recently securing contracts with the military and RCMP.⁴ However, the current Provincial government's "Action Strategy for Economic Growth"⁵ does not emphasize the garment industry, and it is unlikely that the current government views this generally low-wage industry as a high priority. As well, under this government immigration policy has focused on higher-skilled immigrants, and the garment industry is generally held to be an entry-level industry. The garment industry is seen to be a "traditional" industry, and not on the cutting edge like biotech or IT, although some aspects of the industry are recognized to be increasingly making use of new technologies.

³ CBC, *The Current*, December 15, 2004.

⁴ Winnipeg Labour Market Bulletins (Government of Canada): January 2004, May 2004. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/mb/LMBulletins/wpgbulletin.shtml> (June 14, 2005).

⁵ *Manitoba's Action Strategy for Economic Growth* (Government of Manitoba, March 2005). http://www.gov.mb.ca/economic_strategy/ (June 14, 2005).

One of the main aspects of government involvement in the garment industry has been support for training. One interviewee noted that the NDP government in Manitoba has traditionally been very “pro-training”, and this has resulted in a strong “training culture” surrounding the industry.⁶ Provincially and Federally supported training in the Manitoba garment industry has occurred primarily through the Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI), although partnerships have taken place at the individual company level.⁷

LABOUR RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING, MFI, IFTC, AND CATIP

Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI)

In January 2005 MFI closed its office on Bannatyne Avenue, including its training centre and newly formed business incubator. Due to changes in the industry, it was concluded that the existing reduced workforce could handle the work that is available in the city, and there was no longer a need for the training centre.⁸ One interviewee commented that the Provincial government had contributed probably close to \$2 million to the MFI’s training program since 1992 when it began offering support.⁹ The Provincial government, with Federal partnership, provided annual funding through the Department of Education and Training’s Industry Training Partnerships (ITP). Despite offshoring of production and subsequent shedding of SMOs (sewing machine operators), there was a perceived need to support the training program, until this January. During the late 1990s, annual Provincial/Federal contributions to the training centre peaked at the \$400,000-\$500,000 range.¹⁰

The 8-week sewing machine operator (SMO) program previously housed at the MFI’s Bannatyne training centre provided factory floor training as well as ESL instruction. MFI describes that its “Production Floor Training” included entry-level

⁶ Interview: October 31, 2003.

⁷ Interview: May 31, 2005.

⁸ Winnipeg Labour Market Bulletins (Government of Canada): December 2004. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/mb/LMBulletins/wpgbulletin.shtml> (June 14, 2005).

⁹ Interview: July 19, 2004.

¹⁰ Interview: May 31, 2005.

sewing machine operation as well as supervisory and technical training, among others.¹¹ Government support for this training was justified by the argument that SMO training was a good program to integrate disadvantaged groups such as inner-city populations, new immigrants, Aboriginal people, etc. into the labour force for the first time.¹² Continued government support in light of the shedding of SMOs was based on the premise that the skills acquired in the program allowed graduates to progress into other industries such as hospitality (i.e. acquired language skills). The garment industry has been seen as an employer of disadvantaged groups, and there was perceived need for SMO training as recently as 2004. In general, the garment sector is perceived as a relatively large and important industry in Manitoba, and, while it may not be on the “cutting edge”, it is seen as an industry the government would want to be involved with.¹³

MFI had also recently entered the area of small garment business support in response to macro-level changes and new technologies in the industry. In response to the issue of global competition the industry was perceived as needing to transform itself away from mass production and towards design, marketing, and niche production. This included the concomitant need for a facility providing new technology utilization and instruction. MFI launched the “Manitoba Fashion Business Incubator” in October 2003, described as an “entrepreneurial development program”.¹⁴ MFI reportedly received \$113,000 from Western Economic Diversification (Federal-level) and \$40,000 from the Province towards the cost of equipment.¹⁵ This is reportedly an example of how government was trying to support the industry through the transition period.¹⁶

MFI describes that the business incubator provided: production facility utilization and instruction, CAD software and hardware, apparel and general business resources, seminars and workshops focused on emerging businesses, consultation with business

¹¹ MFI Website: <http://www.apparel-manitoba.org/mfi/> (June 14, 2005).

¹² Interview: July 19, 2004.

¹³ Interview: May 31, 2005.

¹⁴ “Business Help Sewn Up”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 15, 2003: B4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Interview: July 19, 2004.

specialists, and opportunities for participation in new designer fashion shows.¹⁷ The mandate of the business incubator upon its creation was “to foster an entrepreneurial spirit, encouraging small fashion business growth and job creation within the apparel industry of Manitoba”.¹⁸ The equipment provided with government contributions was apparently sold off with MFI’s office closure two years later.

Recruitment—Immigration

Another main aspect of government involvement in the garment industry is labour recruitment. As recently as 1999 it was reported that nearly every company in the Winnipeg garment industry was constrained by a labour shortage.¹⁹ In July 1999, for example, then Premier Filmon discussed the “chronic labour shortage” in the garment industry.²⁰ He referred to growth of the industry as fuelled by skilled immigrant labour, and recommended urging the Federal government to change policy and open immigration in this area. In a review of records from the mid to late 1990s a theme of debate emerges: immigration for the industry versus local recruitment.

Labour shortage was repeatedly voiced as an urgent industry issue in the mid 1990s, ultimately resulting in the recruitment of workers through the newly negotiated Provincial Nominee Program for immigration. Numbers referred to by industry and government were in the 1,500 vacancies range.²¹ The immigration vs. local recruitment debate was illustrated in 1995 when it was reported²² that the Federal government was arguing that training programs and national recruitment to fill garment industry vacancies were to be prioritized. Then Human Resources minister Lloyd Axworthy reportedly took the position that the garment industry could increase its funding of private-sector training programs in Winnipeg in order to address local unemployment together with Federal wage supplement and training programs. Industry reportedly claimed that there were not

¹⁷ MFI Website: <http://www.apparel-manitoba.org/mfi/> (June 14, 2005).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Sew Many Jobs, So Few Workers”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 28, 1999: A8.

²⁰ Hansard (Government of Manitoba), 5th-36th, vol. 54.

²¹ See for example “Begging for Workers”, *Winnipeg Sun*, March 14, 1996: 3.

²² “Hunt on for Garment Workers”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 29, 1995: A16.

enough workers to be trained in Manitoba, nor enough skilled workers in other provinces willing to relocate. Again illustrating the debate, in June 1996 then Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism argued that the Provincial government was working to address garment industry labour shortage on two fronts; one was to identify Canadians who could qualify for the jobs and develop training programs with industry, and one was to work with the Federal government to recruit immigrants to fill the demand.²³

Industry arguments appear to have ultimately held sway, and by January 1996, the Provincial and Federal governments had agreed to recruit 200 garment workers to settle in Manitoba, representing the first agreement to make use of the Provincial Nominee immigration class.²⁴ The Provincial Nominee Program—seen as giving the provinces more power over immigration—is administered by the Immigration and Multiculturalism division of Manitoba Labour and Immigration. Through the PNP the Immigration and Multiculturalism division accepts and processes immigration applications and nominates people with the potential to establish successfully in Manitoba. The PNP includes a skilled worker class, a business class, and a new agriculture class. Garment workers are reportedly now off the list of recruited occupations, however, the PNP website states that applications for garment industry positions (such as SMOs) require a pre-approved full-time and long-term job offer from an employer who has demonstrated a genuine effort to recruit in Canada, offering labour market-standard wages and benefits.²⁵ Under the Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement, the PNP gives the Province an increased role in recruiting, screening and nominating skilled individuals and their family members, and over the period 1999-2004 garment industry immigrants through the program numbered 191, or 1.3% of PNP immigrants.²⁶

Recruitment—Domestic

There was some discussion in the mid-1990s regarding Provincial government cooperation with the garment industry for the hiring of social assistance recipients,

²³ Hansard (Government of Manitoba), 2nd-36th, vol. 45.

²⁴ “Immigrant Plan Gets Green Light”, Winnipeg Free Press, November 17, 1995: B8.

²⁵ PNP Website: www.immigratemanitoba.com (June 14, 2005).

²⁶ Data provided by Immigration and Multiculturalism Division (June 1, 2005).

specifically those involved with the “Taking Charge!” organization. The mandate of this organization involves supporting single parents receiving social assistance to find employment. In December 1995, then Minister of Family Services was questioned about a wage top-up from Family Services and Housing for social assistance recipients working in the garment industry.²⁷ The questioning referred to the ongoing debate regarding the labour shortage in the industry, with some supporting changes in immigration policy to allow increased international recruitment, and others pointing to the unemployed here in Manitoba. In 1995, the president of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), for example, made reference during standing committee proceedings to the possibility of training Métis to fill garment industry vacancies.²⁸ In 1996, the Minister of Family Services also pointed to apparel sector employment for social assistance recipients, and industry reportedly claimed it would provide training and assistance with child-care and transportation.²⁹

Taking Charge! reports³⁰ that it commenced one garment industry project in 1997, and reports that recruitment was difficult due to low wages in the industry, primarily. The 8-week SMO training program with MFI was not continued due to few participants, and even fewer completions, as well as the fact the highest wage offered to successful participants was \$7/hour.

One interviewee noted that while the Provincial government desired to deal with the MFI regarding training as representing the industry as a whole, partnerships did exist at the individual company level. Nygård could contact the department responsible for EI and social assistance when workers were required, for example.³¹ MFI also noted cooperation with departments responsible for EI and social assistance regarding recruitment.³²

²⁷ Hansard (Government of Manitoba), 2nd-36th, vol.9.

²⁸ Hansard (Government of Manitoba), October 24, 1995.

²⁹ “Begging for Workers”, *Winnipeg Sun*, March 14, 1996: 3.

³⁰ Informal discussion: June 2004.

³¹ Interview: May 31, 2005.

³² Interview: October 31, 2003.

International Fashion Technology Centre (IFTC)

The International Fashion Technology Centre (IFTC) never actually materialized, but is worthy of discussion because it is arguably representative of policy shifts that occurred with changes in the Provincial government. A “new technologies” initiative that is illustrative of government and industry response to macro-level and technological changes in the industry, the IFTC was referred to at least as early as 1996, and was “dead on the vine” by 2000. In 1996,³³ City Council was expected to receive a request for \$25,000 to conduct a feasibility study for the centre. The Federal and Provincial governments and Nygård had reportedly already agreed to allocate funds for the \$100,000 report. The Nygård-led initiative proposed a \$5-\$10 million facility specializing in training in advanced manufacturing techniques to be created in Winnipeg. Federal and Provincial officials had reportedly voiced reservations that public investment in the project was contingent on the ability of members of the broader apparel sector to take advantage of the training.

In 1999, it was reported³⁴ that the International Fashion Technology Centre was to be built in Winnipeg with \$8.6 million in funding from the Provincial and Federal governments and local industry. The 10,000 square-meter centre was to include distance and multi-media training facilities demonstrating manufacturing equipment and systems, as well as research laboratories, a resource center, and facilities for the manufacturing and testing of new products. Students and fashion-industry employees would receive training in areas such as e-commerce and use of “high-tech” equipment, and garment manufacturers would have access to experts for advice on design, production, marketing and distribution of new products. It was reported that \$1.4 million was to be contributed from the tri-partite Winnipeg Development Agreement, \$2.8 million was to be repayable under the Canada-Manitoba Economic Development Partnership Agreement, and \$1.4 million was to take the form of a repayable loan from the Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program—\$3 million was to be contributed from the fashion industry.

³³ “Fashion Study up to Council”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 30, 1996: B4.

³⁴ “Garment Firms Hail Significance of New Facility”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 4, 1999: B3.

While construction of the centre next to Nygård International's head office and manufacturing plant on Inkster Boulevard seemed set to begin, by April 2000 the plan was off the books, and Peter Nygård commented:

Perhaps with a change of government ... who knows where the program ended up... We need to see a major initiative. We're prepared to do it, if there's enough momentum ... but the fashion industry must mobilize.³⁵

Change in government seems a likely explanation for the cancellation of this project, and one could argue that the government support for the Nygård-led initiative amounted to a subsidy for the industry.

Canadian Apparel and Textile Industries Program (CATIP)

One of the most recent government initiatives in the garment industry is the Canadian Apparel and Textile Industries Program (CATIP).³⁶ In response to macro-level changes in the industry the Federal government implemented CATIP in 2003. The program aims to increase the international competitiveness of the apparel and textile industries and assist them “to pursue new market opportunities in an era of global competition”. CATIP funds projects that diversify production, develop e-commerce capabilities, strengthen marketing strategies and identify high-potential niche markets, and apply new technologies to improve productivity. Winnipeg projects include,³⁷ but are not limited to (values are approximate): \$132,000 to Engineered Apparel for new product development and manufacturing systems, \$100,000 to Itty Bitty Baby for new technology in design, \$150,000 to Nygård for manufacturing and new technologies, \$100,000 to Pace Setter for IT hardware/software, \$67,000 to Peerless for electronic systems, \$85,000 to Warehouse One for a manufacturing forecasting system, and \$200,000 to Western Glove for production and web projects.

³⁵ Nygard Website (April 2000): http://www2.nygard.com/corporate/news/fashion_center_fades.html (June 14, 2005).

³⁶ See CATIP website: <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/incatp-pictv.nsf/en/Home> (June 14, 2005).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

CATIP reportedly³⁸ used its \$33 million budget -intended to last through 2005-6- in one year. Split between the textile and apparel industries, probably \$16 million went to the apparel sector. Subsequent measures, including “tariff relief” on imported textile inputs, will bring the level of assistance to \$136 million and were announced in early 2004.³⁹ The result of these measures remains to be seen.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

When viewing the evidence, a pattern emerges of more pronounced industry support from government in the mid and late 1990s. We see a peak in training contributions to the MFI’s training centre, government recruitment of immigrant labour for the industry, and substantial support for the defunct International Fashion Technology Centre. Government support for training peaked in the late 1990s, and with subsequent offshoring and shedding of production jobs, it appears the trend will be towards less (or non-existent) government support for training of new workers. There is still demand for SMOs in the Manitoba garment industry, however, and the Provincial government will support the “upgrading” of existing workers.⁴⁰ After the change in Provincial government in 1999, we see that government support for the IFTC was cancelled, and Provincial support for MFI’s business incubator was \$40,000. In the mid and late 1990s there was a push for immigration to fill industry vacancies, and between 1999 and 2004 garment industry immigrants under the PNP numbered 191. While the industry does not appear to be a high priority for the Provincial government, Winnipeg apparel companies are receiving some Federal-level support for technological and other upgrades through CATIP.

With offshoring of production and subsequent shedding of production jobs the question emerges regarding recruited workers now finding themselves unemployed. The Provincial government may encounter questioning for recruiting immigrants who are now unemployed with few prospects. The Government attitude appears to generally be that

³⁸ Interview: July 19, 2004.

³⁹ See CATIP website: <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/incatp-pictv.nsf/en/Home> (June 14, 2005).

⁴⁰ Interview: May 31, 2005.

the industry is not necessarily on its way out, but changing. We will see less production, but more design, marketing, “logistics”, etc. in line with the ostensible shift to “knowledge workers” under the “New Economy”. What happens to local garment production workers displaced under the New Economy? Smaller, emerging companies involved in niche production, for example, will absorb some. These companies are growing, exporting and can be considered “large” companies, but cannot absorb all the laid-off garment production workers.⁴¹ The focus on small business start-ups appears to have encountered a set back with the closure of the business incubator. The closure of the training centre may also represent an end to certain training opportunities for inner-city populations. In terms of current government support for the industry, one industry analyst commented that it is just a “drop in a bucket”, ultimately doing very little⁴². The macro-level dynamics affecting the local industry are to a large extent beyond the reach of the Federal government.

⁴¹ Interview: May 31, 2005.

⁴² CBC, *The Current*, December 15, 2004.

Technology in the Winnipeg Garment Industry

Leigh Hayden

INTRODUCTION

The Winnipeg garment industry initially developed as a supplier of work garments. Manufacturers in Winnipeg specialized in overalls, jeans, work shirts, and work gloves. Later the focus in the Winnipeg garment industry moved to other heavy-duty sewing such as military garments.¹ Currently the Winnipeg garment industry is more diverse. It has changed focus from work supply to fashion. Some manufacturers (Peerless Garments Inc., Pace Setter Sportswear Inc.) still make military outerwear, but have also branched out to include leather goods and sportswear. The garment industry has always been highly competitive, and in today's globalized free market, the competition has become much fiercer.² In the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s the Winnipeg garment industry focused on increased mechanization and deskilling to reduce labour costs. With the reduction in tariffs and quotas brought about by the MFA and APT, there has been a shift from increasing manufacturing efficiency to moving manufacturing offshore to take advantage of cheap labour in less developed countries.³ Therefore, the domestic focus on technology has changed from increased mechanization to increased communication

¹Video: *Tales of the Needle Trade* [Winnipeg], CBC, 1979.

² Interview: Grace Mann, design consultant; former lecturer, Clothing and Textiles, University of Manitoba, June 14, 2004.

³ Interview: UNITE representative, October 17, 2003.

between offshore contractors and domestic producers, and faster and more accurate design and pattern-making. It is estimated that while 1000-2100 jobs in Manitoba garment manufacturing and associated industries will be lost after the removal of all apparel quotas on January 1, 2005 (Richter Consulting 2004). However, it is estimated that the Canadian garment industry will require over 3,000 professional workers skilled in areas such as sales and marketing and logistics (Richter Consulting 2004). The labour market in the Winnipeg garment industry is changing; as the requirements for skilled sewers decreases, the demand for skilled marketing, sourcing, and designing staff is projected to increase.

Depending on their market, some Winnipeg garment manufacturers hope to remain profitable and continue domestic operations. Such operations tend to continue to invest in production technology to increase efficiency and decrease labour costs. Generally such technologies involve deskilling. Investments in production technology must have short return on investment and generally require low capital investment. Investment in design, pattern-making and marker-making technology, as well as information technology, have been and are continually being made by firms that must invest a great deal of their resources into design and pattern-making and grading (those firms doing custom orders or small runs). The same is true for those firms that must respond quickly to market demands; minimizing design and pattern-making and grading is a necessity.⁴

TYPES OF TECHNOLOGIES USED

Pre-production

All of the facilities we visited⁵ used a CAD (computer-assisted design) software package for design, pattern-making, and marker-making. These software packages can be used in a few different ways. A base pattern can be made out of cardboard (“the old fashioned way”) and then placed on a digitizing table and its coordinates traced out to

⁴ Interview: Lena Horne, Head, Clothing and Textiles, University of Manitoba, December 18, 2003.

⁵ I was accompanied by Erin Jonasson in several plant tours, and by Kate Mossman in one other. Notes on our observations were prepared independently and were then compared.

obtain a digital image of each pattern piece. Alternatively, instead of making the base pattern by hand, a new pattern can be made by electronically manipulating an already digitized pattern. In this way, developing new but not radically different styles and patterns can be done with relative ease. Sizing rules tell the computer how the dimensions of people grow. These sizing rules are not standard; they vary somewhat between companies and significantly between countries.⁶ With these rules, the computer can “grade” the pattern and enlarge or shrink the base pattern to obtain the pattern pieces for other sizes. Grading was traditionally done by hand and is a slow and difficult process. Once a pattern has been graded into all of the required sizes for a particular production run, a marker is developed with the aid of the computer to maximize fabric utilization. A marker is a map of how the different pattern pieces are laid out on the fabric. According to some sources, fabric is usually about 30% of the cost of the garment, so fabric waste minimization is essential to keep costs down.⁷ Marker development can be done manually, although it can take several hours and fabric utilization is usually not as efficient as it is when the computer is used. When the marker is completed it is usually printed out on a larger plotter and then delivered to the cutting floor.

Most facilities we visited used Gerber technology for design, pattern making and grading, and marker making.⁸ However, the Clothing and Textiles Department at the University of Manitoba has a Lectra system, Gerber’s main competitor. Michael Silver, the president of Silver Jeans, said that they have, and most likely will always use, the Gerber system, although it is not necessarily the best. Gerber developed its product before Lectra did, and although it is not the best, many manufacturers started with the Gerber system and have stayed with it. Both systems start at about \$50,000, so they are a significant investment for firms competing in an uncertain market.

The benefits of CAD technology are efficiency and accuracy. With CAD technology, businesses can develop products faster. In addition, since grading and

⁶ Interview: Nelma Fetterman, former Head (retired), Clothing and Textiles, University of Manitoba, March 15 2004.

⁷ Interview: Michael Silver, President, Silver Jeans (from Western Glove Works), May 14, 2004.

⁸ Nelman Fetterman was once told by a major Winnipeg garment manufacturer that “Winnipeg is a Gerber town”.

marking is automated, the patterns are more accurate and the percentage of material usage is higher.

CAD technology was first used in the garment industry in the 1980s.⁹ It has improved significantly in terms of functionality and user friendliness in the last five to ten years. In North America it is becoming a requirement that designers and pattern makers working in the garment industry be familiar with CAD technology. The Clothing and Textiles Department at the University of Manitoba offers CAD training. Although graduates from the department may be familiar only with the Lectra system, they have the skills and general CAD knowledge to work with a Gerber system, if that is what they encounter in industry.¹⁰

Another development in pre-production technology is 3-D body scanning. There are several different models of the 3-D body scanner, but they all do essentially the same thing—they automate measuring body dimensions. Automating this process does two things—it increases the accuracy of measurement (it is difficult to obtain accurate body measurements manually because of human variation and error),¹¹ and it unobtrusively and quickly measures a vast number of body dimensions. Proper fitting clothes improve the look and feel of the garment, but only 3% of the American population fit the American Sizing Standards.¹²

Body scanning equipment, referred to as “booths”, ranges in price from USD \$25,000-\$225,000. Some believe that in the near future it will be common for people to go to body scanning boutiques to have their measurements taken, receive an electronic copy of their measurements, and then download this information to a virtual store to purchase custom-made clothing online.¹³ Body scanning technology is the perfect complement for electronic clothing boutiques. An individual can use his or her data to

⁹ Interview: Nelma Fetterman, March 15, 2004.

¹⁰ Interview: Lorna Campbell, May 27, 2004.

¹¹ Interview: Nelma Fetterman, March 15, 2004.

¹² Presentation at University of Manitoba: Dr. Cynthia Istook, Associate Professor, Department of Textile and Apparel Technology and Management, North Carolina State University, entitled “Integrating Three-Dimensional Body Scanning, Computerized Pattern Development, and Digital Design Technologies to Create Customized Textile Products”, January 19, 2004.

¹³ Interview: Manitoba Fashion Institute representative, October 31, 2003.

either order custom-made clothes online or determine whether a particular ready-made style fits their own body properly. It is estimated that 38%-40% of all clothing purchased online is returned.¹⁴ Garment industry analysts project that body scanning technology will significantly decrease the return rate and increase profits of online stores.

Production

Spreading/Cutting

The first stage of production is cutting. Fabric is laid out on spreader tables in layers of 1 to 100, depending on the type of fabric and the size of the production run. A paper marker is placed on top of the fabric. Each pattern piece on the marker is identified with a code indicating the style of garment, size, colour, and type of piece. Smaller facilities with short production runs or custom-made orders do pattern cutting either with scissors or an electric hand-held fabric cutter. Some large volume facilities have invested in automated spreaders and cutters. At the ARTS2 plant, automated spreaders have been installed. Where ten people used to be employed to spread and cut fabric, in this plant it only requires two people, one to operate each machine.¹⁵ In the spreading area, fabric is spread out into several layers on one end of a very long table. At the ARTS2 plant, air is blown up from the bottom of the spreader table so the fabric can be slid down the table to the cutting area once the fabric spreading is complete. In the cutting area, the table is equipped with a vacuum to keep the many layers of fabric in place. Although a paper marker is laid over the fabric, the electronic cutter does not follow the lines of the marker. The marker is used for labelling the pattern pieces. The marker is downloaded into the automated cutter. The operator starts the cutter and it quickly and accurately cuts the fabric. Once the cutting step is complete (whether the cutting is done by hand or with an automated cutter) the fabric pieces are bundled, labelled and sent to the sewing area.

¹⁴ Interview: Michael Silver, May 14, 2004.

¹⁵ Plant tour: ARTS2, February 26, 2004.

United Production System (UPS)

We visited one plant with a UPS or Unit Production System (Nygaard's ARTS2), visited another that had removed its UPS (Western Glove Works), and visited a third plant that had plans to install a UPS (JMJ Fashions Inc.). A UPS is an overhead track where garment pieces are moved from one sewing step to another, in sequence, until the garment is complete. It was developed in the 1970s to help streamline the production process. It can save time and can improve efficiency by bringing the work to the sewing machine operator (SMO). The plant that we visited with the UPS system makes only one type of garment. The UPS system is ideal for this type of production because the production steps do not change. For facilities that make a variety of different garments in a variety of different styles, such as JMJ Fashions Inc., a UPS set-up must be flexible because the order and number of sewing steps changes with each type of garment.¹⁶ The plant we visited that removed its UPS—Western Glove Works—found the system too inflexible and cumbersome, and did not allow for rapid change and response. Michael Silver, president of Silver Jeans (from Western Glove Works), felt that its primary advantage was to force the production managers to really think through and plan the production process. Its primary advantage was as a way of “disciplining” line managers. Silver also said that it was “great on plant tours”; people seemed to be very impressed by it.¹⁷

JMJ Fashions Inc. hopes to install a UPS in the next year or so.¹⁸ The firm recognizes the need for a flexible UPS system, so they plan on installing wheels on all of the sewing machines. Since the overhead conveyor system is permanently fixed, the machines themselves must be portable to respond to the various production needs. Moving the machines to different locations in the UPS production line will take planning and time, but it is expected that these drawbacks will be outweighed by the benefits of increased efficiency and decreased inventory in progress.

¹⁶ Interview: Wilfred Tai, Production Manager, IMJ Fashions, June 28, 2004.

¹⁷ Interview: Michael Silver, May 14, 2004.

¹⁸ Interview: Wilfred Tai, June 28, 2004.

Modular Sewing

Modular sewing is not the standard in Winnipeg, although a few companies use it. In modular sewing, a team of usually four SMOs (sewing machine operators) work together to complete a garment from start to finish. Each team member may be responsible for two or three steps in the construction. This type of work usually requires highly skilled and experienced sewing machine operators. They must be trained on a variety of machines and understand a multitude of different operations.¹⁹ For the ARTS 2 plant, a modular team system has been implemented to reduce in-progress inventory and speed up order filling so that rush orders can be shipped to the customer within 48 hours. This system also allows the firm to monitor the performance of each team and base bonuses on the number of garments produced above quota for each team. Bonuses are team-based rather than based on individual performance. If a team member is not performing to standard, the rest of the team pressures that person to increase their output. Thus, peer pressure as well as bonus incentives encourage SMOs to work harder and faster.²⁰

JMJ is considering developing one modular team comprised of their most experienced sewers (many of whom are in the pattern development area). Members of this team would be taken off their particular jobs and brought together to do small runs of detailed, difficult, high priority garments. For MJJ, a modular team is best suited to short, fast runs of difficult and critical garments,²¹ i.e., niche market, high quality and high priority due to higher returns.

Stand-up Sewing Machines

There is some debate as to whether stand-up sewing machines are desirable. The Nygaard ARTS2 plant introduced stand-up machines in 2000. The workers initially rejected the stand-up machines and many walked out. Given time, we were told, the sewing machine operators who remained on began to prefer them to the sit-down

¹⁹ Interview: UNITE representative, October 17, 2003.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Interview: Wilfred Tai, June 28, 2004.

machines, and some SMOs who quit heard that it was a positive change and asked for their jobs back.²² Stand-up machines are in theory less fatiguing because they offer more mobility. While operating a stand-up machine, the operator stands on a micro-sensor pad to reduce fatigue and controls the machine using light-touch foot pedals. We were told that sitting down and bending over a machine all day is much more fatiguing and ergonomically taxing than standing at a machine. Thus, it is said that workers have accepted stand-up machines because they find the work less fatiguing and they also achieve higher efficiency, which means more bonuses and higher pay.

Others facilities have not embraced the stand-up machines. Sewing machine operators at Western Glove Works found them fatiguing.²³ K9 Storm decided not to purchase stand-up machines because they felt they were too hard on the workers.²⁴ JMJ purchased a used stand-up machine and retrofitted it so it could be operated while sitting down.²⁵ So there are different opinions, likely tied to length of time in application as well as level of integration into an overall production system.

Other Sewing Machine Technology

Other sewing machine technology, such as thread cutters and machines that automatically place the sewing needle in the down position once the machine is stopped, have increased efficiency and ease of sewing.²⁶ These technologies are common in the Winnipeg garment industry, although some contract shops may be equipped with older machines and this technology may be lacking. Automated embroidery machines have replaced hand embroidery. Both Pace Setter and K9 Storm own such machines.²⁷ An electronic copy of the desired logo or inscription is read by the machine and automatically stitched into the fabric. This type of work used to take hours of skilled labour, but now an operator simply places the fabric under the needle, instructs the

²² Interview: UNITE representative, October 17, 2003 and Plant Tour: ARTS2, February 26, 2004.

²³ Interview: Michael Silver, May 14, 2004.

²⁴ Interview: Jim Slater, President, K9 Storm, April 23, 2004.

²⁵ Interview: Wilfred Tai, June 28, 2004.

²⁶ Interview: Lorna Campbell, May 27, 2004.

²⁷ Plant tours: Pace Setter, July 6, 2004, and K9 Storm, April 23, 2004.

machine to read the electronic file, and presses a button. Other production technology has focused on “small parts preparation”, work that is standard and simple. For example, the ARTS2 plant has purchased a machine that automatically measures, cuts, and sews elastic waistbands. The machine is expensive, but it has eliminated labour required for that task.²⁸ Other “small parts preparation” technology, such as automatic back pocket and label sewing, reduce the time and skill level needed for these steps. Western Glove Works often does small parts production at their Winnipeg facility and then contracts out the rest of the work (often overseas).²⁹ As mentioned above, not all garment companies in Winnipeg continue to focus on increasing production automation to reduce labour costs; many companies (e.g., Western Glove Works, Gemini, Nygaard) have simply moved the bulk of their production offshore. For large-scale manufacturing, the lower labour costs in developing countries such as China and Mexico make a considerable impact on the cost of each garment piece, enough to easily make up for increased shipping costs and lead times.³⁰

Labourers and labour unions seem to be suspicious of technological and production changes within plants. Only a few facilities in Winnipeg are still unionized. UNITE membership has decreased since the movement of manufacturing overseas and it continues to shrink.³¹ Efficiency improvements in garment manufacturing facilities almost always work to reduce labour costs. This means fewer jobs and hours to workers. In unionized plants, the union must be consulted before production and technology changes take place. This restricts the types of changes that can be made, although reductions in labour requirements still occur. In non-unionized plants, workers do not have to be consulted when changes and production and technology are implemented. Therefore, companies can demand an increased work rate from operators by adjusting the

²⁸ Plant tour: ARTS2, February 26, 2004.

²⁹ Interview: Michael Silver, May 14, 2004.

³⁰ Interview: Grace Mann, June 14, 2004.

³¹ Interview: UNITE representative, October 17, 2003. Note, due to low membership, UNITE merged with HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union) on July 8, 2004 to form a new union named “UNITE HERE”.

technology, saying that the technology increases efficiency. This may reduce the labour required or place unreasonable production rates on workers, or both.³²

Communication Technology

Large garment manufacturing firms in Winnipeg rely on sophisticated communication technology software systems. Communication technology is critical for larger multinational corporations in a variety of ways. First, plants like Nygaard's ARTS2 facility operate on an automatic ordering system. When the inventory levels of key garments for their customers (at least those who have agreed to use the automatic reorder system) drop below a certain point, an order is automatically placed at the ARTS2 plant. Once the order comes in, it can be shipped within 48 hours (if the items are in their standard colours—otherwise the order will be shipped in over 48 hours). This ensures that stores have sufficient inventory, but stores do not have to overstock because the reorder time is so short. This automatic reorder system is something that Nygaard has developed and believes it is a key part of their success.³³

The second type of communication technology involves relaying design information from design shops in Winnipeg to manufacturing facilities in developing countries. Western Glove Works is a good example of a company that relies on this type of communication technology. They have moved 90% of their garment production offshore, and they anticipate that it will one day be 100%.³⁴ Their design team and sample sewers have remained in Winnipeg. Once a new garment has been designed, and the pattern developed and graded, the information must be sent overseas and the instructions for the garment construction must be communicated. Good communication is key, due to the cost of miscommunication and the significant barriers to communication, such as language and geography.³⁵ Communication technology to relay and discuss the information has been developed by CAD software companies, such as Gerber and Lectra,

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Plant tour: ARTS2, February 26, 2004.

³⁴ Interview: Michael Silver, May 14, 2004.

³⁵ Interview: Grace Mann, June 14, 2004.

as part of their full suite. However, when one sight has a Gerber system, and the other has a Lectra system, there can be compatibility issues.

Finally, another important feature of a software package such as Gerber or Lectra is specification communication. Companies such as Western Glove Works that have their products manufactured in a number of different locations around the world must maintain standards and quality. Using industry-particular software, companies such as Western Glove Works can communicate fabrication specifications to all of their customers to ensure their product needs are understood and met.³⁶

Implications for Labour

Changes in technology are impacting both the number of skilled workers required by the Winnipeg garment industry and the types of skills required. Increased automation, facilitated by a reduced union voice in the Winnipeg garment industry, means fewer jobs and lower job security for SMOs. The movement of production facilities overseas has also meant the reduction of approximately 2,000 jobs in the Winnipeg garment industry in the last ten years.³⁷ This trend is anticipated to continue, with an estimated loss of 1,100 jobs in Winnipeg after the removal of quotas on January 1, 2005 (Richter Consulting 2004). However, firms such as JMJ and Pacesetters periodically require skilled SMOs. It appears that in Winnipeg there will continue to be requirements for SMOs. The plant manager from JMJ complained that even though other firms have been reducing the number of SMOs they employ, JMJ still has difficulty finding skilled SMOs. They are hoping to expand their production and are currently limited by their ability to find skilled SMOs. They suspect that the skilled SMOs who have lost their jobs have either retired or moved into another industry.³⁸ Spokespersons from MFI, UNITE, and Clothing and Textiles, University of Manitoba all note that the reduction of SMO positions in Winnipeg will mean that those who are in their late 50s (there are many in this age bracket who represent an immigration of SMOs in the 1960s and 1970s from

³⁶ Interview: Michael Silver, May 14, 2004.

³⁷ Interview: UNITE representative, October 17, 2003.

³⁸ Interview: Wilfred Tai, June 28, 2004.

Asia due to government policy encouraging the immigration of individuals with experience in the garment industry) will retire and perhaps leave Winnipeg. The younger wave of SMOs will either stay in the industry and struggle to get regular employment or seek training in a different industry.³⁹

At some facilities, such as Pacesetter, the number of SMOs required changes according to the amount of work they have, which often changes with the season.⁴⁰ Work will continue to exist in the Winnipeg garment industry for SMOs although it could be unstable. Firms are looking for SMOs who are “flexible”, “pay attention to detail”, and have considerable speed.⁴¹

However, as production continues to move overseas, pre-production work such as garment design, pattern-making, sourcing, and marketing has often remained in Winnipeg. Thus, it appears that the Winnipeg garment industry may continue to need individuals with these skills. However, as Richter Consulting (2004) remark, the Canadian garment industry has had a difficult time attracting and keeping such highly skilled individuals due to relatively low pay compared to other industries, coupled with high stress and long hours. These two trends—(1) increased automation and the resultant deskilling of SMOs, and (2) overseas production relocation—are seen as inevitable and intrinsic to the Winnipeg garment industry. Free-market logic is pervasive throughout industry and labour groups, and significantly impacts the type, volume, and method of work in the Winnipeg garment industry. Some industry and labour representatives expressed regret about these trends, but none voiced alternatives, and instead focused on how they could maintain their market share.

³⁹ Interviews: Manitoba Fashion Institute representative, October 31, 2003; UNITE representative, October 17, 2003; University of Manitoba Clothing and Textiles spokesperson, December 18, 2003.

⁴⁰ Interview: Anna Kolinski, Pace Setter Sportswear, Inc., July 6, 2004.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Labour Recruitment Strategies of the Winnipeg Garment Industry

Sara Stephens

INTRODUCTION

This paper on Winnipeg garment industry labour recruitment strategies is a report compiled from several interviews, reports on plant tours and summaries of discussions with garment industry workers conducted by various members of the Manitoba Research Alliance project #4 over the past two years. The information offers a wide range of views on the garment industry, including those of plant owners and supervisors, workers in garment factories, workers for independent small-scale designers, government officials, and employment facilitators at employment and resource centres. Using these varied sources, this report gives a broad perspective of the recruitment strategies used by various sectors of the garment industry to attract new labour.

Recruitment strategies range from highly organized and intensive efforts to recruit labour to casual, sporadic strategies that evolve in response to the changes and pressures of a dynamic industry. This report will outline these strategies and explore some of the differences between the formal recruitment strategies that many factories claimed to practice, and the more informal recruitment strategies that also appeared to be used in response to the ground-level realities, demands and desires of the garment industry. There often appears to be a discrepancy between the recruitment practices of some garment factories and the reasons they gave to justify those strategies. The source of this discrepancy may be located in industry beliefs and biases concerning the types of skills

needed for the garment jobs and which kinds of workers possess those skills. These biases affect recruitment by allowing the garment industry to define and shape the types of workers that are both desirable and available.¹

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES OF GARMENT FACTORIES

Sponsorship Strategies Involving Worker Networks

Recruitment in one Winnipeg garment factory was aided by the factory's employees. Information about job openings might be discovered through ads placed in a newspaper and would then pass along by word of mouth among the current employees. Word of mouth was believed by some to be an effective recruitment strategy due to the fact that most of the workers were immigrants with family members who were also looking for work in Canada. Asian workers were particularly mentioned in this regard, and were believed to often sponsor family members who were still in their home countries to come to Canada to apply for the job, a practice that the factory encouraged.²

Large-Scale Industrial Sponsorship Strategies

Recruitment by sponsorship in garment factories could be a very organized and strategic process. A higher-level employee at one factory discussed its large-scale and group recruitment strategy. In the 1960s, as part of a government and industry initiative, women workers were recruited from the Philippines and brought in groups to Canada.³ Potential workers were provided with housing, food and clothing for the first week, and then were left to their own devices. One reason given for the garment industry's use of this recruitment strategy is that the industry generally viewed women from the Philippines as docile workers who would not complain.⁴ It was stated that this strategy remained in practice until the 1980s in the Philippines, at which time the garment

¹ For further information, please see *Perspectives on the Garment Industry: Impacts of Biases and Beliefs* by Sara Stephens and Kathryn Mossman, this volume.

² Interview: June 01, 2005.

³ Interview: October 17, 2003.

⁴ Interview: October 17, 2003. For more information on stereotypes surrounding women, immigrants and Aboriginal people, please see *Perspectives on the Garment Industry: Impacts of Biases and Beliefs* by Sara Stephens and Kathryn Mossman, this volume.

industry recruiters moved their focus to Vietnam and other Asian countries. The industry may have tried to recruit from the Philippines again in 2000 using the same tactic, but without encouraging results. Some of the sponsored workers who came to Winnipeg did not have sewing experience, some pretended to have sewing experience in order to get into the country, and some moved on to other cities after arriving in Winnipeg. At least one informant felt that the 2000 recruitment drive was the last one of its type in the Philippines.⁵

Other factories also recruited new workers by sponsoring women from non-Western countries. One Winnipeg factory recruited women from Thailand, ostensibly for their experience in sewing, and despite the fact that other factories were laying off workers and creating a surplus of experienced workers in Winnipeg.⁶ Another factory sponsored women workers from the Ukraine who had experience working in Ukrainian garment factories.⁷ In both cases, the women's sewing experience was given to be the main advantage of this practice.

Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI): Its Role in Labour Recruitment

The Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI) also played a major role in providing many garment factories with new labour, until its closure in January of 2005.⁸ Many factories approached MFI directly for new SMO recruits, seeking those who had completed the training program. When MFI was in operation, one nearby garment factory recruited workers directly from them, as MFI was believed to provide the most comprehensive training for garment workers in Winnipeg. The employees hired from MFI were believed to have received training in the factory-specific skills that this particular plant required.⁹ Another factory that was largely dependent on MFI for new recruits also expressed the belief that MFI was a valuable resource for recruitment, but felt that the new employees

⁵ Interview: October 17, 2003.

⁶ Interview: July 06, 2004.

⁷ Interview: June 01, 2005.

⁸ For more information on MFI and its training programs please see *Government Programs and the Garment Industry* by Aaron Pettman, this volume.

⁹ Interview: June 28, 2004.

required further training in the specific needs and demands of their specific garment factory.¹⁰

Government Recruitment Strategies

Government recruitment and funding strategies play a role in the recruitment of workers from particular sectors of the population. A provincial government worker expressed that the garment industry largely recruits people from certain “disadvantaged groups”, such as women and new immigrants.¹¹ The provincial government encourages this recruitment strategy by funding training centres such as MFI. While still in operation, MFI was funded by the Department of Education and Training, which spent \$2 million to train SMOs. Despite the government’s support of the garment industry, jobs, especially SMO positions, began to decline. The decline in jobs changed the meaning and purpose of recruitment and training among those people who were still being trained at MFI, such as Aboriginal people and immigrants. For these often economically disadvantaged people and those who had poor English language skills, recruitment and training programs could be used to acquire jobs and language skills that could then be transferred to jobs outside the garment industry. The hospitality and health care industries were viewed to be among those areas of employment being pursued by some people originally recruited for garment industry jobs.¹²

Other Resources: Advertising, Job Banks, Resource and Employment Centres

Many garment factories pursued several different recruitment strategies at the same time in order to obtain new workers. In one factory, recruitment strategies included placing ads in the newspaper, with the government job bank, and recruiting directly from MFI.¹³ The plant also had an Employment Insurance (EI) officer who could inform them when workers lost their jobs with other garment companies. While the EI officer could not release personal information, s/he could name the company that the person had

¹⁰ Interview: July 6, 2004.

¹¹ Interview: July 15, 2004.

¹² Interview: July 15, 2004.

¹³ Interview: June 28, 2004.

worked for, and the informant could then place ads at that worksite and ask the company for the former employee's contact information. When hiring people for higher positions, such as head designer, the plant had hired graduates from the Clothing and Textiles program at the University of Manitoba. Another factory claimed that, due to the decline of garment industry jobs in Winnipeg and the consequent plant closures and worker layoffs, it was getting easier to recruit experienced SMOs in the city.¹⁴

Resource and employment centres are another source of new labour for the garment industry. One issue that was investigated in this research project was the degree to which Aboriginal people were being targeted for recruitment by the garment industry. Most sources for this report have been drawn from remarks made by past interviewees or from contacts made with current resource and employment centre staff.¹⁵ One resource centre, whose clientele largely consisted of members of the Aboriginal community and people who were on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), did not feel it had any real connections with the garment industry. When the centre first opened it was contacted by a large garment factory, and had on another occasion received a notice from a different garment factory that was looking specifically for five Aboriginal garment workers. Both factories were looking to recruit workers through the resource centre. Since the opening of the resource centre, the garment industry in Winnipeg had undergone significant downsizing, and there had not been any more contact between the garment industry and this particular resource centre.¹⁶

Many resource and employment centres were contacted over the telephone to discuss their involvement with the garment industry, but this failed to yield any significant contacts. However, these failed connections do help to characterize the relationship, or lack thereof, between Aboriginal people and the garment industry. At each resource centre, a receptionist or employment facilitator was asked about their level

¹⁴ Interview: July 6, 2004.

¹⁵ The author conducted telephone research in order to get a sense of the degree of Aboriginal involvement in the garment industry, which was generally felt to be quite low. As this research was very casual, in the form of telephone calls to various Aboriginal resource centres, and was conducted after the decline in garment jobs in Winnipeg, one can only obtain a very general sense of the links, or lack thereof, between the urban Aboriginal community and the garment industry.

¹⁶ Interview: June 16, 2004.

of contact with the garment industry, and whether they had experienced interest from the garment industry in recruiting workers through their centres. Some of the centres contacted were aimed specifically at Aboriginal people, while others offered services to a broader clientele. Of the fifteen centres contacted, only the Manitoba Employment Centre—a branch of the Human Resource Centres of Canada—had experienced any contact from the garment industry with regard to recruitment. The garment industry was believed to be “always hiring”, by posting ads on the employment centre’s popular job bank. However, the centre could not release any information on the types of workers the ads were looking for, or whether Aboriginal people were especially being sought as workers.¹⁷

Of the fourteen other centres contacted, four were pre-training centres and were not actually involved with recruitment, and so were unlikely to be contacted by prospective employers. The other ten centres were employment centres, and had never experienced contact with the garment industry. Some centres’ staff expressed their opinions on the reasons why they might not have been contacted, and at least one centre felt that it was unfortunate that they had not experienced any interest from the garment industry. Another centre said the lack of interest from the garment industry might be due to the fact that most of their clients were men, and were being recruited largely by call centres, while another claimed that their clientele were mainly being recruited into health care jobs. Another centre believed that the lack of interest in their centre stemmed from the fact that their clientele were young and relatively well educated (at least Grade 10). The centre claimed that the lack of interest was mutual, and that their clientele did not find garment industry jobs appealing.¹⁸

Therefore, it would appear that garment industry jobs are simply not attractive to some of the centres’ clientele, although the decline in jobs in the garment industry could also have had an effect on the level of recruitment and the number of channels or strategies required by the garment industry to attract new labour. Through this contact with Aboriginal resource and employment centres, it also appeared that Aboriginal

¹⁷ Personal communication with staff member, June 02, 2005.

¹⁸ Personal communication with resource centres, June 02, 2005.

peoples in particular were not being specifically targeted for recruitment by the garment industry.

Casual Recruitment Strategies: “Off the Street” Hiring

Many garment factories and their employees at many levels often reiterated that skills and experience are the important factors that shape their recruitment strategies. However, the patterns and general information on the skills and experience of workers, and the actual availability of experienced labour, challenge the necessity and practicality of these strategies. Experience and skill were preferred by virtually every garment factory included in this research, and recruitment strategies such as sponsoring women from overseas, placing ads directed at workers who have been laid off from other garment factories, and recruiting from training facilities such as MFI, are often explained and justified by the necessity of experience in garment industry jobs.

However, many sectors and employees in the garment industry claimed that they were also willing to hire new workers that walked in off the street, in other words, with no experience. It was stated that one garment factory would hire basically anyone who came in off the street who did not have a serious criminal record, although it was noted that some employees were hired despite having criminal records.¹⁹ The factory’s recruitment strategy therefore did not need to be extremely intensive, and it was expressed that it was hard to present garment work to the public as an attractive job option, as the work was difficult, boring and repetitive.²⁰ The degree of skill and experience actually necessary to work in a garment factory can also come into question. At another factory, it was felt that the technology used and the work performed did not require great skill and that anyone off the street could perform the job.²¹ Facing the reality that MFI might experience funding cuts for their training program, staff at another factory claimed that they would hire people off the street and train them, but only as a last resource.²² Therefore, casual recruitment strategies were used to deal with worker

¹⁹ Interview: June 01, 2005

²⁰ Interview: June 01, 2005

²¹ Interview: October 17, 2003.

shortages and the need to fill positions quickly, and possibly with the knowledge that garment industry jobs are not highly attractive or in demand.

Casual recruitment strategies may also be used in a different context, as was the case at one small sewing co-op.²³ The co-op manufactured Aboriginal crafts, and had only a handful of employees, all women. The women had experience in recruiting and training new employees, and had trained other Aboriginal women to start their own sewing co-ops. Their recruitment strategy also did not seem to require much intensive effort, but unlike the garment factories, this was due to the fact that they were often approached by people who wanted training. The co-op's presence in the community seemed to be a positive contribution, and the community seemed to be very aware of the co-op's activities. When the co-op was busy and in need of new workers, the women tended to recruit people they already knew, and people they had previously trained. The interest expressed by people in learning how to sew Aboriginal crafts was so great that some people were willing to work for no pay just to get the training. It therefore appears that recruitment for this small co-op was not difficult, and that workers were interested in the job for personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Some of the women trained through the co-op were eventually recruited by large garment factories, and the co-op workers appeared to believe this was beneficial, both for the women and the community.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Recruitment strategies vary according to the sector and needs of the garment industry, and show discrepancies between the explanation of why certain strategies are pursued, and the actual practice of recruitment. This fluctuation and discrepancy may be a result of—and response to—a very flexible, dynamic and changeful industry, where technology and the skills required to use it change on a regular basis. The garment industry is also regulated by changes in demand and the necessity to supply that demand in the most expeditious yet profitable way. Workers in the garment industry are an

²² Interview: June 28, 2004.

²³ Interview: June 03, 2004.

important factor in maintaining profitability, although this fact is often overlooked or underplayed by higher-level factory workers and management.

Recruitment therefore often involves highly organized strategies, such as the sponsorship of immigrant women, in order to provide what is seen to be a willing and qualified workforce. In a tour of a garment plant, it was noted that most of the sewers were women, and that they were largely from Asian or South Asian countries, which seems to imply that recruitment is focused on immigrants, and especially on women, for SMO positions.²⁴ As mentioned earlier with regard to sponsorship, one factory sponsored women from Thailand, despite the fact that Winnipeg workers were being laid off from large garment factories.²⁵ The surplus of experienced, qualified workers in Winnipeg calls the motivation behind sponsorship into question. This motivation was not explained by the factory staff, but leads one to suspect that underlying biases and prejudices about what makes a “good” worker might be a factor in this recruitment strategy. Sponsoring new immigrants may also allow the garment industry to label these workers as “beginners” to the industry and therefore to pay them low beginning wages (Lepp *et al.* 1987:155).

Stereotypes concerning what kinds of people are suitable and desirable garment workers evidently live on in the Winnipeg garment industry. As noted above, government funding for recruitment strategies often encourage the hiring of various disadvantaged workers, such as women and immigrants. Resource centres, in their explanations for why their centres and clients had not experienced contact with the garment industry, also seemed to be aware of, or working with, stereotypes of garment workers. Their clients were considered to be undesirable garment workers based on their gender (male), education level (at least Grade 10), and their pursuit of other, perhaps more profitable, careers and training. These stereotypes are further reinforced and possibly even validated in the centres’ estimation by the fact that they truly had not experienced interest from the garment industry, and their clientele were truly not being targeted as prospective employees.

²⁴ Plant tour notes: February 26, 2004

²⁵ Interview: July 06, 2004

However, despite these apparent prejudices and preferences for certain workers and the organized recruitment strategies used to pursue them, the garment industry also appears to use various casual, unorganized strategies to recruit workers. The willingness of many garment factories to recruit workers off the street appears to be linked to the garment industry's veiled awareness that a great deal of garment work is unattractive, tedious and repetitive. While many higher-level garment industry employees seemed hesitant to portray garment industry jobs in this light, many admitted that they would hire off the street, take any willing worker, and train employees themselves if necessary. The acceptance and use of these casual recruitment strategies seems to indicate an often unspoken awareness of the unappealing and demanding nature of garment factory work, and the challenge that this presents to recruitment.

The garment industry's claim to be willing to hire people off the street needs to be examined more closely. Further study might determine whether "off the street" hiring actually happens, and how many workers are hired this way. For example, despite their apparent willingness to take any worker, most garment factories seemed to be still pursuing immigrant labour through sponsorship, and recruiting from trusted training facilities.

The dynamics involved in recruitment are complex and multidimensional. There may be a reciprocal lack of interest in the garment industry from the local unemployed or underemployed population. Various factors are obviously at work in recruitment, and the garment industry's apparent dismissal or lack of interest in much of the local (i.e., non-immigrant) unemployed and Aboriginal populations may stem from a reciprocal rejection or lack of interest from these groups. Aboriginal people and other urban unemployed people may not be interested in working in the garment industry, as much as they may also fail to meet the unspoken requirements for recruitment. The issue of biases and stereotypes in recruitment, and the industry's perception of various types of workers, is explored further in this volume.²⁶

²⁶ Please see *Perspectives on the Garment Industry: Impacts of Biases and Beliefs* by Sara Stephens and Kathryn Mossman, this volume.

Training of Labour in the Winnipeg Garment Industry

Kathryn Mossman

INTRODUCTION

The Winnipeg garment industry requires its employees to have appropriate knowledge and skills in garment development and construction in order to bring a garment from the initial design concept to the final product. However, the training provided for those involved in the Winnipeg garment industry is highly variable and lacks consistency, with most skills being learned on an informal basis. Our research team took an interest in the training received by people working in the garment industry, with a focus on workers involved in garment assembly at the factories, independent, small-scale designers, and the Clothing and Textiles program offered at the University of Manitoba. This report is an overview of such training, with an examination of where different groups received their training and the type of skills that were acquired. It includes a discussion of the variety of training obtained by garment workers, such as training in one's home country, programs provided by community groups like the Northern Star Co-op, as well as local unions, and the Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI). As well, it will discuss the training independent designers developed in the home and at school. The program of study available at the University of Manitoba's Clothing and Textiles department will also be examined, including the views of both faculty and recent graduates on the skills being developed in this program. A brief analysis of the training availability for different members of the Winnipeg garment industry will follow this discussion.

TRAINING FOR GARMENT WORKERS

The training received by garment workers in Winnipeg varied a great deal, from training in one's home country, as was often experienced by immigrant women garment workers, to training in Winnipeg programs, such as those offered by MFI and local unions. On-the-job training was also often provided, although it was often quite informal and sporadic. While community programs were rarely mentioned as providing training for garment workers, one community organization, the Northern Star Co-op, at one time provided free training to community members. However, most of the training programs for garment workers are no longer in operation, as the industry's demand for workers with these skills steadily decreases with the movement of manufacturing overseas.

Learning in Home Country

The majority of immigrant garment workers in Winnipeg gained experience in garment work in their home countries before coming to Canada. Skills in sewing and garment construction were often developed through lessons from relatives, neighbours, or sometimes from working in garment factories of their country of origin. For example, one such worker¹ learned how to sew in her home country of Vietnam from a neighbouring family that owned a store. They taught her how to use a sewing machine, and she used her skills to sew for herself and her family while living in Vietnam. She found that her sewing training greatly helped while she was working as a SMO for a Winnipeg company. Supervisors would simply tell her what to do, and she already had the skills to carry out the sewing desired for the particular piece. This was often the case among immigrant workers who were previously trained in their home countries, as they typically required little more than to be asked for a particular operation in order to complete it. However, language barriers between supervisors and these workers have led to difficulties in communicating instructions, sometimes interfering in clear understanding of the task to be undertaken. In such cases, other workers would often step in to explain and show one another the job to be carried out. Ghorayshi (1990:285) notes that garment workers have tended to congregate in factories where some workers or a supervisor speak

¹ Interview: June 2, 2005.

their native language. Certainly, there are advantages for immigrant workers to work with others of a similar ethnic background, including being able to maintain traditions and customs more easily and communicate in a shared language (Green 1996:423). However, the cliques that can form from such ethnic groupings have hampered collective action and labour solidarity with other garment workers (Ghorayshi 1990:285). As well, many garment workers are not aware of their rights as a result of language problems and barriers.

MFI Training Programs

The Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI) is an industry association for Manitoba Apparel Manufacturers. After offering SMO training for many years, under a joint Federal-Provincial-Industry sector agreement, MFI founded a Training Institute in 1994 (Hilf 1996:19). The MFI Training Institute offered a number of training programs for garment workers, including one for SMOs, as well as an ESL program² (Hilf 1996:19). These programs were terminated in January 2005 when MFI closed its Bannatyne Avenue office where the training took place. This closure was concurrent with the enactment of the Multi-Fibre Agreement and the perception that the demand for trained garment workers was in decline.³ Interestingly, during an interview in October 2003, an MFI representative seemed to have a positive outlook for the training program, noting that the program was constantly changing and upgrading to meet the needs of the industry.⁴ At the time, the three sewing instructors were being sent out to smaller companies, considered to be “the ones that are going to stay here” to learn about the technologies and processes. That way, when replacements are needed for aging employees, and the skills required to perform these jobs increase, the sewing instructors will be able to teach trainees at MFI the techniques sought by these companies.

² For further discussion on these programs, please see *Government Programs and the Garment Industry* by Aaron Pettman, this volume.

³ For further discussion of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA), please see *Government Programs and the Garment Industry* by Aaron Pettman, this volume.

⁴ Interview: October 31, 2003.

When the MFI SMO training program was still in operation, exercises would be carried out on an assortment of machines, such as surgers and a variety of different sewing machines. While the course was officially eight weeks in duration, the program was self-directed in nature so that participants would work on different skills and techniques, becoming proficient in a particular area and then moving on to the next set of exercises. Thus, some trainees were actually able to finish in just three weeks. Every Monday new trainees could join the program.

An MFI representative said that out of the 200 people that entered their training program in 2002, they had 80 graduates, and she believed that approximately 2 out of 10 potential students completed the program.⁵ This is in part related to the perceived abilities of potential trainees, as Hilf reports that less than 25% of people tested at the MFI Training Institute had the basic dexterity skills to qualify for the SMO training (1996:18). He also states that even with eight weeks of full-time training on one machine, graduates reached only 30% of a fully experienced, 100%-rated, SMO (Hilf, 1996:18). Thus, one year would actually be the optimum training experience time (Hilf, 1996:18).

The provincial government financially supported the MFI SMO training program since 1992, because it was considered to provide valuable training to disadvantaged groups like new immigrants, women, and First Nations people, helping to integrate them into the workforce for the first time with work and language skills.⁶ While many of the trainees were immigrant women, who were often of South Asian origin, there were typically few men or persons of Aboriginal background being trained in this program.

Many garment companies depended on the MFI Training Centre as a source of skilled garment workers as few companies were able to offer in-house training for new workers due to time and budgetary constraints. However, the closure of the training centre in January 2005 reflected the diminished demand for SMOs by many, but not all, garment companies. It also sent a strong message about MFI's assessment of the future prospects for garment manufacturing in Winnipeg.

⁵ Interview: October 31, 2003.

⁶ Interview: July 19, 2005. For more information on this funding, see *Government Programs and the Garment Industry* by Aaron Pettman, this volume.

Union Training Initiatives

The unions representing garment workers in Winnipeg have provided training programs for this group of workers for a number of years. The Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) Local 459, represented Winnipeg garment workers from 1976-1995.⁷ In 1994, ACTWU offered an ESL training program that not only offered garment workers basic listening and speaking skills in English, but also involved discussions of how to tell a supervisor that they were ill, an examination of sick leave and health benefits clauses in their collective agreement, as well as a review of pay cheques and time sheets (Lindsay 1995:96-97). The nature of factory work was also discussed, including an overview of sewing machine parts as well as the types of seams and stitches garment workers might come across in their work. In 1995, ACTWU merged with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) to form the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE).⁸ UNITE Local 459 continued to provide training courses with its Learning Experience Centre, where union members and their families could receive training in basic skills, such as ESL and computer literacy.⁹ Such training was funded by the federal and provincial government, as well as with union member dues. As a result of this skill development, a report on women and training notes that, "...students have gone on to other studies, have become more involved with their union and, in some cases, have become leaders at work and in the union".¹⁰ However, a union representative informed us their public funding was eventually cut for these training courses because the government viewed such programs

⁷ UNITE HERE! 2005. Our History: UNITE HERE Historical Timeline. Retrieved August 17, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.uniteunion.org/research/history/unionsborn.html>

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women and The National Women's Reference Group on Labour Market Issues. March 2-5, 2000. Worker-Centred Learning Programs for Women and Their Families. In *Congress Report: Designing Our Future: Women's Learning, Education and Training in Canada: 2000 and Beyond*. Retrieved August 17, 2005 from the World Wide Web: http://www.nald.ca/CANORG/cclow/doc/Cong_rep/Cover_1.PDF

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

as going beyond the mandate of the union.¹¹ In October 2003, the only remaining programs available through the union were ESL classes offered at the union offices and at some factories.

Training on the Job or at the Factory

Winnipeg garment factories generally preferred to hire workers who had been trained by MFI or already had basic sewing skills, and rarely trained people with no background or experience in garment construction. The lack of proficient training facilities for garment workers in the factories themselves has been viewed as problematic by some workers, especially when they were assigned to use new technologies without adequate training or orientation.¹² However, there would often be some on-the-job training dealing with improving speed and efficiency, as well as learning the particular operations of the plant and how to operate some of the new technologies being introduced. For example, one female plant manager at the Nygard Arts 2 Manufacturing Facility, a fairly technologically-advanced garment factory, noted that all new SMOs have to be trained no matter how experienced they are because their system and organization is very unique.¹³ New SMOs worked with other new hires in training modules, and it often took months and sometimes even more than a year for new employees to be fully trained and working at the appropriate efficiency level. Once trained, they were integrated into the experienced modules, and these modules were expected to repair garments that did not meet quality standards. As the modules were not paid for repair time, the plant manager considered this to give greater incentive to construct the garment correctly on the first attempt.

Northern Star Co-op

Outside of MFI and UNITE, there were few other SMO training programs in Winnipeg. However, one alternative program of note was run by Northern Star Co-op, which consists of a group of women who quilt a number of items, such as their widely

¹¹ Interview: October 17, 2003.

¹² Interim Report on Interviews with Winnipeg Garment Workers, January 25, 2004, by Amena Khatun

¹³ Interview: February 26, 2004.

recognized star blankets. Their approximately five-week training program was provided free of charge, and involved learning how to operate single-needle industrial sewing machines, with an emphasis on precision and quality work. Most of the trainees participating in the program were inner-city women, and those completing the program often started working for Northern Star Co-op, or for other garment companies in Winnipeg, such as Western Glove Works.

Northern Star Co-op has also trained women from other parts of Manitoba. At one time, a group of women from Northern Manitoba came to Winnipeg to be taught sewing skills by the co-op members. This group of thirty women from Split Lake, Manitoba, learned how to use sewing machines and how to construct different items, including quilts. The training took place over a three-week period, with ten women being taught at a time. Unlike their regular training program, the co-op charged a fee for training these women, as their regular work-load had to be put on hold, and meals were also provided to these trainees. The women from Split Lake wanted to start up their own business, in the same manner that Northern Star Co-op is run. However, one member of Northern Star said that she thought this plan had fallen through.¹⁴

According to co-op members, women from the inner-city neighbourhood where they work are constantly requesting to be trained to sew, with some even offering to work for no pay just to receive the training. Past trainees have also been asking to come back and work for them. However, due to their tight financial situation and the extra time required for this interactive training, Northern Star had to discontinue its training program in 2001, a program which had provided training for women from downtown Winnipeg and other parts of the Province of Manitoba.¹⁵

TRAINING FOR INDEPENDENT DESIGNERS

The training received by independent Winnipeg designers is also highly variable, from some designers learning all of their skills on their own, to others who have pursued

¹⁴ Interview: June 3, 2004.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

post-secondary education in garment construction and design. The different avenues of training received by these independent designers are discussed here.

Learning at School and at Home

Many of the independent designers we interviewed first encountered garment construction while in primary or secondary school, often during school sewing classes. One local designer told us that she first took sewing lessons while in elementary school.¹⁶ As well, most of these independent designers took pride in teaching themselves certain construction skills, and had creative home environments growing up, including relatives who were involved in various artistic activities. For example, an Aboriginal designer from Winnipeg described herself as growing up with First Nations and Métis people who taught her traditional methods of garment and craft construction.¹⁷ Her grandmother sewed, and those sewing skills were passed down to her father, who then taught her to sew. As well, she learned beadwork skills from her mother, and her great aunt was involved in making hooked and braided rugs. Her parents also helped people on different reserves learn to make jackets, moccasins, and other First Nations and Métis crafts; her father felt it was important to preserve such traditions and way of life through art and crafts. As well as being taught to sew by her father, she was also self-taught, and while she felt that people are born with the natural ability to do such work, she also mentioned that her lack of formal training has at times made her less confident and prone to second-guessing her skills. She suggested that people wanting to pursue a career in design or construction should get formal training, and she herself had taken a commercial art course on signs and letter painting that she felt was useful in learning how to produce her designs in a more formal, standard way.

POST-SECONDARY TRAINING: UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA'S DEPARTMENT OF CLOTHING AND TEXTILES

Post-secondary education in the Department of Clothing and Textiles at the University of Manitoba provided another source of training for members of the garment

¹⁶ Interview: June 8, 2004.

¹⁷ Interview: June 10, 2004.

industry, and was also pursued by several of the designers in our study. Often, their desire was to develop and refine their sewing and construction skills, as well as develop their sense of design. However, while this department provides training on sewing and garment construction, their recent focus appears to be less on design per se, but more on product development and design technologies like CAD.¹⁸ One of the main reasons for this is that proficiency in the use of such technologies and an understanding of the business is considered to be one of the major skills required in the future of the garment industry.

While an AutoCAD system had been in place and taught to students for many years in the department, in 1997 they set up a CAD lab with Lectra CAD software programmed on 16 of their computers, which cost the equivalent of almost \$250,000, but given to them at educational prices by Lectra. The lab also included a plotter and a digitizing table. Two instructors were trained for two weeks on how to use the software by Lectra in December 1997, and in January 1998, they started teaching a course on CAD that was available to all students in the department. Learning the CAD system was not a requirement in the Department of Clothing and Textiles, but it was considered to be a great asset by several faculty members. As one instructor stated, “We wanted to educate grad[uate]s so they could help the industry”.¹⁹ As well, she said that there were students who wanted to go into the garment industry and realized the importance of such technology. However, this same instructor noted that students have different ideas about what their education should be, stating that the students seemed to want to tell the department what they should be learning. She noted that those students who didn’t have talent for understanding pattern development and computers went into other areas of the department, such as merchandising, management, retail and textile science. As well, due to the dwindling number of staff in the department, there was less time for faculty to devote to the CAD program, and she felt that this program required one person in a full-time position in order to do a good job, a condition that was never met.

¹⁸ For more information on CAD and other technology used in the garment industry, please see *Technology in the Winnipeg Garment Industry* by Leigh Hayden, this volume.

¹⁹ Interview: March 15, 2004.

The department had also hoped to for collaboration between the industry and the University, such that the industry, which can have difficulty affording such expensive equipment, would make use of their Lectra system. As a result, they offered a Continuing Education course for the public on the CAD system. The course started with eight students, but not all of them completed it due to some having a lack of prerequisites. It was considered a challenging course; some of the students had very little computer training and the course involved the use of very sophisticated equipment. However, it was very successful for the owner of a small Winnipeg garment company.²⁰ After taking the department's course on CAD, he approached the Lectra Company, purchased their system, and was then able to use this system to modify and manipulate his designs. With the Lectra system, he no longer had to make every pattern by hand, and he hired his own staff to manufacture their protective wear instead of contracting it out to a smaller company. Thus far, he has been very pleased with the Lectra equipment and service. Nonetheless, the collaboration between the university and industry was described as an unsuccessful venture by a former faculty member due to the sporadic nature it was available to the industry and the resulting lack of interest.²¹ The industry wanted to use the equipment according to their scheduling, but this was not conducive to an educational facility that had to be shared with students. As well, the university experienced some competition for its program as MFI had also been trying to become a central place where industry could learn how to use CAD with the development of its Manitoba Fashion Business Incubator in October 2003.²²

Faculty Member Views

According to instructors we interviewed in the University of Manitoba Department of Clothing and Textiles, design technology and product development were becoming increasingly important parts of the garment industry, and the goal was to prepare students to be proficient in these areas. As one faculty member told us during an

²⁰ Interview: April 23, 2004.

²¹ Interview: March 15, 2004.

²² For further discussion on this program, please see *Government Programs and the Garment Industry* by Aaron Pettman, this volume.

interview, the garment industry is now technology-driven and there is no turning back.²³ In her view, progressive firms have already embraced the new technology, and it is just a matter of time before everyone else does. Thus, with the implementation of more sophisticated design equipment and the movement of garment production overseas, she believed that the Winnipeg garment industry will now require individuals with a high degree of knowledge and skill about design and design technology. She described jobs in the garment industry as requiring a good knowledge and understanding of how fabrics and clothing feel, move, and work, as well as the ability to operate sophisticated design equipment and skill in technical design. With her perception that there will be a greater demand for highly skilled graduates, such as those from the Clothing and Textiles program, she said that it was important her department has support (namely financial) in order to ensure that their graduates are equipped with the appropriate technical skills and training.

As a result, certain changes have been made to the University of Manitoba Clothing and Textiles program to align it with the skills desired by the industry, with an emphasis on management, science, and technology. For example, another faculty member told us that there would probably be less time spent learning manual methods of pattern making and grading in their department, as well as in other design schools, internship programs and places of work in the US and Canada.²⁴ There was also a distancing from being a creative design program. She said that their program could no longer be considered a design program, due to the curriculum changes taking place, although there would always be a design component. In her view, design was taught in their program more in terms of the elements and principles of design, teaching people how to use those principles in creating a style or some form of presentation. She said that their teaching focus was different from that of design schools, and that the department emphasized learning the theoretical basis of what was being produced, as well as critical thinking and problem solving. This instructor noted that the focus was going more towards product development, which involves taking an idea and working it through until it becomes the

²³ Interview: December 18, 2003.

²⁴ Interview: May 27, 2004.

end product you might see at a store or being purchased by another type of business. Thus, she described the program as teaching students about the development and business process, the supply chain involved, and the technical and procedural elements that go into creating a style or fashion, rather than focusing on the development of individual creativity in design. It should be noted that a number of University of Manitoba Clothing and Textiles graduates had been hired by Winnipeg garment companies, where they typically have worked as pattern makers, markers, designers, merchandisers and buyers.

Perspectives of Program Graduates

The graduates we talked to expressed that they generally enjoyed their time in the University of Manitoba's Clothing and Textiles program, and also appreciated the skills they were able to develop. For example, one Department of Clothing and Textiles graduate, who is also a local small-scale designer, went into the program after learning to sew at home. It was her goal to improve some of her sewing and design skills,²⁵ and she felt that this program was beneficial in giving her a solid knowledge of the basics of construction. As well, her Clothing and Textiles degree helped her find work as a home economics teacher, and she found some of what she learned, such as general information about the garment industry, business management and marketing, to be helpful. She also described some of her professors as being very good teachers and enjoying their classes, although she found the lack of full-time faculty problematic, with only one staff member working full-time while she was in the program.

Beyond basic home sewing machines, construction classes also included training on an industrial surger and single needle sewing machines. Students could learn how to use CAD software in a CAD class (which is in the area of Textile Product Development), where they would scan in basic garments and change and modify different aspects of it on the computer, such as size. There was an emphasis on using the software in the way the industry would, but in this particular designer's view, CAD is only a small part of the garment industry; only a few people are going to need CAD or want it. She didn't think knowledge of CAD was in high demand. She said that while there were some companies

²⁵ Interview: August 25, 2004.

using this technology, they only required a few trained people be hired to carry out this task. In fact, she thought that the skills learned in the Clothing and Textiles program matched up half-and-half to the skills desired in the industry right now. In her view, some of the skills students learned in the program have been useful, and she mentioned that several of her classmates from the program now work in the Winnipeg industry as merchandisers and buyers, and others use their skills to sew and design.

However, not every student was happy with the department's new direction, especially with the shift away from design. The students felt some frustration that they did not learn the techniques they wanted to learn or were interested in. They felt like the program was not set up in the way they would have liked. This especially was the case with drawing and design, which some students felt should have been a larger part of the program. Instead, there was less and less focus on fashion design in the program, with fewer classes offered in this area. One graduate noted that there was an increasing focus on textile sciences in the department. While there were industries needing textile science expertise, in her view, there were many students coming into the program wanting to do design, not textile sciences.²⁶ She also thought that University of Manitoba training was very broad, touching on the surface of many areas, and thus making it difficult to decide which area to pursue after graduating. The program was viewed as good for people wanting a taste of many areas and not too sure of what they wanted to do, but it was lacking for people wanting to learn a particular area in more depth. In her view, a design school in Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal would be better for those wanting a more focused program.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The training available for those involved in the Winnipeg garment industry can best be described as diverse and inconsistent. Many garment workers and designers learned their sewing skills through informal training from family members or their own self-taught methods. Even though much of the training available to garment workers was highly variable, programs like that offered by MFI provided thorough training in line

²⁶ Interview: August 25, 2004.

with industry standards. Also, UNITE and organizations like Northern Star Co-op also offered useful training. Most of these programs, however, are no longer in operation, and potential garment workers looking for training will find it even more difficult to locate accessible and effective programs that will teach them skills to work in the industry. Then again, finding employment as a garment worker in Winnipeg may be increasingly difficult as more and more manufacturing jobs move overseas. Also, the small fraction of garment production that remains in Winnipeg may require new kinds of training in the use of newly introduced automated and computerized equipment. However, a former supervisor noted that workers often required less skill to use this new equipment, and that certain tasks actually took fewer people to complete, further reducing the number of garment workers required by the local industry.²⁷ Thus, garment workers are experiencing both a decrease in the employment available to them, as well as a deskilling in the work that they are performing. According to one industry consultant, in order to be in demand, a worker has to have the desired skills and experience, and to stay in the industry, garment workers will need to get new training.²⁸ However, many garment workers viewed the federal government's job development strategies as focusing on apprenticeship programs for both established and new designers, pattern-makers, and middle-management trainers, but not including programs that assisted the long-term educational goals of immigrant workers. While the acquisition of new skills will be imperative to continue working in this industry, the development of new training programs accessible to garment workers, consisting largely of immigrant women, has yet to be seen.

The current lack of training for garment workers is in sharp contrast with the in-depth training available for other members of the industry, such as that at the University of Manitoba's Department of Clothing and Textiles. However, it should be noted that many students entering the University of Manitoba program were interested in learning aspects of design and fashion. Instead, they found this program to be focusing more and more on product development, as well as the management and science aspects of the

²⁷ Interview: June 1, 2005.

²⁸ Interview: June 14, 2004.

industry. Indeed, the training that is available for those interested in working in the production and design of garments has increasingly focused on the use of new technologies. Such training is also dictated by the skills the industry currently desires and predicts will be required in the future. With most garment manufacturing moving overseas, it is the industry's view that only design, product development and management will remain in Winnipeg. As a result, training in these areas has become more prevalent, while the availability of training for SMOs in relation to garment construction has decreased. Ultimately, those interested in developing their construction or creative design skills and becoming garment workers or designers will have to look elsewhere for such training.

Worker Views on Changes in the Winnipeg Garment Industry: In-depth Interviews with Ten Immigrant Garment Workers¹

Amena Khatun

INTRODUCTION

The garment-manufacturing sector of Winnipeg is composed of about 100 firms that employ an estimated 8,000 workers. The sector is characterized by its high-quality product manufacturing, use of the latest state-of-the-art production equipment and advanced manufacturing design, and sophisticated retail chains in North America, Japan, Australia, Mexico and Hong Kong. The sector manufactures outerwear, military garments and gear, cresting and commercial embroidery, active-wear and knitwear, gloves, hats and caps, industrial and institutional apparel, canvas sewn products, leather and fur fashions, casual wear and denim products for brand names like OshKosh, London Fog, Jhane Barnes Outerwear, and Calvin Klein. According to the Industry Canada Report (2003), the sector is famous for worker training, good labour-management relations, unionization, no work stoppages and negligible lay-offs.

However, global garment production stereotypes apply here in Winnipeg too. The sector relies on a gender-biased international division of labour based on stereotypic

¹ Editors note: Citations by other contributors to this report of the research conducted by Amena Khatun are based on Amena's Interim Report on Interviews with Winnipeg Garment Workers, January 25, 2005. The final report by Amena was received October 2005. This version of her final report is edited by Raymond Wiest.

“nimble fingers” and “docility” principles. Managerial practices result in recruitment of immigrant workers of impoverished backgrounds. Recently, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) put the Canadian garment industry in a transition period (Industry Canada Report 2003:9). The sector now is tending to switch from combined manufacturing to assembly-line outsourcing of plants in order to integrate with global corporate strategies of market competition. One marker of the Winnipeg industry is innovative use of more sophisticated technology, such as 3-D body scanning machines for mass customization, and introduction of group work stations in place of the conventional individualized division of labour. These innovations are thought to contribute to yet unexplored changes in the livelihood of the workers of the sector.

This small-scale study of garment workers is intended to review and examine the reasons for managerial preference for immigrant workers while inner-city residents remain unemployed. Consequently, impacts of technological advances on workers’ everyday community lives and occupational spheres come to the fore. Relying on flexibly organized multiple-session interviews of ten garment workers, I have attempted to explore perceptions of the women garment workers of Winnipeg on the most contemporary operational and technological change trends in manufacturing that might affect their occupation, family and community lives in the short and/or long run.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

One objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of the Winnipeg garment sector jobs on their livelihoods and household economic management. A second objective of this study is to report worker perception of impacts of new technology—including computerization—on their factory jobs. A third objective is to assess, through the opinions of workers themselves, the problems and prospects of employment of inner-city residents in garment sector jobs. A fourth objective is to investigate whether the contemporary trend of globalization and high mechanization affects community economics through loss of employment or displacement of workers. How garment workers understand new technology impacts on the conditions of their work and job futures underlies each of these objectives.

RESEARCH METHODS

My part of a larger team study, begun in September 2003, is based on informal interviewing of respondents and individual in-depth probing. I sought to prepare a number of case studies of workers, utilizing an informal approach through which the respondents were encouraged by me to generate as much information as possible by themselves on different dimensions of the garment manufacturing occupation. Through a snowball contact technique, eighteen women garment workers from different parts of the city were contacted and selected for the study. Each of these persons was told of the nature of the research and its objectives, and they all expressed willingness to participate voluntarily upon assurance of their freedom of withdrawal from this study at any time.

Fieldwork Difficulties and Limitations of the Research

Despite the fact that I traveled to make frequent visits to communicate with the selected respondents in order to avoid the risk of participant dropout during the study period, only ten participants continued to the end of my study in July 2004. Thirty-two successful interview sessions were conducted with the ten respondents. Another thirty attempts of interviewing were unsuccessful due to time-constraints and other personal-familial problems the workers expressed. Since most of these women were actively working in their jobs, interviewing turned into a very inconvenient and time-consuming venture. In addition to taking time to build rapport and develop a trust to gain their confidence, I placed the respondents' voices and choices above everything else. Thus, I was guided by, and limited by, mutual understanding between the researcher and the respondents for convenient interview times, as well as the nature and content of the interviews.²

Each potential respondent was provided with the project description, the supervisor's accreditation and an informed consent letter, nevertheless, their suspicion of the researcher's motives lasted for an unusually long time. The problems were overcome

² I experienced considerable difficulties in carrying out this fieldwork. Respondents frequently switched previously arranged interview times, or did not appear for group discussions previously agreed upon; this occurred thirty times among all respondents, meaning that each of the ten respondents who stayed with the study changed mutually agreed schedules three times on average.

only in the more advanced period of interviewing, after numerous follow-up visits. Eight of the interviewed workers explained the reasons for their suspicion at the end of the study. Four of them were suspicious of me because of my foreign background. Three among these respondents mentioned that they considered me to be an aspirant for a garment factory job, and thus suspected that I might have been collecting information about factories for my own use. One other believed that I must have been serving some assignment of workers' unions or other organizations. Another worker believed that a non-Canadian was not supposed to do research on any Canadian problem. Two respondents suspected me for appearing to work alone in the research. They believed that no social research could be done without a team of researchers; although my research was part of a team effort, to them I was appearing alone.³

I also encountered transcription and translation problems. Since all of the workers were immigrants using English as a second language, their accents and linguistic dialects constituted a great difficulty in note taking and information gathering.⁴ Beyond these problems, seasonal conditions interfered with smooth operation of the interview sessions to some extent. I had to rely on bus transportation in the harsh winter months, so that the cancellations of interviews were particularly taxing at times, especially since I myself also had children to care for.

It is worth noting here that the eight workers who dropped out of the planned interview sessions had characteristics in common. First, all of them were inner city Aboriginal people, and were former garment workers who voluntarily resigned their jobs in different factories. None of them were employed during their selection for this study. All of them had worked in garment factories only once in their job-life. As well, none of them worked for more than two months. Although they each had accepted a factory job, they remained in the job for a relatively short period of time. It would be worth examining through the voice of the inner city Aboriginal people why their time in the job is relatively short. However, because their reluctance to be part of this study came at an

³ Four of the respondents asked whether I was going to compensate them for their time in interviewing. I replied that there would be no monetary compensation, but towards the end of my interviews I presented gifts to each respondent.

⁴ I used a Chinese interpreter for six sessions, and paid for the service of this interpreter.

early stage—just at the rapport-building phase of this study—I was unable to follow up on these issues with these short-term Aboriginal employees of the garment industry.

Profile of the Interviewed Respondents

The ten respondents who continued with me the duration of my study were drawn from six different firms—Nygard Corporation, Warehouse One, Great Western Glove, MWG Apparel, All Canadian Emblem Corporation, and SIA Inc.⁵ They were interviewed in thirty-two sessions. All respondents were women. They are all above thirty-five years of age, ranging from 35 to 50 years old. Representing Bangladesh, China, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Vietnam, their first languages were all other than English. The most notable commonality among all of these ten workers is that they are landed immigrants who immigrated from developing countries and gained experience in garment work in their home countries. Their experiences in their countries of origin contributed to a deeper comparative understanding of garment manufacturing techniques in ‘outsourced’ or ‘sub-contracted’ plants of developing countries and the integrated manufacturing of Winnipeg factories.

Sewing machine operators (SMOs) constitute the greater part of the Winnipeg garment factory workforce, a point that is reflected in this micro study too. Of ten workers interviewed, seven were SMOs, including one who had just resigned from her workplace of several years. One worked as a busheller,⁶ one as a packer-bundler, and one as a spreader-presser. In addition to comments on their specializations, all of them were asked about holistic and integrated features of the Winnipeg factories.

Six of the respondents are citizens of Canada; the other four are permanent residents. Three of the permanent residents were about to fulfill their residence requirements by the end of this study. It is worth noting that, except for two respondents receiving citizenship through a spouse in a skilled category, eight of the respondents applied for political asylum or refugee status. All of the eight asylum seekers mentioned that, although their permanent residence permits were granted much beyond their initial

⁵ The distribution of interviewed workers in these plants is kept confidential to protect worker identities.

⁶ A ‘busheller’ removes loose threads from garments before they are packed and shipped.

application period, this did not pose any problem for them to get jobs in the garment sector.

Organization of the Report

An important feature of this study is that it contributes to a comparative understanding of the garment manufacturing system of Canada and of developing countries. Since eight out of the ten workers had previous experience of garment manufacturing in their home countries, all of them tended to discuss every issue from a cross-country comparative perspective. This enriched the focus of the study and overall assessment of the researchable issues. Considering these attributes, and because of my own previous work in the garment industry in Bangladesh (Khatun 1998; Wiest, Khatun and Mohiuddin 2003), comparative commentary is included in this report. It is clear from the observations made by the interviewed workers that their perceptions of the Winnipeg garment industry are shaped by their comparative experiences.

Given the commonalities and conformity of information delivered by different respondents, information is presented in this report largely in generalized form to reduce redundancy. Two reflexive case studies are presented as representation of answers to all research questions. These two cases are included in this report for several reasons. First, these respondents had impressive analytical capacity with a very clear sense of the issues. Second, both had a better command of the English language than other workers. Third, both of them voluntarily and willingly provided the most hours in interview sessions. Finally, and most importantly, these two respondents covered my research issues in a way that triangulated different analytical perspectives with the collated information of other respondents.

These case studies are more than appendages to this report; each offers subtle insights into the experiences of immigrant garment workers. The two case studies are positioned at the end of the report to allow the generalized observations of the ten immigrant workers to flow naturally, and to preserve the integrity of the case studies themselves.

This report is organized around: 1) worker perceptions of general features of Winnipeg garment factories in the new economy, and perceived impacts of technological

changes in the industry; and 2) comparison of experiences in the Winnipeg industry with experiences in the garment industry of other countries. Particularly in the case studies, the report touches upon 3) immigrant garment worker impressions of the prospect for economic integration of unemployed inner-city residents.

WORKER PERCEPTIONS OF WINNIPEG GARMENT FACTORIES IN THE NEW ECONOMY

In order to reflect on the changes in manufacturing system and management pattern of the respective factories, the respondents of this study focused on two important sections of factory-line operation: division of labour, and types of technology use and trends of change in technology use.

Worker Characterizations of the Workforce, Division of Labour, and Hierarchy

A multi-ethnic, predominantly woman workforce is a feature of the respective factories of the respondents. Workers are composed of Filipino, Chinese, Thai, Laotian, Mexican, Italian, Portuguese, Greek, Eastern European, Bosnian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Indian workers. One respondent mentioned, for example, that of 35 workers on her floor, only four were male workers. There was only one Canadian working as bundle lifter, and one Aboriginal worker in the packaging section. All other workers were immigrants. All of the respondents secured their jobs through referrals from other workers, which tends to lead to members of some communities and nationalities constituting the large share of the Winnipeg garment workforce. All respondents informed that workers from the Philippines outnumber workers of other communities.

Interviewed workers reflect a rather uniform understanding of Winnipeg garment factory management systems, division of labour, and hierarchy. The major division of labour is composed of computerized pattern grading, marker making, pattern making, cutting, sewing, handling, packaging and shipping. By rank order, employees represent the administrative and manufacturing tiers as follows:

- Managers
- Designers
- Supervisors
- Patterners and Cutters
- Supervisors and Quality Control Managers
- Sewing Machine Operators

- Spreaders, Pressers and Bushellers
- Packers, Bundlers and Shippers.

All of the interviewed workers suggested that the Nygard firm is the role model for the division of labour, operation organization and introduction and use of technology for other plants, whether they worked there or elsewhere. According to them, whatever Nygard initiates or introduces, other plants try to imitate or at least attempt to equip their plants as closely as possible.

Plants in which the interviewed workers worked or had worked are conveniently organized from entry to exit, except for Sia Inc., which cannot match other factories in the upgrading process due to its small size. Attendance tags are received at entry, and employee outer garments are to be placed in entry closets and hangers. Factory floors are divided into several independent workplace units: security checkroom zone; office zone, lunchroom and restroom; cutting and spreading zone; pressing, inspecting, labelling and packing zone; and warehouse zone.

Most of the plants in which the interviewed workers work have computerized Gerber plotters and electronic printers that print patterns and designs of customizable orders; in some plants these tasks are sometimes outsourced. Spreaders use automatic air-blowing machines to quickly and efficiently unroll fabric. The fabric is then sent to the cutters. Once computer assisted cutting is done with the Gerber cutting machines, railed shelves bring the fabric to the SMOs. In the Nygard plant, the computer-assisted modular sewing is handled and managed in groups of four to five SMOs. These operators receive prolonged training. They are paid according to the group output. More experienced workers do the quality control tasks of inspecting the finished garments for imperfections in stitching and finishing.

SMOs receive hourly wages. All of the respondents mentioned that preferential treatment of management is not uncommon. Sometimes some groups receive pay beyond their real working hours, i.e., bonuses. According to the respondents, this happens when the management forms a group of workers selected on the basis of criteria not made clear. Bonuses are paid on a group basis, often depending upon the performance of a group in accomplishing the monthly group quota.

WORKER VIEWS OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES AND IMPACTS

According to the interviewed workers, the most significant technological changes being undertaken, or already installed by the end of this study, were installation of automatic conveyor belts and computerized multi-needle machines. These changes have resulted in a new arrangement of workers—from individual SMOs operating alone to teamwork in some factories. The workers argued that this new organization around team production has resulted in three problems among workers. First, a considerable level of tension affects each worker in fear of any possible individual mistake or inefficiency, with the possibility of group rebuke in case of a mistake since all members of a group suffer monetary loss for a mistake by one member of a workgroup. This creates degenerative competition within the workgroup that provokes excuses and attempts to blame others. Second, new team members, or the most junior team members, feel intimidated as the older or senior team members tend to doubt the capacity of the beginners, and often show impatience and anger toward the new team member. Consequently, the teamwork system may interfere with mutually beneficial learning and training of workers, and the system can threaten shop floor group solidarity. Third, the management may become biased in the formation of groups, and may tend to put those in the same group who they favour for personal reasons. The interviewed workers consider this to be a practice that may increase shop floor nepotism.

According to these same workers, most factories—except the smaller ones—are undergoing rapid technological change. They believe that installation of new technology⁷ is mostly influenced by the mechanization move of the Nygard firm. This is reflected in their perception about “mass customization”,⁸ a new buzzword that most workers are familiar with. They perceive that introduction of any such machine may result in loss of jobs for male patterners and designers, but not women seamstresses or SMOs. However, respondents beyond those from Nygard plants were neither familiar with the technology, nor saw it installed in their respective factories.

⁷ For a description of the current technology, please see *Technology in the Winnipeg Garment Industry* by Leigh Hayden, this volume.

⁸ “Mass customization” refers to a generalized set of computerized algorithms of exact body measurements of several persons. This is done with automatic body-scanning machines.

In the view of these workers, only one firm stood out as falling behind in the adoption of new technology, namely Sia Inc. According to one worker, this firm still functions with old machines and a relatively slow manual production system, having computerized only a few sections such as inventory, electronic communication systems and departmental accounting and human resource management. The factory recently introduced a limited number of multi-layer electronic stitching machines, but not every worker is allowed to operate them. They are reserved for only a few most skilled and favoured workers. According to this particular SMO, management shows reluctance to automate the factory on unfortunate but understandable grounds—the factory is under the process of a permanent move to Mexico. From this worker’s perspective, the firm is in the position of not being able to sustain itself in Winnipeg in the long run. The factory has lagged behind in terms of other provisions too, such as an electronic identification system for workers. The plant does not have capacity to compete for orders of classic apparel from major retailers. These conditions are somewhat similar to garment manufacturing plants of developing countries, conditions that reflect, in the words of this SMO respondent, “lack of bargaining power”. Despite a lower level of technological development, it is particularly interesting that the workers suggest that this firm provides better worker welfare facilities through provision of insurance for health checks and medical treatment, work-time injury compensation, retirement benefits and other desirable worker welfare benefits.

All Canadian Emblem changes its technology frequently. Its production is different from other factories, with more specialized machinery. The factory is equipped with an art, design and digitizing department. Two workers mentioned that this factory is specialized in automated screen printing, chenille, embossing, radio frequency welding, rubber bonding, label making, twill finishing, and manufacture of epaulettes, ties, bullions, pins, etc. The major problem is that these specialized machines generate more uncomfortable noise than machines of regular garment manufacturing units. Not having installed noise control facilities, these installations pose a threat to worker health. Both respondents mentioned that the noise level is almost unbearable, in part because the factory has installed reconditioned machines. They surmised that the factory would move

from Winnipeg to another country soon. From their point of view, this is why management does not install new machines.

With regard to impacts of new technology on jobs and on workers' careers, the view of respondents in general is positive. Initially new technologies were thought to reduce the workload of workers. After initial difficulties with new equipment, workers eventually become familiar with, and learn how to work with these machines. However, all of the respondents suggest that workers need more paid training before being assigned to work with new technology. The workers said that in some of the plants management deems training to be essential upon introduction of new machines, but other plants do not follow this standard consistently.

All but one of the interviewed workers believes that increased automation in manufacturing will lead to reduction in skill utilization, i.e., it is contributing to deskilling. Nygard operators, for example, noted that, due to mechanization, they have to comply with the speed of the conveyer belt and shelving process. Such mechanization compels them to remain alert in a standing position for most of their working hours. It has also increased the frequency of their physical movement on the factory floor. At the same time, their rest time and work in a sitting position has been reduced drastically.

Some workers note that recent manufacturing shifts from specialized garments (e.g., a complete parka) to sportswear production are displacing Eastern European cloak makers and furriers. One worker observed that her East European friends lost jobs due to the switch from knitwear to sportswear apparel production. Consequently, many who have been skilled in this specialized manufacture of complete cloaks will suffer from skill loss, they argue.

Workers assume or consider email, fax and instant communication systems to have a negative impact on their life-style and everyday planning because of the new expectation for immediate response to orders. As communication systems are modernized, factories start working instantly upon receipt of orders. As a result, workers face increased rescheduling of shifts and duties. This type of instant response to work-orders makes it difficult for the workers to plan for familial or personal events in advance.

All respondents expressed their concern about rumours that factories would move outside Canada, or if they remained in Winnipeg, they would turn into sportswear manufacturing units requiring different types of manufacturing skill. Such rumours introduce tension and a sense of job insecurity among workers.

Although the number of women cutting masters appears to be increasing, newer managerial positions for men are also increasing, say the workers. Men are increasingly being hired as computer programmers, data managers, inventory managers and computer technicians. With technological advances, job prospects for male workers increases. As a result, male white-collar officials and technicians are increasing in factories.

Interviewed workers also speak against introduction of new technology that hinders their privacy and establishes more managerial control over them. All but one of the interviewed workers said that their respective employing factories installed computerized speed monitoring and surveillance systems. Workers consider this type of surveillance to be unusually invasive and disrespectful of workers as human being. They noted that such surveillance reflects a managerial attitude towards workers as if they are machines or non-human animals. They also consider the computer-based staff performance recording system to be humiliating, exploitative, and threatening of their privacy and human dignity. Both types of technology are viewed as a means to gain more managerial control over workers, including increased invasion of one's privacy.

However, all of the respondents mentioned that introduction of modern technologies increases noise levels in factories. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the absence of adequate hearing protection measures in their respective plants. They consider that although other in-plant utilities are adequate, lack of provision of hearing protection measures may result in hearing impairment and other health problems in the near future.

In the in-depth discussions, all of the three Nygard respondents informed that introduction of the modular system at Nygard plants evoked a worker strike in 1995. Gradually the resistance movement waned, especially when it became widely known that the new system had not resulted in as negative impacts on workers as had been anticipated by some. Gradually other large firms introduced modular systems without much worker resistance.

The interviewed workers thought it unwise to speculate on the impact of new technologies without close observation and monitoring of their real impacts for several years. One of them expressed that new technology will create an adjustment problem among workers, especially for an initial two to three years. Later on it may increase productivity and appear to reduce workloads. This worker also suggested that new technology will not replace manual workers, but rather may help workers avoid mistakes in their work and may also reduce monotony. Two workers thought that mechanization would result in job cuts, especially entry-level positions such as helpers and shelvers in near future. This, they think, will mean loss of job opportunities for new immigrants. This was based on news circulating in one firm that jobs for helpers and bundlers were gradually disappearing due to introduction of conveyor belts, hanger dispensers, and automatic shelvers, with one sewing machine operator controlling movements by a tableside button.

Worker Assessment of Winnipeg Garment Factory Attributes

General opinions expressed about the Winnipeg garment industry were collated from general discussions with ten workers, and are presented here as positive and negative attributes. The views expressed suggest a strong comparison with conditions experienced in the garment industry elsewhere.

Positive attributes

- Salary and payment in these factories are basically satisfactory and paid regularly. Managerial treatment is more or less equitable; respondents rarely experienced discrimination in salary. Skilled and qualified workers receive due recognition. The provision of bonuses is for the most part uniform and regular.
- Workers' freedom of choice about overtime work is safeguarded. There were no major instances noted of forced work, or managerial pressure for over-time work. Overtime is not a regular phenomenon; rather, it is an exception of work organization in Winnipeg factories. None of the respondents experienced overnight overtime work. Overtime payment is 1.5 the regular payment.
- The recruitment system in these factories is brief and orderly. Recruiters pay specific attention to immigrant workers. The interviewed workers experienced no exploitation incidents—financial or otherwise—from factory management in recruitment.

Negative attributes

- Despite persistence of professional discipline in provision of salary and other benefits, all interviewed workers expressed dissatisfaction with individual level managerial treatment of workers. They complained about rude treatment of foreign workers. Their viewpoint is that managerial mannerisms in most factories often appear heavy-handed and abusive. The interviewed workers characterized management people as too bossy, overly bureaucratic, rigid in their decisions, and inconsiderate of unintended mistakes made by workers. However, none of the interviewed workers ever experienced sexual abuse, nor had they heard of any allegations of sexual misconduct of managers.
- Respondents highlighted the lack of coordination and mutual understanding between workers in different sections of the plants. Misunderstandings often occur among workers due to language and cultural differences between workers from different nations. For example, in a tight production schedule in one plant, a cutter, from a culture and language very different from the SMOs, supplied pieces that were inaccurately cut. SMOs experienced great frustration, but the cutter blamed the SMOs rather than admit the mistake. Such difficulties can be resolved only if there is effective managerial coordination.
- All of the respondents referred to a suppressed racism between management and the workers. Workers noted that, despite persistence of systematic production management, managers usually look down on the immigrant workers. They note that it becomes transparent through management's partiality to Canadian workers. The interviewed workers felt that management people underestimate the capacity of immigrant workers in ways that are naïve and even rude. According to these respondents, such underestimation rarely takes place in the case of Canadian workers. The experience of one interviewed worker is worth noting here. She worked for a year at a single plant from December 1999 to January 2001. According to her, in this factory she experienced a racially biased management who withheld due payment. The management of the factory terminated her and three of her friends without compensating them properly with salary and other benefits considered due.
- A regional sectarian attitude among workers poses a big threat to formation of greater worker solidarity. Interviewed workers reported that the immigrant workers of the Philippines and China tend to form close-knit worker groups that exclude others. Other workers also become grouped in terms of their culture and nationality. Such groupings restrict the opportunity of interaction among workers. Moreover, the minority group of workers always feels intimidated by the larger groups. The respondents identified this regionalist tendency as a barrier for trade union movements. They also argued that factory management has tended to disregard these divisions among workers.
- The Winnipeg garment factories offer minimal provision for entertainment, recreation, and interactive socio-cultural events for workers. The respondents suggested that management should introduce more interactive and recreational programs for the employees, because they all believed such incentive systems boost worker commitment to group output.

- The interviewed workers also noted that the rigid division of task in most plants offers little opportunity to learn new techniques and develop skills to improve performance.
- In general, the production management system on factory floors is considered monotonous, boring and mindless, with little room for skill stimulation or renewal, or for personal performance satisfaction. All of the respondents mentioned that, after an eight-hour shift, physical and mental fatigue sets in after work-hours.
- Language often poses a serious barrier for communication among the workers. Due to their differing cultural backgrounds, even the common spoken English takes on a complex character on factory floors.

Special Problems

- Six respondents explained from their experience that women are now gradually taking up so-called male-dominated positions like cutters and patterners. However, their view is that this development should not be construed as managerial recognition of women's skill in these areas. Rather, management can take advantage of this shift to diminish the bargaining power of male cutters and patterners. Two interviewed workers expressed that they are aware of the introduction of fashion design courses in universities and technical colleges in Canada, as well as in their respective countries. In their opinion, women may have been studying these courses in greater number than before, and this might have contributed to the increase of women cutters. Four interviewed workers noted that they experienced the brief presence of female cutters in their respective factories, and none noted gender discrimination against new women cutters and patterners in the form of wages or managerial treatment. With reference to their experience that female cutters lasted for only short periods in those plants (one to three months), they suggested that women cutters are not yet as well established as men in this position.
- The respondents do not believe that factories are facing considerable economic loss due to NAFTA or other global economic adjustments. They believe that the factories are moving out of Winnipeg to achieve greater profits. However, all of them believe that this movement of factories will jeopardize jobs of local and immigrant workers. 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. Their view is that any major Winnipeg plant closures or relocations will put additional burden on both the federal and provincial governments to absorb the immigrant workforce in other suitable job sectors.
- The respondents noted the absence of training facilities for SMOs in factories other than Nygard 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. Although the federal government's job development initiative focuses on apprenticeship programs for both young and established designers, pattern makers, and

middle management trainers, it does not include the long-term educational goals of immigrant workers.

- Most Winnipeg factories are based on piecework in manufacturing. The interviewed workers consider per piece wages to be low in relation to worker skill and efficiency, and they expressed concern about the traditional ticket system of quality control over piece wages. They also expressed concern with the complex system of accounting and calculation of worker output because they found it confusing and potentially depriving them of their dues. These respondents suggest a more straightforward and transparent accounting and payment system.
- All of the workers blamed their respective factory management for not paying attention to language development measures for the workers. Due to the multi-ethnic work environment in these factories, workers deserve specialized language development training for more effective communication and correspondence. They reiterated worker demand for English literacy and mathematical numeracy, and suggested that factory management should come forward to help the workers realize this oft-expressed demand.
- Workers assert that factory management should take initiative to solve the problems associated with unavailability of childcare centres near the factories. They suggest that management seldom pays attention to problems of refugee women workers' need for nearby childcare centres. They also noted the absence of provisions for exercise, recreation, reading or other forms of relaxation in most factories. They suggested these facilities should be given higher priority in factories to help workers reduce fatigue, boredom, and disinterest in work.

THE WINNIPEG GARMENT INDUSTRY IN RELATION TO INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Contrasting Features

Experiences of eight of the interviewed immigrant garment workers who had garment sector jobs in their countries of origin yield interesting comparisons that not only highlight characteristics of the Winnipeg context, but provide insights on the perspectives of the immigrant workers themselves. For the most part the respondents see the Winnipeg manufacturing system in a positive light in comparison to their countries of origin. They highlight strong differences, but they also note undesirable similarities.

The following set of contrasts is based on compilation of similar responses of respondents regarding their previous work experience and their garment industry jobs in Winnipeg.

Age of workers

Age of workers in Winnipeg factories contrasts sharply with the age of workers in their countries of origin. Young and inexperienced workers dominate in factories of China, Trinidad, Vietnam, the Philippines and Bangladesh. The respondents suggested that in Winnipeg, just as mature women prefer a factory job, the managers also prefer mature women. The age level of the respondents of this study reflects this observation. According to all of the respondents, young girls in their respective countries compete hard to secure factory jobs; in contrast, young girls of Canada express considerable disinterest in such jobs.

Size of workforce

Respondents noted that on each floor of a garment manufacturing plant in their respective countries there are usually 200 or more workers; while in Canada only 50 workers, on average, work in each plant. Helpers outnumber operators in developing country plants. Most workers are usually denied promotion from helper to position of SMO, even after gaining years of experience. In contrast, SMOs in Winnipeg factories outnumber helpers. Having clear opportunity to enter the position of SMO gives the respondents a greater sense of job satisfaction than they experienced before. In a similar fashion, part-time workers outnumber full-time workers in garment factories of developing countries. The Winnipeg garment factories present the opposite picture. The respondents noted that their full-time contracts give them solace and a positive feeling of reasonable job security. They also noted that factories of the developing countries are organized around large available labour pools, and thus depend more on fresh recruits for profit maximization rather than dealing with demands for greater earnings by those with experience. Thus, exploitation increases in these rapid turnover plants, and workers are often denied their work rights. In contrast, Winnipeg plants depend more on experienced workers than on new and young recruits in order not to compromise quality.

Plant production specificity

Respondents also marked a difference between Canada and their respective countries in specificity of production. In their countries or origin, manufacturing is “plant-specific”, meaning that a jeans factory always manufactures jeans, and a blouse

factory manufactures blouses without exception, because these plants are equipped with inflexible manufacturing technology. In contrast, Winnipeg factories have technological flexibility for generalized and multi-tasking production. This is why the same plant can manufacture different kinds of apparel depending on the variety of orders from buyers. As well, the respondents mentioned that factories of developing countries, including their respective countries of origin, have added a new section of assembly-line operation dedicated repair of defective apparel. In contrast, Winnipeg factories follow a logical and integrated means of manufacturing.

Technology

Technological difference was a major focus of the respondents' discussion. They indicated that workplaces in their countries of origin were equipped with old, used and reconditioned machines, mostly single-needle machines. Technology used in Winnipeg factories is complex, flexible and sophisticated. All but one of the respondents said they commonly used multi-needle machines, and one said she was familiar with newly installed multi-layer stitching machines in her present workplace. All of the interviewed workers said that garment factories in their home countries manually perform designing, cutting, and seaming, while in Winnipeg factories these tasks are performed with the assistance and precision of computer programs. And while online communication is an essential feature of the Winnipeg factories, developing countries remain handicapped in terms of their dependence on weak and inefficient off-line communication systems.

Production management

Respondents noted that sub-contracting—through middlemanship or compradorship—is a common phenomenon in their countries of origin. The Winnipeg factories do not operate through extended subcontracting chains. Thus, in their view the production management system of the developing countries as disjointed, and a clear contrast to the integrated production management systems of the Winnipeg factories.

Markets

The factories of the developing countries, as represented in the opinion of the interviewed immigrant workers, are one hundred percent export-oriented. They rarely

manufacture for domestic markets. In contrast, Winnipeg factories are believed to focus first on the clothing needs of the domestic market, and treat export as an extension of that market. They suggest this is one reason why export to the US and other markets is not uniform. They also noted that garment-manufacturing units of developing countries generally do not have organized and systematic marketing networks. The Winnipeg factories have efficient marketing departments linked to a global marketing system.

Contribution to national or regional economy

The role and contribution of the garment sector in developing countries was portrayed as secondary or even negative. Respondents from Sri Lanka, Trinidad, and Vietnam mentioned that the factories in their countries play the role of big tailoring-houses that cater to precise work orders of overseas buyers. Since all manufacturing inputs are sourced from outside, these factories do not contribute to the installation of input-manufacturing plants, e.g., production of textiles. With these explanations, the respondents hinted that there is no backward or forward linkage with the garment factories in their respective countries. However, many inputs or raw materials of the Winnipeg factories are believed to be sourced from inside Canada. Therefore, the workers point to the fact that Winnipeg factories have a direct contribution to the economy national and regional economy because they believe the garment factories have both backward and forward linkages to other factories in Canada.⁹

Research, development and training

The respondents were pointed about the absence of research, development and training activities in factories of their countries of origin. In contrast, the Winnipeg factories generally conduct periodic surveys and research, and some plants arrange skill training for the workers.

⁹ It is interesting that these immigrant workers make this contrast assumption. See the discussion of backward linkages in the final paper of this volume, *Conclusions and Propositions*, by Raymond Wiest.

Administration

Respondents suggested that factory administrations in developing countries are guided by autocratic bureaucratic managerial policies. In contrast, the Winnipeg factories provide the workers professional services at least in an organized if still bureaucratic manner. The respondents believe that here management people work in a team environment while developing countries' factory administrations remain mostly in the hands of few, often controlled by an owner-cum-manager alone.

Provision of work schedules, safeguards and benefits

Work hours in the respondents' home-country workplaces were irregular. The length of daily working hours was generally undefined yet inflexible. All interviewed workers reported experiencing mandatory overtime and overnight work. Their experience in Winnipeg factories was thus different in terms of provision for shift allocation and work schedules. In order to combat theft of fabric and finished garments, entry and exit physical checks were mandatory in the home-country workplaces of the respondents. Such practices are uncommon in Winnipeg factories. Respondents reported that they have never experienced such humiliating security measures in Winnipeg. Although electronic surveillance systems exist, they are used mostly in the packaging sections. Even though surveillance cameras are placed throughout the production floor, respondents feel less humiliated because they do not create the same sense of accusation and potential dispossession generated by person-by-person manual checking in the factories they worked for in their home countries. In general, the interviewed workers spoke against any form of surveillance. All of them noted that hidden surveillance cameras also make them feel repressed. One of the workers pointed out that the presence of cameras makes them feel like they are considered thieves. Consequently, they suggest that these provisions should be used restrictively. All but one of the interviewed workers mentioned their satisfaction with the existing independent punch card provision for each worker. It makes them feel less harassed in comparison to their previous experience with use of paper records for staff card identification, attendance records, etc.

In Winnipeg they perform hourly work that is integrated with piecework. Generally, accomplishing 82% of target piecework per hour is treated as the expected

target. Workers are paid accordingly. In their home-country factories, piecework is accounted not on an hourly basis, but by the absolute number of pieces without any manufacturing defect. Thus, Winnipeg factories appear to them a more advantageous workplace than their home-country factories. One other difference is that instead of single layer sewing or sewing one-by-one that they used to perform in their countries, they now enjoy the most recent trend of multi-layer sewing or sewing of several pieces together.

According to the respondents, poor provisions of benefits, neglected service, inadequacy of safety and security devices, absence of health checks and fire checks, and inadequacy of first aid equipment characterize the garment factories of their respective countries. They have no complaints about such inadequacies in their Winnipeg workplaces.

They also described that their experiences with receipt of payment in their present workplaces are considerably different from that in their home-country factories. Payments are timely, regulated and regular here. As well, they rarely experience lay-offs and termination without compensation. These differences are significant to them as they suffered from lay-offs and undue termination in their previous garment manufacturing jobs. And speaking to another difference between Winnipeg factories and their home-country factories, they mentioned that discriminatory practices by senior staff against junior staff are not apparent.

Eight out of ten of the respondents said that their respective factories of current employment were unionized. Nygard employees noted that they enjoy regular health checks, are ensured fire safety, have access to in-house medical and emergency medical facilities, and do not experience intimidating entry-exit body checks. Work injuries are often compensated and salary level is increased every year in compliance with inflation in the market. Trade unions play a vital role in salary increases. They said Nygard is affiliated with the Manitoba Fashion Centre, where new workers used to receive training on use of efficient use of the technologies introduced. Unlike other factories, Nygard can operate its production in two shifts—night and day. Because there are appropriate facilities, services and benefits, workers rarely feel too exhausted to do overtime work for

Nygaard if there is a call for it. Moreover, overtime is not open for all; only experienced workers receive overtime assignments.

Workers in MWG Apparel and Sia Inc. receive a full week-with-pay leave upon completing a year's work. However, these two factories offer little provision for training; instead, they tend to recruit already trained and experienced workers from other factories who are attracted by the offer of a small salary increase. MWG Apparel increases worker salaries every six months, and offers cash and gift incentives for festival times.

Job satisfaction

Considering all pros and cons in their comparisons between the Winnipeg garment industry and their experiences in their home countries, the interviewed workers contend that they have moderate job satisfaction. Even if occupational salaries and benefits are not increased, they would still prefer working in this sector because of salary certainty and allocation of assignments on the basis of experience and skill of the workers. Nygaard workers informed that they are particularly satisfied because of the training provisions. Other workers pointed to the weaknesses of training facilities in their respective workplaces, commenting that they would have greater satisfaction with their present jobs if there were provisions for timely update training and specialized need-specific training.

Interviewed employees working for Nygaard argued that Nygaard can ensure greater job security for workers because the company, with multinational manufacturing settings that include full facilities for design, production and distribution, can transfer workers from one plant to another without threatening their skill level or adaptation capabilities. Thus, all three respondents working at Nygaard plants spoke of their job satisfaction while working with Nygaard's production system.

However, job security is not well guaranteed in Winnipeg factories. Several workers expressed fear, knowing that their respective factories would be closed down shortly. Although they received managerial commitments and trade union assurances of compensation upon lay-off with the move of these factories, their concern is that they will not realize their dues in accordance with commitments made to them.

Commonalities

Despite the aforesaid differences, in the view of the respondents the Winnipeg garment factories also share some common or uniform features of a global garment manufacturing system. They characterize these commonalities as follows:

Regardless of mechanization and introduction of new technologies, the sector still remains a labour-intensive sector. Thus, these immigrant workers believe that the prospect for employment of new workers is not reduced in Winnipeg factories. None of the respondents are particularly aware of factories moving from Winnipeg to other places in the world. They argued that, since the need for clothing is a universal need, and since Winnipeg has an established set-up for manufacturing, closing of some factories will not create a crisis situation for the workers.

According to these immigrant workers, another common feature of the Winnipeg garment sector is that it relies mostly on immigrant labour as is the situation commonly seen elsewhere in the world. All of the respondents mentioned that they have heard about the Manitoba provincial government's policy to enhance its citizenship program. They perceive that this policy would encourage more people to migrate to Canada—especially to Manitoba—from other countries, and thus the provincial government itself would patronize and subsidize the Winnipeg garment sector in order to create opportunities in garment manufacturing jobs for a new immigrant workforce.

The interviewed immigrant workers pointed toward another global scale uniformity relating to migration of workers. In their previous home-country employment context they would bring their elderly family members from villages to cities. They resorted to such arrangements to ensure a supply of caretakers for their children. The practice applies in the Winnipeg context too. In order to meet familial responsibilities—especially child care—immigrant workers often try to bring their family members to Winnipeg. At some stage relatives who have immigrated to provide family service eventually join the workforce of these factories. Consequently, this familial cooperation serves as a supply chain for workers in garment factories.

As in their home-country factories, a fairly rigid gendered division of labour still persists in Winnipeg garment factories. Technological changes seem to have little impact

on the overall division of labour except in a few cases where men are increasingly assuming jobs that have heretofore been considered women's jobs.

Gender stereotyping still remains largely unaffected. Men assume managerial positions, and jobs associated with supervision, quality control, shipping, and handling of finished jobs, while SMO and helper positions are still preserved for women. Although slowly, the only notable change in gender stereotyping that is taking place is in the cutting section. There are some instances that hint a tendency toward gradual increase in participation of educated women in the cutting department. The interviewed workers argue that this may be a global trend.

Workers also explained that, like everywhere else in the world, unions have been weakened in Winnipeg factories too. Consequently, they see deterioration in the preservation of their occupational rights. The interviewed workers expressed not trusting the union activists because they are believed to do nothing to improve working conditions. They also suspect the unions to operate largely as collectives of advantage-seeking people who work as pawns of plant managers.

Absence of an occupational safety net is another feature common in both developing and developed countries. Although rate and frequency of lay-offs and termination is not high in Winnipeg factories, there is no strict regulation about employment and termination of workers. Moreover, managers tend to exploit immigrant worker unawareness or ignorance of recruitment and termination laws.

According to the respondents, the manufacturing practice in Winnipeg plants also reflects the similarity in the nature of this job throughout the world. The tasks and assignments allocated for the workers are still tedious, monotonous and nerve-racking. And, like factories of developing countries, unfriendly supervisory surveillance systems annoy workers.

The experience of health hazards of workers also conforms to those of the developing countries. Hearing disorders, noise irritation, pricking of fingers, arthritis, eye-soreness, fatigue, headache and repetitive strain injuries are some of the shop-floor problems. Cutters sometime experience hand and finger injuries, and shippers suffer from back strains and muscular injuries. In this context it must be noted that workers rarely suffer from breathing problems in Winnipeg plants because there are vacuum machines

throughout the spreading area that collect fabric dust in disposable dust bags. As well, exhaust fans are sufficient to maintain air quality freshness on shop floors in the Winnipeg context.

Resistance of workers takes many forms, expressed by workers in different ways in different contexts of the global garment manufacturing industry. In Winnipeg factories, absenteeism or job shopping is the most common way to express dissatisfaction upon harsh and unfair treatment by managers. Before the introduction of teamwork, some frustrated workers are said to have resorted to work stoppages, work slow down, sewing garments backwards, or reversing patterns. Now that one worker's fault implicates other team members, such practices are believed to have diminished significantly.

Respondents also spoke of an unwritten practice of job networking in Winnipeg factories, similar to other countries. Emergency recruitment on emergency orders is often made through workers' personal communication channels. Workers receive some additional benefit for supplying workers in a moment of great need. SIA Inc. and MWG Apparels used to pay the workers special cash incentives for recruiting their family members or friends.

CASE STUDIES

The following case study interview reports are representative of the perceptions of the respondents themselves, but also speak well for other respondents. Only selected portions of the interviews are presented. The two case studies shed considerable light on the inherent conditions of the Winnipeg garment factories and the corresponding community economy questions that are a part of understanding how labour relates to employment in this industry.

Names are changed to safeguard the identity of these workers, as well as the plants in which each of them has been employed. The author's interviewing questions are noted in italics, sometimes paraphrased. The worker's specific responses are noted with quotation marks.

Case Study with "Dawn"

I met Dawn in three interview sessions; one in my home and the other two sessions at her downtown residence. She immigrated to Canada with her husband and

three children thirteen years ago. She has two daughters and a son. Her husband works in construction. Her eldest daughter also works in the same factory as she does. They claimed refugee status in 1990. After a prolonged deadlock in their hearing and an executive decision on their plea, they finally received landed immigrant status in 2001. Before immigrating to Canada, Dawn had worked for six years in a local plant in her country of origin. She entered her first garment industry job in Winnipeg in 1995 as a sewing assistant. After two years, she resigned the job in 1997 on health grounds. In 1999, she joined another garment factory and worked for a year. In 2000, she returned to the firm she first began with and is still working in this factory as a SMO. The factory manufactures jeans and casual garments for men and ladies. Her present workplace is one of the largest factories in Winnipeg. She knows that the factory employs about 350 workers. In her unit, she works with 55 workers on the same floor.

Dawn explained the nature of manufacturing in her factory. Since she had garment industry experience in her home country, she started our discussion through a comparison of manufacturing and management systems of her home country and Canada. This gave me a better chance to understand the inherent reasons for garment manufacturing differences in various countries, especially between developed and poor countries. Initially Dawn raised two issues for discussion: age and fitness differentials of workers in two countries with different cultures.

When I asked her to explain to me the reasons *why the factory management prefers to recruit relatively older women workers*, Dawn said- “older women are serious about accepting the profession as a career. So, they do not usually switch from this profession to another profession. Maybe the management thinks that young girls would be ambitious and frequently move in search of better paid jobs elsewhere. Managers may perceive that drop-out of young women would risk orderly work schedules, and may hinder team work”. At one point she referred to the case of two daughters of her two colleagues who always hated their mothers’ jobs. “But the case of my daughter is different. My daughter is an eighteen-year-old girl. I want her to go to school. But she prefers to work in my factory more than going to school. I always discourage her from remaining too engaged with the factory work because I am worried it will destroy her ability and willingness to continue schooling”. She added, “there are only four young

workers in my factory. But I observed that these young girls always tend not to prioritize schooling over factory work. Maybe this is the case that they are backbenchers at school, or are in desperate need to earn for themselves, or maybe to supplement their family income”.

Do you think that the factory management is right to consider ‘age’ of workers as an important factor in the recruitment process”? When I asked the question she replied, “Yes, like management people, I also believe that mature women are perfect for factory work for many reasons. The most important of all reasons is that mature women are calm and cool; are innovative, learn quickly, and remain satisfied with the current job, because they know that their age is a barrier for them to move from door to door in search of jobs”.

Then I asked her another relevant question in order to get a comparative sense of ‘age preference’ across cultures. I asked, *Do your home country factories also prefer mature workers in recruitment”?* “No, in fact it is just the opposite in my country”, she replied. “There I have always watched older women getting terminated for nothing (no reason)”. “Why”?, I asked again. “Because ours is not a mechanized society, so women can’t get enough time for work in factories after home-work. Here we have oven, microwave, washing machine and everything that makes all our tasks so easy that we don’t need to spend the whole day in cooking and serving family members and guests. In our country, women have to prioritize homework above everything. A woman can work outside only when all household duties are met properly and satisfactorily”. She smiled and took a short break. Then she said- “Look, we never had packaged and preserved food except chips in our country. I hailed from rural areas, a place where I never could even think of something like ready food. Here every one of my family members— my husband and I, my son and daughter—everyone works. So we never mind having ready food. It (ready food) saves us a lot [of time]”. She said further, “the third and the most important matter of consideration is that what we earn here makes a huge difference. What we earn in Canada against an hour of work is worth two days earning in my home country. So, we have lot of fun in work. Work means earning money. Wasting time is wasting money”.

Then, could you please tell me why Canadian women do not take this kind of money-earning opportunity?, I asked. “Maybe [it is] because they do not suffer from

unemployment crises as intensely as we suffer from. However, I have my own thoughts about it. I think that as Canadians they are born, brought up, and have grown up in such an affluent environment that they do not deem hourly payment as handsome and lucrative as we, the immigrants, value it. To them, the amount is like a peanut, but to us it's huge because we came from impoverished backgrounds”.

So, how do you treat the garment job for immigrants? Good or bad, or just like 'something is better than nothing' type of work? Just evaluate from the viewpoint of an immigrant. She stated that the garment sector jobs serve as “medicines for many types of disease”. She explained with some examples, “I know some women of my country who had been engaged in all sorts of bad living before coming to Canada. They had bad relations, bad family lives, infidelity, drug addiction and links with a criminal world. When they arrived right after our arrival, we thought they would be rather more exposed to bad things because we viewed that they had become freer from family ties. But what happened was just the opposite from our calculation. As soon as they discovered that working brought them money while a bad life-style caused wastage of money, they just paid their full attention to their factory job. Now they have good family lives and secured futures. What more could you expect then”! She complemented with saying that she had watched many other immigrants of varied nationality whose personal life-styles have changed forever due to this well-paid job.

So, do you mean that the garment factory jobs are not bad, but good for many reasons”? “Yes! I say it's even more than better. You know, I consider it as a good decriminalization project. We may not notice, but it is true that opportunity of earning keeps many of us away from criminal-type activities and misuse of our valuable time in for-nothing type activities”.

This is just my curiosity, but why don't the Aboriginal people come forward to take this opportunity”? In response to this question, she informed me saying, “Aboriginal people are often employed, but they do not stay. They leave voluntarily. Their dropout rate is very high”. *Why do they tend to give up factory jobs? Does factory management discriminate against them? Do you think the factory management shows reluctance to recruit them?* I asked these questions together. Dawn replied, “I have observed some racial discrimination among the management. They seem not that fair to the workers who

come from Caribbean or South Asian backgrounds. Yet, these discriminations are not that open. They remain hidden. We just feel so sometime. Anyway, I did not see any reluctance of the management to recruit Aboriginal people so far. Maybe some hidden disliking works here too. So far I have heard and observed, they leave all of a sudden, often for unknown reasons”.

I tried to supplement this discussion with another question. *Do you think that other workers, who are non-Canadians, do not receive them (i.e., Aboriginal peoples) cordially? Do they (Aboriginal people) feel that fellow-workers are not sympathetic or friendly enough to them?* “No, I did see just the reverse picture. Despite we often tend to become friendly with our new colleagues from among the Aboriginal people, they seem to feel shy and suspect us of intimidation and mistrust, and seem to suffer from a kind of nervousness. In fact they appear to be more restless and inattentive to work. They also seem to dislike shop-floor discipline”. Dawn smiled and added, “Don’t treat me as a racist; this is just an honest delivery of what I have felt about them”.

Do you see any kind of new arrangements in your duty? In response she said, “Yes, something is obviously new to us. Previously, we used to work independently; I mean individual distribution of labour. Now, the management is assigning us with group-work. Previously, we had to earn benefits individually based on individual performance. Now, a team of three or four workers receives benefits like bonuses and incentives”. *So, when your benefits are being divided between several workers, do you receive fewer benefits than before?* “No, in fact we are receiving more than before because it is not the case that my money is being divided into parts, but all of the team members are being paid equally”, Dawn replied.

Have you ever felt any problem or sense of deprivation with newer forms of work-management and division of labour? “Yes, at first such arrangements created tensions among us. We were not ready to accept any new arrangements. Some of us were pretty resistant and outspoken about a new work arrangement. However, we discovered later on that the new arrangements, rather, gave us some chances to know each other better than ever before. As well, we gradually grew sharing tendencies among ourselves. So, this is not that bad”. *So, teamwork is not a problem for you, but what about others? Do they also feel or treat it like you treat the teamwork?* At this point, Dawn smiled. “No, most

workers still treat it as bad. Most workers do not consider it as helpful—like the way I feel it! I think most of them are either impassionate, or selfish, and fear every change”. *So, you are saying that teamwork is actually better than the previous arrangement?* This time Dawn took some additional time to respond. Then she commented, “Actually, the management people should not have imposed it so suddenly. They should have researched workers’ opinion. They should have taken some additional time to know the opinions of the workers. Most importantly, they should have arranged some training sessions for workers to convince and assure the workers that teamwork is rather beneficial for everyone”.

Case Study with “Helen”

Helen was a former worker of a mid-size Winnipeg garment plant. She resigned from the job in late 2003 in protest of ill treatment and inappropriate behaviour by management. Helen had worked for thirty-seven months in the factory she just left. She worked in the same plant from the beginning of her job in Winnipeg. Beforehand, she acquired a substantial level of similar work experience in her home country for seven years. Her experience made her confident to be optimistic that that she would be getting a better position in any Canadian garment factory. Her education level—a grade twelve graduate—was better than many immigrant workers. Thus, she became even more confident that her education and experience would be well regarded inside her workplace.

In 2000, she received her Winnipeg garment industry job without much effort. Although she was designated a SMO position instantly, there were no further developments in her career in the long three years. As she believed, she was working with more commitment and efficiency than many other “average” workers; but her salary did not increase, nor did she receive incentives or other benefits. Moreover, she felt she received racist treatment from managerial staff. She started to feel intimidated when she realized the male supervisors started to laugh at her. Her feeling of humiliation and deprivation heightened as she felt that her short height and physique had become an object of fun-making for the management people. Eventually she protested such behaviour and humiliation. The result was more adverse than before. As she explained, “I

had undergone so many different types of mental torture (that I do not want to elaborate to you), that at some point I decided to quit.

“*So, managerial misbehaviour was the main reason behind your resignation?*” I asked. “No! not really! It was one of the causes. There were many other considerations entangled with that decision”, Helen replied. “But, you know, racial discrimination by the factory management had 50% influence in my resignation”, she added. *Can I know what could be the other 50% reasons behind your resignation? Were they all related to your job, or something personal?* “Yes, I cannot tell you all, because there were some very confidential personal matters, but mainly the operational conditions did not produce much job satisfaction for me”. At this point, Helen described, “Listen, I did not like the workers to be so divided by their original identity. Chinese formed a syndicate, Filipinos formed something like an underground party with some hidden agenda, South Asians flocked together like birds, and the Canadians used to behave like Nazi Germans, as if they were bluebirds and all of us were scavengers. You know, no sensible person can tolerate such tendencies among workers”!

Helen came to Canada as a landed immigrant in 1999 and became a citizen very recently. She is married and has three children. Her husband works as a part-timer in various types of jobs; these jobs change from time to time. Now they both are in search of permanent full-time secure jobs. Being experienced in the garment sector, Helen prefers to be employed in similar positions in some other factory. However, considering the need to provide better care to children and give attention to familial activities, she plans not to take a new job immediately. *In a way, both you and your husband are unemployed now? Then how will you survive?*, I asked. Helen smiled at this question, and then replied, “You know, Canada is a country where unemployed people have a better living than the employed people. We will follow the same for the time being”. I placed a new question before her: *How does that work?* Helen responded, “Look, I will get a good amount of child tax benefit and a moderate amount of unemployment insurance. My husband once worked in one of the large stores in Winnipeg; he now receives some unemployment insurance benefit. Although this benefit tenure will end soon, we are not just in dire crisis to get a job. The Canadian system does not allow people to get into much trouble”. *So, what you would have done if it were not for these benefits and a safety-net system?* “I

would not have resigned, by no means! No matter what sort of managerial misbehaviour I have experienced, I would have to ignore them, for sure, because I would not have any other means to survive”. After she explained her position, I asked her once again, *So, how do you perceive the social security provisions of Canada?* “Of course this is good, because it helped me to secure my own prestige and dignity without any compromise. But you know, such provisions are counterproductive for some people, like Aboriginal people. They misuse this provision.” *How? Can you explain?* “Look, I know there are so many issues that discourage the downtown Aboriginal people to work. One is this social security system. Since they could carry out their lives some way, especially through specialized government subsidy systems in everything, they do not work. If I were them, perhaps I would have behaved like them. No work! Freedom like bird”!

In another two sessions, I discussed with Helen prospects for generating local-level employment through the garment industry for unemployed inner-city people. Helen explained from her observation that not only Aboriginal peoples, but Canadians in general do not prefer garment sector jobs. As for the reasons, she raised the issues that are commonly raised by other respondents as well. In Helen’s opinion, inner-city unemployed people will not adjust to this sector for the following reasons: 1) boredom, monotony and lack of freedom inside the plants; 2) strict workplace regulations; 3) lack of workers’ unions, and weakness of the existing union; 4) garment factory managers tend to recruit workers as submissive and docile as possible, and Aboriginal peoples are not that; 5) availability of a social welfare safety-net, even though such supports may not yield the level of financial support achievable through wage-employment, can be considered better than substandard SMO jobs; 6) lack of skills and low motivation among inner-city people for factory work; 7) absence of government initiatives to motivate people to work towards securing a viable livelihood; 8) widespread use of alcohol in the inner-city population; and above all, 9) garment industry managerial reluctance to recruit Aboriginal people because of concern with their job dropout reputation.

In subsequent discussions, I said to Helen, as I had expressed to other workers, *“Let’s not blame them. If we honestly want to do something for inner-city unemployed people, what could be done? Do you have any suggestions?”* She elaborated her response to these questions. “I think the [garment industry] management people need

to experience conscientization first. If they throw away their stereotypical mindset first about Aboriginals and about foreign workers, fifty percent of the problems get solved automatically”. *So, how will they (the management) experience conscientization?* “In my opinion, the NGOs first, then the government’s social welfare department, then the intelligentsia, like university teachers and students, may come forward to do something with them jointly”, she suggested.

It is worth noting here that other respondents suggested the government, NGOs and civil society should play a partnership role to formulate policy that would provide incentives among unemployed people toward associating work with a better livelihood.¹⁰

Helen was recruited to a full-time position of eight hour shifts, and had been assigned piecework as well. In the factory she worked, all workers were assigned piecework. She was receiving a bi-weekly payment of \$7.00 per hour, and her base salary never increased in three years. Receipt of an increment or bonus reward was conditional upon exceeding at least 78% of target piecework. This 78% margin was set as compulsory for every worker to receive the minimum \$7.00 hourly payment. A worker would receive a \$1.00 “bonus” per hour against successful completion of 84% of target piecework, and \$1.50 for 100% accomplishment of target piecework.

Gender composition of the shop floor was identical to other plants. The female-male ratio was 28:1 on the floor she worked. Except for a male cutting master cum floor supervisor, all workers were women. Male personnel controlled managerial and office tasks. Except for management personnel, all workers were (landed) immigrants. Workers from the Philippines dominated the shop floor numerically. Chinese workers were the second most numerous, followed by others, mainly people from South Asia and the Caribbean. Helen observed only one “white woman” in the plant—possibly a recent European immigrant or a Canadian. The management of this particular plant preferred not to hire workers with short-term employment authorization. As a result, worker dropout was uncommon due to expiry of employment authorization.

¹⁰ Editorial comment: Helen and other garment workers acknowledge the unattractive character of work in the garment industry. Note the paradox here between conscientization (captured in Helen’s first reference to the process as directed to plant managers) and the succeeding recommendation for government, NGO, and civil society inducements to embrace labour commodification.

In Helen's opinion, the garment factory she worked in does not pay much attention to the need for skill training of workers. Helen received only a two-day training course with pay. She suggested that workers need more training on different dimensions of manufacturing. She suggested that, due to the rigid division of labour, most workers suffer from boredom, and gradually develop a disinterest in these types of jobs. Stresses of responsibility in teamwork, limited scope for interaction among workers, and use of electronic surveillance increases feelings of alienation among workers. Helen also mentioned that worker-worker and worker-management disputes were common in her plant. While there are counselling and labour dispute resolution bodies in each factory, their role seemed to be to mitigate complaints and labour disputes to avoid intervention of trade unions on these issues. However, the submissiveness and docility of most immigrant women means that they do not bring these issues forward for resolution. So, despite the presence of a dispute resolution body, to avoid additional hassles immigrant women workers rarely turned to these bodies for assistance. Helen believes that immigrant worker submissiveness turns the managers into an unusually powerful group that is intimidating.

CONCLUSION

This report has focused on immigrant garment workers' views of the garment industry in Winnipeg, views that are clearly and obviously comparative in nature because so many of the immigrant garment workers have come to Canada with previous experience in their countries of origin. The report highlights differences and similarities based on the respondents' comparisons. In addition, this report provides some perspective on how immigrant garment workers view the operation of the industry in Winnipeg. In large part their assessment is rather positive, but these workers also highlight a number of problem areas that can be addressed.

With regard to the relation between jobs in the garment sector and their livelihood, the respondents discussed both problems and prospects associated with their garment industry jobs. While they consider their jobs to help with economic solvency of their families, such achievements are usually accompanied by other problems. Foremost is that they believe their jobs create barriers for proper schooling and socialization of

adolescent children. Given their shortage of time to take care of family members—especially adolescent children—garment workers have difficulty monitoring their adolescent children and are pained by insufficient time to guide them for their future development. Other than this problem, immigrant garment workers generally view this employment sector positively, because the sector represents readily available employment options for new immigrants. They also view technological advancement as an unavoidable reality of societal change. However, they suggest that provision of training be integrated with advancement of technology. As well, they suggest fair compensation for workers who lose jobs associated with rapid technological shifts.

The views expressed by the immigrant workers interviewed for this study underscore very sharply why the industry has been so dependent on immigrant workers. Because they experience so many improved conditions from their prior experiences, they are less demanding of industry. But these same workers are astute in their observations of shortcomings in supportive training, subtle intimidation and/or harassment, and few protections against sudden loss of jobs due to plant closures. They also note the strong parallels throughout this global industry in the monotonous and tedious nature of the work. They express different interpretations of the impact of new technology on these universal characteristics of the industry. Some think new technology may reduce monotony, tedium and stress by improving accuracy and efficiency; others are convinced that deskilling will be the primary effect of new technology in their work.

The views expressed by these immigrant workers on employment of inner-city residents of Aboriginal background show sensitivity and social awareness. With respect to integration of the inner-city Aboriginal workforce in the garment sector, they suggest that only willingness of the government and managers of manufacturing plants can make a real difference. They also suggest that community mobilization and civil society may play an important role to effectively include Aboriginal peoples in a new and vibrant community economic development process. Their portrayals, and their reasoning on the responses of a non-immigrant underemployed population to employment in the garment industry, exhibit sensitivity to historical and cultural differences, and contribute powerful insights into the dynamics of immigrant labour recruitment in an industry widely seen as reliant on cheap labour.

Biases and Beliefs: Impacts of Perspectives on the Garment Industry

Sara Stephens and Kathryn Mossman

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the research and interviews undertaken by members of the Winnipeg garment industry research team, certain views and perspectives about garment workers emerged from a number of people involved in the industry. These views and ideas are about the skills involved in garment work and the suitability of certain workers to perform this work, such as women, immigrants, ethnic groups and Aboriginal workers. These perspectives and perceptions have influenced, and been influenced by, the interaction with, and treatment and recruitment of, garment workers from various groups. The goal of this paper is to explore these often-stereotyped perspectives, as well as the reciprocal stereotypes and perspectives about the garment industry from prospective employee populations, in order to discover the ways in which these perspectives have shaped the workforce, philosophy and strategies of the garment industry.

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES ON GARMENT WORKERS

Skills Required in Garment Work

One of the common assumptions about garment workers is that the work they do falls under the category of “unskilled labour” that consequently can be performed by anyone, and merits the low pay garment workers often receive. As women have a

disproportionately large involvement in the garment industry and typically perform this work, attitudes toward this labour become gendered. The low skills required for garment work become associated with women and assumed to be inherent qualities of the women themselves, not of the work. As Sinclair states, “Women’s relatively low earnings can be explained on the basis of the *belief* that they are less skilled than men, irrespective of their actual skill levels” (1991:12).

Despite the fact that much garment work is monotonous and repetitive, it is work that still requires sewing skills, knowledge of garment construction and experience with machinery, skills that often require at least some basic training.¹ However, most garment workers learn their sewing skills in the home, a type of informal training that does not cost the employer and tends not be rewarded or acknowledged in the paid labour force (Sinclair 1991:13). These skills are also being undervalued as equipment becomes more automated and computerized. The industry associates the increase in technology with a demand for fewer and fewer skills from the garment workers. One former supervisor believed the industry to be willing to hire “...anyone who seemed half reasonable”.² While undervaluing the skills of its workers, the garment industry at the same time often claims that it is difficult to find skilled, experienced workers in Canada, and pushes for the recruitment of immigrant workers. This argument and practice has allowed the garment industry to hire new immigrants as beginners to the industry and pay them low beginning wages (Lepp *et al.* 1987:155).

It is worthwhile to note that not everyone in the industry shares the view that garment work does not involve a great deal of skill. For example, one female industry representative did state that she thought the various tasks involved in the production of garments were complex and difficult to carry out without the necessary skills.³ Indeed, she found it difficult to understand how people could consider work in the garment industry as simple or unskilled, and she expressed the great respect she had for people

¹ For further information on the training available for garment workers, please see *Training of Labour in the Winnipeg Garment Industry* by Kathryn Mossman, this volume.

² Interview: June 1, 2005.

³ Interview: October 31, 2003.

working in this industry. However, this view was rather unique, and the view of garment workers as unskilled labourers is a pervasive one.

The lack of skills considered necessary for garment work affects the type of workers the industry deems to be worth recruiting.⁴ The industry perceives the work to be the type of job a new immigrant to Canada would be capable and willing to do. Garment work is often menial labour, which immigrants might undertake in order to make a living and establish their families. With their hard work and sacrifice, some immigrants might hold on to these positions in order to be able to offer their children the opportunity to become professionals and find work outside the garment industry. Garment work is also viewed to be suitable labour for new immigrants to perform because it does not require a high level of English. Some of the factories considered verbal communication to be less important in garment construction, although language barriers between supervisors and garment workers could lead to frustration and difficulty communicating for both groups. However, workers from the same country would often communicate in their common language to help each other understand the tasks being requested of them.

Although garment work was viewed as predominantly very suitable for new immigrants, some garment industry workers expressed concerns about the dedication of immigrants to the work. One plant manager at a factory that still needed garment workers was concerned that garment workers might choose to support themselves with Employment Insurance (EI) rather than with employment. Another concern expressed was that immigrant workers who had been sponsored to come to Canada would leave the industry in search of other jobs, due to their perception of shrinking opportunities in the garment sector.⁵ This was especially thought to be a problem with immigrant youth.

⁴ For further information on the garment industry's recruitment strategies, please see *Labour Recruitment Strategies in the Winnipeg Garment Industry* by Sara Stephens, this volume.

⁵ Interview: June 28, 2004.

Immigrant Women

Ninety-four percent of Winnipeg garment workers are women⁶ and the majority of these workers are immigrant women who have been involved in the industry for anywhere from a few years to decades. While not all garment workers are women, there is clearly a gendered division of labour within the manufacturing plants. In the medium to large size companies investigated, all of the CEOs or presidents were male. In garment factories, management positions, as well as those in cutting, pressing, and shipping and handling, tended to be filled by men, while the majority of sewing machine operator (SMO) positions were filled by women. Some workers had observed a greater number of women entering traditionally male-dominated positions, such as cutters and patterners, but this trend was seen as a strategy to decrease the bargaining power of the men working in these fields, not as management's recognition of women's skills in these areas.⁷ Some workers viewed the introduction of computer-aided technology as contributing to an increase in the number of male technicians, operators and white-collar officials in the factories. This trend suggests that men may have been viewed by the industry as having a better understanding of, and capability with, this technology than women.

The industry wants and needs to have control over its workers to ensure that they will work hard and take orders. One male plant manager stated that the initial training of SMOs in machine operation was called "toilet-training" in the industry, and that these new trainees "have to be disciplined first".⁸ The issue of the control and patronization of women is also expressed in the references to SMOs as "girls", despite the age of the workers. One female plant manager at a large manufacturing firm repeatedly referred to the female SMOs and other female employees as "girls" almost to the exclusion of any other label or name.⁹ The women at the plant, most of whom were Asian or South Asian in background, were between the ages of seventeen and fifty, and most appeared to be

⁶ Manitoba Job Futures - Human Resources and Skills Development Canada - Manitoba Advanced Education & Training: <http://mb.jobfutures.org/profiles/profile.cfm?noc=9451&lang=en&site=txt>

⁷ Interim Report on Interviews with Winnipeg Garment Workers, January 25, 2004, by Amena Khatun. See selection 6, *Worker Views on Changes in the Winnipeg Garment Industry: In-depth Interviews with Ten Immigrant Garment Workers* by Amena Khatun, this volume.

⁸ Interview: June 28, 2004.

⁹ Plant Tour: February 26, 2004.

middle-aged. This was a common occurrence amongst both the male and female plant managers and executives interviewed.

The preference for women in sewing positions may be linked to gender stereotypes that consider women to be more physically suited to the work due to their smaller, more “nimble” fingers, and more mentally suited to the work because they are seen as more docile and more open to taking orders than men.¹⁰ This stereotype was believed by one former garment worker from the Philippines to be the motivation behind a 1960’s recruitment drive in the Philippines to attract Filipino women.¹¹ These stereotypes often have racial as well as gendered divisions, perhaps influenced by the fact that seventy percent of garment workers are visible minorities.¹² Women of Asian origin are often especially felt to have slender, nimble fingers that allow them to sew quickly and with great accuracy. Sinclair (1991:13) points out that, “Abilities such as dexterity and accuracy are perceived as women’s natural characteristics”; this view and its racial divisions are evident in the predominantly female workforce of Winnipeg’s garment industry. Some stereotypes are even accepted and used by the garment workers themselves. One former garment worker of Asian background remarked that, due to their “small fingers and hands”, women from Asian countries were uniquely capable of doing some of the detailed work on some of the garments. While she apologized for stereotyping her “own” people, she stated, “it’s true”.¹³

These racially based ideas concerning different ethnic groups and their possession of certain sewing skills could have an impact on the working environment. A number of workers found that some psychological stress was imposed on them by the ethnic referencing system used by some members of management, in which the skill and personality of one ethnic group would be intentionally praised over the others.¹⁴ This practice was considered to cause some distance between different immigrant ethnic

¹⁰ Interim Report on Interviews with Winnipeg Garment Workers, January 25, 2004, by Amena Khatun.

¹¹ Interview: October 17, 2003.

¹² Manitoba Job Futures - Human Resources and Skills Development Canada - Manitoba Advanced Education & Training: <http://mb.jobfutures.org/profiles/profile.cfm?noc=9451&lang=en&site=txt>

¹³ Interview: October 17, 2003.

¹⁴ Interim Report on Interviews with Winnipeg Garment Workers, January 25, 2004, by Amena Khatun.

groups, thus hindering worker solidarity and negatively affecting potential union networking.

Aboriginal Workers

The garment industry also has some specific perceptions about Aboriginal people, and these perceptions may explain why only three percent of garment workers are Aboriginal.¹⁵ Aboriginal workers were believed to have skills, intelligence and the ability to learn quickly, and were thought to work hard and do a good job. However, the industry view was not without criticism, and viewed Aboriginal people as lacking reliability and commitment to the job. Aboriginal people were viewed as rarely giving top priority to their jobs. It was considered that while they would be interested in getting the job, there was not an interest in holding and keeping the job. For example, if a distant relative died or another family issue arose, it was felt that Aboriginal workers would leave the job and be absent for a prolonged period. Another view offered was that, in order for more Aboriginal people to participate in the garment industry, they would need to change their outlook on life, to develop pride, and to make work a priority in their lives.¹⁶

A former supervisor at one factory rejected the notion that the industry might be reluctant to hire Aboriginal people based on these racially discriminatory ideas. She felt that the factory had hired many Aboriginal workers over the years, but on a rotating basis, stating that, "...it's not that we didn't hire them, they just didn't stay!".¹⁷ Some members of management and non-Aboriginal garment workers could offer examples of Aboriginal workers who had good job records with a company for many years, but it was felt that these people were a minority, a small percentage of the Aboriginal workers.¹⁸

Other reasons given for the lack of Aboriginal garment workers in the industry were related to the nature of the job and the garment industry environment, not necessarily to Aboriginal people themselves. It was noted that hiring people could be

¹⁵ Manitoba Job Futures - Human Resources and Skills Development Canada - Manitoba Advanced Education & Training: <http://mb.jobfutures.org/profiles/profile.cfm?noc=9451&lang=en&site=txt>

¹⁶ Interview: June 1, 2005.

¹⁷ Interview: June 1, 2005.

¹⁸ Interview: June 1, 2005.

difficult due to the repetitious, monotonous nature of the job. One supervisor stated that the Asian workers might be more suited to, or comfortable in, the garment industry because many came from a background of repetitious jobs. As well, since many Asian people worked in the industry, they could socialize at work with other people who spoke the same language, could share similar experiences, and were often part of the same community. In contrast, Aboriginal people, with so few Aboriginal workers in a factory at any one given time, would have difficulty in developing social groups that would make this work more attractive.¹⁹ These perceptions about Aboriginal people shed light on the reasons members of the garment industry give to explain the lack of garment workers of Aboriginal background. However, negative perceptions, and the behaviour that stems from them, can be reciprocal. The next section will explore Aboriginal peoples' views on the garment industry, and how these might lead to a lack of interest from the Aboriginal community in engaging in garment industry work.

ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE GARMENT INDUSTRY

Aboriginal people have their own ideas, biases and beliefs about the garment industry, perspectives that are dynamic and experienced in interchanges with the garment industry. A mutual lack of interest appears to exist between these two groups, which affects the level of Aboriginal recruitment into the garment industry and creates a cycle of lack of interest and lack of opportunities. This section of the report is restricted to those perspectives offered by Aboriginal people, and excludes those of non-Aboriginal people on what they believed an Aboriginal perspective to be. The opinions included in this section are based on statements from people with a wide range of experience with the garment industry, from garment factory work, to design, to small-scale sewing businesses. The attitudes of Aboriginal people on the garment industry appear to depend on the type of work being done and how culturally relevant and appropriate it is considered to be.

¹⁹ Interview: June 1, 2005.

Positive Aspects of Garment Jobs

Some perspectives on garment jobs were positive, and the jobs were seen as beneficial sources of employment for Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal employee at a resource centre offered her own perspective on the garment industry, as well as those she may have heard or inferred to be those of her Aboriginal clientele. The resource centre and its affiliated training centre did not offer any sewing training, and the only Aboriginal people the informant knew that were involved in the garment industry were involved with what she referred to as “picking and packing”—rag picking, or filling out and packing orders of ready-made merchandise for distribution. She felt that some Aboriginal clients might view garment jobs in a positive light, as safer and less physically demanding jobs than other alternatives such as construction or lumberyard labour. She expressed an interest in having greater connections with the garment industry in the future.²⁰

Another reason Aboriginal people may view the garment industry in a positive light is due to their potential interest in arts and crafts. It was felt that some Aboriginal people might extend this interest in arts and crafts to garment factory jobs.²¹ An Aboriginal designer in Winnipeg provided some insight into how Aboriginal people might perceive sewing and the garment industry from a different angle, outside of the factory. She claimed to love sewing, and had learned to sew from her grandmother and from courses in high school. From this education, she had become involved in the garment industry as a designer.²² An employee with the Toronto Aboriginal Business Association (TABA) also mentioned that some Aboriginal people participate in the garment industry out of a love for arts and crafts. Many Aboriginal entrepreneurs chose to become independently involved with the garment industry by running small-scale arts and crafts businesses out of their homes. According to the TABA employee, small-scale entrepreneurs were the only sector of Aboriginal people with concrete connections to the

²⁰ Interview: June 16, 2004.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Interview: August 25, 2004.

garment industry, and TABA had very few Aboriginal entrepreneurs who were successful in the “higher end brackets” of having a staff and making a profit.²³

Another Aboriginal woman involved in a small-scale sewing co-op entered into the garment industry on a voluntary basis, and then stayed on because she enjoyed the sewing. Her work had relevance to her Aboriginal background, as she was mainly sewing blankets with Aboriginal designs.²⁴ She expressed the opinion that the blankets were becoming the co-op’s trademark, and that many Aboriginal people were interested in having blankets made to personal specifications, with their Native names and special culturally relevant colours on them.²⁵ Thus, there is clearly a tradition of sewing and other pursuits that link Aboriginal people to the garment industry. These connections can occur within factories to some extent, as well as outside factories, as is the case with designers and small-scale businesses run from homes or small co-ops.

Negative Aspects of Garment Jobs

Aboriginal people also expressed negative perspectives related to the garment industry, and especially to garment factory jobs. It was felt that some Aboriginal people might not be interested in the garment factories due to a reputation for offering low-paying jobs. Some Aboriginal people were thought to joke about applying to become a sewing machine operator when they were talking about needing money, the joke being that the job has a reputation for being poorly compensated.²⁶ Others felt that the garment industry was in decline and that jobs were becoming scarcer, making the industry insecure and undesirable.²⁷

Some Aboriginal people also appeared to be aware of the stereotyped worker composition of the garment industry, as discussed earlier in this report. It was stated that the garment industry generally targets immigrant workers and largely ignores many other

²³ Interview: May 31, 2004.

²⁴ Interview: June 03, 2004. The interviewee stated that Aboriginal-styled blankets were an important cultural symbol at major life events, such as birth, death and marriage, as well as when a person was being honoured.

²⁵ Interview: June 03, 2004.

²⁶ Interview: June 16, 2004.

²⁷ Interview: August 25, 2004.

potential worker populations, including the Aboriginal community. It was felt that these recruitment patterns might contribute to a lack of awareness of, or interest in, the garment industry among Aboriginal people because they were less likely to have friends or family members in the garment industry that might encourage them to pursue garment jobs. It was also felt that Aboriginal people might be more comfortable working in an environment where there were other Aboriginal people.²⁸ This perspective seems to support the garment industry's perspective that Aboriginal people lack the connections and sense of community in garment factories that might make these jobs more attractive,²⁹ although further research would be required to be more conclusive.

Divisions between the Garment Industry and the Aboriginal Community

Other perspectives on the garment industry are not based on positive or negative aspects of jobs themselves, but on more general ideas about the industry. These perspectives seem to stem from conflicts between the garment industry with the underlying capitalistic, European and non-Aboriginal belief systems that support and shape it, and Aboriginal economic pursuits and belief systems. These clashes in interest can be roughly divided based on cultural, philosophical, and historical differences between the garment industry and many members of the Aboriginal community. While it would be inaccurate and unconstructive to generalize about the Aboriginal community as having one cohesive mindset and goal, there often appear to be common Aboriginal economic and cultural beliefs and pursuits which conflict with those of the garment industry.

While many Aboriginal people clearly do not object to the act of sewing, and do have a rich history and tradition of creating arts and crafts, Aboriginal people pursuing traditional sewing and crafts may have different technology, methods and settings for their work than those common to the garment industry. Other Aboriginal people, those who felt positively about their involvement with the garment industry, were generally

²⁸ Interview: June 16, 2004.

²⁹ Note expressions in the section above on "Industry Perspectives on Garment Workers, *Aboriginal Workers*" in this paper

creating Aboriginal items, and worked in small settings, such as in the home, or in small co-ops with people they knew and who shared their interests and goals.

As well, some Aboriginal people seemed to feel that the reasons they participated in the garment industry, and the goals they hoped to achieve, were guided by a different philosophy or belief system than that of the garment industry. While one Aboriginal designer and sewer felt that it was important for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal designers to get started in a business and stay in business, her involvement with the garment industry was on a fairly small scale. She rejected the idea of mass-production, a key element of much of the garment industry, as she wanted the clothing she produced to be unique and personal. She also felt that her personal goals were not in alignment with the skills that were required by the industry. For example, she felt that merchandising and buying for large companies was a popular direction, but not one that she wanted to pursue personally. Designing and sewing clothing, especially for her own use, was her primary interest and passion.

While the designer did not purposely focus on using Aboriginal designs, she felt that being Aboriginal influenced her design and some of the materials she used. She also felt that Aboriginal designers were becoming more common and that they were receiving more support from the community and more attention from the press.³⁰ Therefore, her expression of her interest in, and involvement with, the garment industry appeared to be very much for personal interest and satisfaction, rather than the pursuit of mass-production and profit common to garment factories. As well, uniqueness and some cultural expression were important to her in her designs, unlike much of the material produced by the garment industry, which is often concerned with uniformity and relatively consistent or homogenous design from one garment to another.

The problem of conflict between the goals and philosophy between Aboriginal people and the garment industry was also evident from the TABA employee. He felt that some Aboriginal entrepreneurs were not having a great deal of success with businesses in arts and crafts, due to the fact that they were operating on such a small scale. In addition,

³⁰ Interview: August 25, 2004.

although there is a great interest in Aboriginal crafts in the industries in Europe, especially Germany, authenticity and uniqueness are not considered to be very important within the Canadian industry. Therefore, local Aboriginal craftspeople were placed in competition with factories in Asia that mass-produced so-called “Aboriginal” crafts.³¹ The philosophy and goals of the garment industry promote profit ahead of other considerations, such as acquiring personal, unique or genuinely Aboriginal crafts. This attitude conflicts with many Aboriginal aims and philosophies, thus creating conflict and reducing opportunities for Aboriginal people to become involved in business in the garment industry in a meaningful way.

At the small co-op mentioned previously, personal reasons and goals for sewing also conflict with the garment industry’s focus on mass-production and obsession with profit. Although the co-op was often in financial difficulty, and the women put in long hours for low pay, they appeared to feel that the end products were worth the effort. Each Aboriginal blanket made by the co-op was created with great care and personal investment, so that each piece was meaningful and connected to the person who made it. The Aboriginal woman stated that when orders were small and the co-op was not too busy, she preferred to sew on one blanket exclusively until it was finished, with the effect of making the finished product seem like it was more personal. When orders were larger, however, she and the other workers might work on several pieces at once. However, she expressed a sense of personal pride and investment in each piece.³² This culturally meaningful sewing job is therefore personally important and relevant to the worker and contrasts with work in garment factories, where workers often see only one part of a garment and can often feel alienated from the product of their labour.

Although neo-colonialism is not an issue that was comprehensively addressed during this research, the history of interaction between Aboriginal and European (and now Western) peoples no doubt has an impact on some Aboriginal peoples’ interest in, and degree of, involvement with the garment industry. As a European, capitalist industry, the garment industry may seem to some Aboriginal people to stand as a symbol or

³¹ Interview: May 31, 2004.

³² Interview: June 03, 2004.

illustration of the hegemonic domination of Western people over Aboriginal people. While an Aboriginal worker at a resource centre was specifically asked to address this issue, she felt that most of her clientele were not familiar enough with the history of colonization to object to garment work based on the factor of neo-colonialism. She did, however, feel that it might be a consideration she would take into account personally.³³

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

This report exposes and explores some of the biases and stereotypes that affect the worker composition of the garment industry and shape the perceptions of the industry, as well as the perception of workers about the garment industry. The garment industry clearly views women, and especially immigrant women, as being suitable and desirable workers, a fact that is reflected in the workforce of many garment factories. The fact that garment work in Winnipeg is predominantly performed by immigrant women leads one to question the reasons why immigrant women might be attracted to, and held in, garment jobs.

Immigrants face certain barriers and restrictions that may make garment work appear to be a practical or beneficial opportunity, and many factors influence immigrants to stay in jobs that are notoriously underpaid and undervalued. One such factor is the likelihood that new immigrants may have come to Canada to flee poverty or poor conditions in their own country, based on the perception of new opportunities in Canada. Upon arriving in Canada, however, they become part a labour market that is already structured along ethnic and class lines (Gannage 1995). Thus, when immigrant women arrived in Winnipeg, there was already a particular existing labour structure that they had to fit into. New immigrants often face financial burdens associated with the cost of traveling to Canada and supporting themselves and their families upon arrival which, in addition to the possibility that they were not financially well off in their home countries, creates enormous pressure to find work. Many immigrants find that their training and skills are not recognized in Canada, leaving them with fewer job options and opportunities, thus encouraging them to take even low-paying jobs out of a necessity to

³³ Interview: June 16, 2004.

support their families (Ghorayshi 1990:285). In addition, accepting and keeping a job is in a new immigrant's interest if s/he wants to become a Canadian citizen. All of these factors create a unique situation of pressure, a condition of choicelessness, and a lack of opportunity for immigrant workers—especially immigrant women—that may contribute to their willingness to take and keep jobs in the garment industry.

As well, some immigrant women have female friends and relatives in the Winnipeg immigrant community who work in garment factories, and who might encourage new immigrant women to also seek employment at the garment factory. Therefore, fellow immigrant workers might recruit new women workers, and the community of immigrant women in garment factories might make the work more appealing, giving it a comfort level with the knowledge that others in their position have found acceptable employment there. Immigrant women are also recruited by the garment industry itself³⁴ as a result of the industry's perception of these women as docile, nimble-fingered, and eager to work. These factors and dynamics, as well as the biases and stereotypes that abound in the industry and among workers, help to explain the predominance of immigrant women workers in the garment industry.

Biased and stereotyped perspectives can also help to explain the absence, or near absence, of Aboriginal garment workers. There appears to be a reciprocal lack of interest between the Aboriginal community and the garment industry, fuelled by cultural differences and differences in belief systems. Aboriginal people seemed to generally view garment factory jobs as unattractive, low paying and aimed at immigrant workers. Although it is clear that some Aboriginal people do hold positive views of sewing, it often appears to be learned, practiced and used in different ways, and to achieve different goals than those of the garment industry. The cultural relevance and appropriateness of the work seem to be very important factors, and personal satisfaction and interest in the final product seem to be the main goal.

³⁴ For further discussion on the garment industry's pressuring of the government to recruit immigrants to fill garment worker positions, see *Government Programs and the Garment Industry* by Aaron Pettman, this volume.

These interests and goals appear to conflict with the interests and goals of the garment industry. The kind of economic and employment development pursued by the garment industry is capitalistic, focused on profit and individual gain. This drive and goal conflicts with many Aboriginal peoples' ideas about economic development, which are often focused on people, community, communal ownership, and the protection of natural resources and land (Loxley 1986). Therefore, for some Aboriginal people, working in the garment industry might represent an increased dependence or involvement in an economic and belief system that is not compatible with Aboriginal beliefs.

In conclusion, perspectives of and about the garment industry shape the type of workers the garment industry pursues, and the type of workers who are attracted or drawn to the industry. The social and cultural acceptability or necessity of performing garment work helps to explain the workforce composition and level of participation of particular groups in the garment industry. Perceptions and practices may influence and act on each other in ways that can become self-fulfilling prophecies, validating or excusing the garment industry's use of stereotypes when admitting or excluding certain workers, and reinforcing the workers stereotypes of the garment industry when considering job options and opportunities. This dynamic exchange between the industry and its potential workers shapes and explains the composition of the garment industry.

Reflections on the Garment Industry in Winnipeg: Alternative Visions, Fashion, and Opportunities for Small Business

Erin Jonasson

INTRODUCTION

The garment industry in Manitoba has been a major sector of the Manitoba economy for generations, employing 6,000 people and exporting an estimated \$333 million worth of goods, or 90 percent of the output of the industry, to destinations around the world in 2001.¹ With the phase-out of tariffs on garments manufactured in the Least Developed Countries through the demise of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement on January 1, 2005, many experts and commentators alike have predicted the end of the industry in North America. But does the loss of tariff protections really spell the end of garment manufacture in Manitoba, or are there unique features of the local apparel industry which may shield it from complete collapse?

Beginning with an overview of some of the issues in the mainstream garment industry in Winnipeg, this report will argue that the paradigm employed by the industry in the province may have to undergo a dramatic shift in order to survive. However, this does not mean the end of garment production in the province. There are several features of the industry in Manitoba, and of the fashion industry in general, that lend themselves

¹ Government of Manitoba website, www.gov.mb.ca/itm/trade/profiles/apparel/index.htm.

to continued success, albeit in different forms. Focussing first on the mainstream industry, this report will then go on to detail what our team has deemed ‘alternative’ fashion designers in the local industry, tying analysis of these small businesses to some of the broad issues in the mainstream industry as well as the Community Economic Development (CED) perspective employed by the Manitoba Research Alliance.

Community Economic Development (CED) is understood as a set of principles that incorporate a holistic perspective into the economic development of a region. The CED approach seeks to place emphasis on small-scale production and the promotion of linkages between various sectors of the local economy, replacing imports with locally-produced goods where possible, and enhancing “social capital, human well being, community safety and stability and local decision making”.² This stance is important for understanding how our ‘alternative’ designers may approach greater success in the Winnipeg garment industry, highlighting the linkages that are so important to small-scale business in the creation and maintenance of niche markets.

OBSERVATIONS

Mainstream Perspectives on the Winnipeg Industry

In order to better understand the issues facing large-scale garment production in the city, team members participated in a number of interviews with industry and labour representatives within the mainstream garment industry. A common theme in these early interviews was the imminent demise of the garment industry in the city due to the phase out of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement on Clothing and Textiles in January 2005.

For both labour and industry insiders the end of the tariffs mean major changes for the industry in the province. The representative of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE)³ believes that the protective measures under

² MRA website: www.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/mra/ced_all.htm.

³ UNITE was a recent amalgamation of several unions working in the garment industry. While the union is ostensibly international, they actually only represent workers in Canada and the United States, despite the moving of production to other lower-wage regions such as Mexico, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and China. It should also be noted that since the interviews in late 2003 and early 2004, UNITE has merged with HERE (the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union), creating UNITE HERE.

the Multi-Fibre Arrangement have helped to sustain the industry in the province, keeping employment on the production floor and maintaining decently-paying jobs within the unionized sector of the local industry. The end of tariff protections spell the end for the Winnipeg garment industry as it has existed. Most large employers will have no business reason to maintain local production and therefore will move their manufacturing off-shore to maximize profits. The reduction of employment opportunities among new immigrants to Canada and among the current active workforce in the city creates serious issues for the union, as well as for the workers themselves. However, it should be noted that not all current workers in the mainstream industry in Manitoba have union affiliation. In fact, while the Province of Manitoba says that 60 percent of the workforce in the industry in Winnipeg is unionized,⁴ the UNITE representative could not give us the current numbers.

The representative of the Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI), the provincial industry's advocacy group, also expressed concern that the end of global tariffs would cause upheaval in the city's industry. But this person's concern was tempered with the expectation that the new directions being implemented by local manufacturers, and indeed trends in the industry as a whole, would off-set the effects of the exodus of production jobs from the city. Unlike the union representative, whose concerns rest with the shrinking number of production jobs and diminished union involvement in the local industry, MFI believes that technology and trends within the retail sector will allow Canadian and Winnipeg-based businesses to flourish, even if the bulk of garment production does not stay in the city. Indeed, this person's view, and the view of most individuals involved in the mainstream garment industry in the province, is that the local industry will move from their current position encompassing all aspects of design, manufacture, and marketing of garments, to the more specialized area solely focussing on design and marketing.⁵

⁴ Government of Manitoba website, www.gov.mb.ca/itm/trade/profiles/apparel/index.htm.

⁵ Interviews: MFI representative, October 31, 2003; Clothing and Textiles, March 15, 2004; Fashion Industry Consultant, June 14, 2004; and Silver Jeans May 14, 2004.

Technology has long been an important factor in the province's garment industry. Technological innovations such as Computer-Assisted Design (CAD) and communications technologies have clearly made an impact at the production-level, as well as in the design and retail sectors.⁶ Indeed, Winnipeg's production facilities, such as Nygard International's ACT2 (Automatic Reorder to Sales) plant, have been at the forefront of introducing these technologies into the local industry. The ACT2 factory employs ergonomically-designed floors within a modular system of garment production, a Gerber system for pattern production and cutting, and an array of other technologies.

Nygar's Automatic Reorder to Sales system is one of the company's biggest assets for production and one of its largest technological investments. Based in the principles of mass customization, the system ensures that retailers of Nygard's various lines are constantly kept with stock as they need it while keeping factory inventories of stock low. These communication lines also allow their Winnipeg-based offices and production facilities to remain in close contact with their off-shore production.

Not all industrial manufacturers in the city have adopted Nygard's level of technology. Pace Setter, another local garment manufacturer, is also implementing some newer technologies such as the most advanced Gerber program, yet continues to use the traditional sewing arrangements and does not have a sophisticated communications system like the one in use at Nygard. Starting with large-scale production of sportswear over thirty years ago, Pace Setter has more recently settled into the niche market of customization for sports teams and businesses. Its custom orders are often as small as five to ten pieces.

The increased implementation of technology, such as Nygard's ACT2 system and the advanced CAD-based design technologies, are seen by MFI as the keys to maintaining locally-owned businesses, if not the production of garments in Manitoba. Through a new initiative, the Business Incubator project, MFI is hoping to expand its reach into smaller manufacturers, helping them to grow. It aims to bring CAD and other expensive technologies to promising enterprises, or companies 'on the verge', that need

⁶ For a more in-depth discussion of technology in the industry, please see *Technology in the Winnipeg Garment Industry* by Leigh Hayden, this volume.

help to keep up with the demands that are being placed on them. Nonetheless, the representative of MFI reported that for Winnipeg-based companies to remain competitive in the global industry they will likely continue to move their production off-shore, maintaining their local offices through which they will focus on the design and other business operations.⁷

Additionally, MFI places great emphasis on trends that are driven from the retail sector, corresponding with similar beliefs espoused by many large players in the industry (see Smith 1997 for more information and a critique of this line of reasoning).⁸ Many of these trends are based in technological innovations. For instance, the MFI representative explained how computers are being combined with older ideas to create new experiences in retail and fashion. These include online shopping, which recalls the catalogue purchases of yesteryear, and a high-tech version of custom tailoring: computer automated 'body scans' used to create custom garments.⁹

Another industry phenomenon, 'mass customization', is also viewed by MFI as a new approach that will revolutionize the industry. Mass customization is the umbrella term for the production processes that emphasize increased product variety at the retail end, a high turnover rate, and a low and better managed inventory at both the retail and manufacturing level (Ross 1997:250-251). Extremely important to the mass customization approach is the ability for retail and manufacturing to remain in constant contact, keeping tabs on sales trends, and keeping the retail side of the industry replenished with stock, as illustrated by the Nygard ACT2 production facility in Winnipeg.¹⁰

As another example of mass customization, the informant spoke at length about the Spanish design and retail firm Zara, which, along with its parent company Inditex Group, has taken the mass customization approach and created considerable waves in the

⁷ Interview: MFI representative, October 13, 2003.

⁸ MFI closed its Bannatyne Avenue offices and training centre in January 2005.

⁹ Interview: MFI representative, October 31, 2003.

¹⁰ Tour of Nygard ACT2 production facility, February 26, 2004.

fashion industry.¹¹ The close networks of communication that exist between their over 750 retail outlets and their headquarters in Spain has enabled a turnaround time from design to finished product in stores of two to three weeks, while the industry standard remains approximately nine months.¹² Because of their quick turnaround, Zara is able to directly track the success of their designs, revamping their most popular garments yet never recreating them.

Independent Designer Perspectives

The views of the industry presented in the preceding section reflect mainstream thought in the industry in Winnipeg and generally reinforce the issues raised in other studies of large-scale garment manufacture throughout North America. Since these companies and institutions represent the majority of workers and dollars in the provincial industry, the insights gained through our investigations are invaluable in terms of coming to grips with our research objectives. Nonetheless, another interesting aspect of the industry in Winnipeg is that the vast majority of the garment firms in the province are categorized as small- to medium-sized businesses.¹³ While some of the small businesses that were investigated by the research team are amongst those that are helped by MFI's Business Incubator project, the independent designers/entrepreneurs discussed below are of a smaller scale, with more modest business goals. Due to several factors, including their size and their stated goals and aspirations, the research team has labeled these designers under the heading 'Alternative Visions'.

The first interview with an independent designer was with the creative force behind the label EMK. In its short life, EMK has managed to expand quite rapidly; currently the label's designs are available in over fifty stores across Canada, including a newly-opened boutique, Stúlka, in trendy Osborne Village, and the owner hopes to expand into the U.S.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹² <http://edition.cnn.com/BUSINESS/programs/yourbusiness/stories2001/zara/>; www.zara.com.

¹³ Government of Manitoba website, www.gov.mb.ca/itm/trade/profiles/apparel/index.htm.

While EMK has a relatively broad reach in terms of retailers, the manufacturing processes involved in the label are miniscule. The owner employs one sewer on a full-time basis, paying per piece completed. The owner believes pay per piece completed encourages quick and accurate work while providing a decent wage. Other than this employee, the owner is currently the sole other person involved in the manufacturing process. She designs and sews many pieces, and takes charge of fabric acquisition and the everyday needs of running a small business (accounting, paperwork, acquisition of clients, etc.). Her designs are not exclusively one-of-a-kind, a departure from her earlier years, but the runs of each garment are extremely small and still embody a one-of-a-kind aesthetic. At the time of the interview, the offices and production facility of EMK were located in a small warehouse building in the Exchange District of Winnipeg, a hip area of town where artists and other small businesses flourish.¹⁴

Lori5, another independent label and entrepreneur, also became a focus of our interest. Unlike EMK's designer, who has no formal training in design or clothing construction, the designer behind Lori5 has a degree in Clothing and Textiles from the University of Manitoba. But like EMK, Lori5's design and business sense are firmly planted in an independent model. The owner of Lori5 works on her own, designing and sewing each piece herself in her home studio. Describing the majority of her designs as collaborative, the owner works with a group of clients that she has cultivated over the last few years to tailor items to their liking. Most of her clothing designs are one-of-a-kind, or reworkings of previous designs. At the time of the interview, Lori5 was selling some of her designs at craft shows and festivals, with booths at various locations around Winnipeg. This was not enough to sufficiently maintain her economically, so as a further source of income she was doing alterations on garments for a handful of clients while also working at a fabric wholesaler in the Winnipeg area. Her preference was to continue

¹⁴ As of May 2005 the offices and production facilities for EMK had been moved to Osborne Village, operating out of a space adjacent to the Stúlka retail store.

to cultivate the contacts that she had made, further developing a client-base as well as finding new locations in which to sell her merchandise.¹⁵

The third interview was with another graduate of the Clothing and Textiles department at the University of Manitoba. Working with a partner under the moniker 'Lost and Found', the duo's designs are usually one-of-a-kind pieces incorporating vintage fabrics and found clothing that they rework into new designs.¹⁶ Both the informant and her partner in Lost and Found work out of their home-based studios and their designs are generally made for clients with whom they are acquainted. Their goals were somewhat modest at the time of the interview, largely due to the short history, but they were hoping to expand and have their designs available in several local retailers that they had already identified.¹⁷

Interestingly, several themes emerged from the interviews with independent designers. First, all of the women had financed their own success. While all of the designers considered the design and production of garments as an art form, they do not find themselves within a niche for arts funding, nor do they necessarily qualify for bank loans or other small business initiatives, including MFI's Business Incubator project.

Additionally, several designers highlighted the lack of networks between independent designers across Canada. Independent retailers may be aware of, and in communication with, independent designers, but the designers and small entrepreneurs themselves are not often in such a position, at least beyond their immediate community. One of the only opportunities open to independent designers to network with designers from other centres across the country is by showing their products at the seasonal design

¹⁵ Interestingly, a follow-up in July 2005 found that Lori5 has expanded radically in the last year. Rather than depending on the unreliable festival and market circuit for retail opportunities, she is now selling her clothing in a stylish downtown boutique specializing in 'counterculture' clothing and accessories. Her success with these sales has even allowed her to quit her other jobs and focus exclusively on designing and sewing. In spite of this, she has not expanded to the extent that she would be looking to hire other sewers.

¹⁶ Interview: Lost & Found, June 3, 2004.

¹⁷ Several other local small businesses were identified to participate in the project, but the team did not have a chance to interview as extensively as we wanted. Despite this, one team member, Sara Komarnisky, interviewed both the owner and the in-house designer at a boutique store, Nokomis, in Edmonton, Alberta, in order to get a greater sense of the issues facing small garment companies. Although separated geographically by great distance, many of the same issues were raised by these designers as those raised by the Winnipeg-area entrepreneurs.

trade shows. Although several of the designers expressed interest in participating in these shows, the expense of travel to, and accommodations at, these events is often prohibitive.

Each designer saw immense possibilities relating to their enterprises and a desire to grow their businesses, including the avenues through which they are selling their work. They all expressed the desire to remain independent and retain control of their products, creating unique designs and garments or items with small runs, which reflect an individualistic fashion aesthetic. Similarities extended to their sourcing of fabrics, the bulk of which is sourced from retail and store-based wholesalers, and their use of vintage patterns and textiles also underline a niche amongst these small businesses that needs to be addressed. And all of the independent designers identified their clientele as young—mainly within the 18-35 age brackets, with few exceptions.

Interestingly, all the designers have some experience within the mainstream garment industry, although for the most part these experiences have been confined to working in retail stores. Two of the designers from Winnipeg, as well as the Edmonton-based entrepreneurs, have worked in independently-owned and operated retail outlets specializing in local, Canadian, and independent designs, and several also have experience in larger retail chains with their own in-house labels. Each designer felt that their experiences have enabled them to better understand the business of fashion retail, which in turn has helped them with the design of their own garments. Not only have their experiences been a source of inspiration and hope, but the networks they have cultivated working in these environments have also been instrumental in marketing their own designs.

Finally, there is a clear social consciousness associated with the work of these designers. They would all like to be in the position to employ more people, although even the most successful and established are not in a position to do much hiring. This desire to employ is rooted in a view of the industry that they see as fading unnecessarily with the movement of production off-shore, with all of the well-documented issues of pay and abuse which they actively try to avoid. In fact, all the designers were adamant that they would not compromise their ethics by employing low-paid overseas labour, even if this would grow their businesses exponentially.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The major issues raised in this article up to this point have not yet incorporated what surely must be considered a key element in the garment industry, namely, *fashion*. By viewing the garment industry in a perspective that emphasizes business, technology, and economic factors, I feel that we may miss the forest for the trees. And so it is within this final section that I will try to balance this omission.

Significant to our understanding of fashion is French anthropologist Rene Girard's theory of mimetic desire in which he asserts that desire is related to the social relations between people. Girard stresses that imitation and emulation are at the root of desire, something we can see reflected in the fashion industry (Girard 1988). In fashion advertising and magazines we see famous people, beautiful people, and scenarios that are desirable or for which we have an affinity, and therefore, we want what we see. There is comfort in conforming and being 'in fashion' and indeed, certain advertising employs this notion explicitly, such as The Gap's "Everyone in Khakis" campaign.

Conversely, there are many people who actively seek to go against the current. These consumers are the underground, the alternative, the counterculture. They are the ultimate niche market. They may be, or may seek to be, ahead of mainstream fashion. They may shop based on political or social issues that are of importance to them, supporting local and Canadian talent, buying Canadian-made or union-made garments, or avoiding garments containing leather or fur. In fact there are any number of reasons for an individual's sense of self and fashion. It is therefore important that we acknowledge the significance of the aesthetics of fashion when we talk about the industry as a whole. This becomes especially pertinent when we discuss what our team has labeled 'Alternative Visions'.

Relevant to this discussion is how the mainstream fashion industry co-opts the underground and alternative and takes it as its own. Certainly this is seen in the fashions that take their influence 'from the street' or incorporate 'alternative lifestyle' elements, such as the punk movement or 'Gothic' aesthetics. Indeed, looking at some of the suggestions made by the MFI representative, we see just that. In discussing the evolution of the retail fashion industry, the MFI representative traced the shift from tailors and boutique shops to the department store, the emergence of the mall and subsequently the

‘big-box’ store, and the continuation of this cycle with a re-embrace of boutique shopping. She asserted that body scanning technology will enable consumers to purchase articles of clothing reflecting their ‘individuality’, although it is certainly unclear to what extent an individualistic aesthetic is reflected in these garments.¹⁸ Her comments about the body scanning technology were echoed by several other informants interviewed for this project, including individuals associated with Clothing and Textiles at the University of Manitoba and individuals in the upper echelon of the fashion industry in the province.¹⁹ Each view the potentialities of body scanning technology as being instrumental in enabling large-scale manufacturers to produce items for the individual consumer.

But the eager embrace of body scanning begs the question: Is the ‘individual consumer’ to which they refer the ‘average consumer’? Body scanning technology has not yet emerged in Canada within the mainstream; according to one interviewee, there are no body scanning machines in Canadian markets, despite their portability.²⁰ Also, it is important to note the sources of commentary about this technological innovation: all those who see body scanning as a breakthrough in clothing manufacture are viewing it from the mainstream industry perspective. This highlights the mainstream industry’s desire to achieve sales within what is otherwise a niche market. It also highlights an issue of class and economic prosperity: body scans themselves are expensive, the clothing made with these scans is currently not available through many manufacturers, nor is this clothing available at a price-point that most consumers can afford. And finally, while it is clear that body scanning may enable custom-*tailored* fashion garments, the garments themselves remain the products of mass-produced designs, thus defeating the ‘individualized’ element that the mainstream industry is trying to tap.

While online shopping and the mass customization approach employed by firms like *Zara appear* to tap into the desire of consumers to purchase articles of clothing that

¹⁸ Interview: MFI representative, October 31, 2003.

¹⁹ Interviews: MFI representative, October 31, 2003; University of Manitoba Clothing and Textiles, March 15, 2004; Fashion Industry Consultant, June 14, 2004; and Silver Jeans, May 14, 2004.

²⁰ Interview: University of Manitoba Clothing and Textiles, March 15, 2004.

they will not see everyone else wearing, I would argue that independent and alternative designers located on the fringes of the mainstream are already serving a clientele with similar, if not the same, mentality when it comes to fashion. As the mainstream industry sees prospects in methodologies and aesthetics associated with individualism, independent designers preserve the upper hand in this market because their garments truly retain the special qualities that ‘fashionistas’ crave: they are more than just ‘clothes’; they are pieces of art of an individual nature. Not only that, local designers are closer to their clients than the designers within the mainstream industry are to their clientele. Each independent designer knows her/his market. They create garments that remain affordable to their customers, and ultimately, due to the locally-designed and produced factor, they can react to local needs in a way that is impossible for large scale manufacturers. And this, of course, is the true test of fashion—remaining up-to-the-moment and in-touch with the latest trends.

Bringing this analysis full circle, we can see how some of the principles of CED outlined by the Manitoba Research Alliance relate well with the independent designers’ philosophies identified under the ‘Alternative Visions’ label. While projects such as MFI’s Business Incubator program may superficially reflect a CED approach to the local garment industry, it still fundamentally falls within the old paradigm of garment manufacturing in the province. This initiative may not be as involved as it could be with the group of new designers and businesses that are operating on small-scale principles, but it could serve as a model upon which to build a more participatory relationship among designers and the industry as a whole. And as for employment opportunities among the ranks of UNITE’s unemployed workers, while the small businesses outlined in this report do not currently have the capacity to engage them, the possibilities do exist, given the right future circumstances.

It is within a broader understanding of fashion and the elements of CED that we can see a niche and positive projection for at least some garment manufacture remaining in the province, even if MFI and UNITE’s pessimistic projections for the industry actually come to fruition (an unlikely scenario, at least in the short to medium term). However, it is clear that no matter what, the bottom line for the local garment industry is that change is on the way. Even among those mainstream businesses that have seen the

rise and fall of the local garment industry, the niche markets served by independent designers and entrepreneurs are viewed as the last bastions of the garment industry in the province. As Michael Silver of Silver Jeans commented, “There will always be room for the small entrepreneurial company [in Manitoba] because... they’re selling on something about the product... [I]f there is a future for the industry in Canada, it will be niche market premium product”.²¹

²¹ Interview: Michael Silver, president, Silver Jeans, May 14, 2004.

Radical Entrepreneurs: Towards a Model of First Nations Approaches to Economic Development in the Secondary Textile Industries

Cory Willmott

INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the role of First Nations in the secondary textile industries in Winnipeg and beyond. Considering the relatively large urban Aboriginal population in Winnipeg, and the focus of other components of our investigation, the Winnipeg garment industry research team (Manitoba Research Alliance, Project #4) was initially interested in the role of First Nations participation in the mainstream Winnipeg garment industry. Although we had circumstantial evidence of First Nations sewing machine operators (SMOs) in Winnipeg, our on-going efforts failed to produce any viable leads into communities of First Nations garment workers.¹ Combining the central concepts of the MRA initiative—Community Economic Development (CED) and the New Economy—with research I conducted among contemporary Native Canadian fashion designers between 1997 and 2000, we broadened our search beyond garments to include all products made from textiles (i.e., the secondary textile industry), and beyond factory workers to include independent designers with small-scale businesses. The wider scope of this approach enabled our team to perceive a pattern of entrepreneurship in First

¹ Team member Sara Stephens contacted sixteen Winnipeg employment and service agencies in an attempt to locate First Nations garment workers. Her diligent efforts were without success.

Nations involvement in the secondary textile industries. Far from being capitalist in the traditional sense, however, these First Nations entrepreneurs engage the New Economy with CED principles that are responsive to both the particular needs of sewing industries and the socio-political interests of Native peoples. This report describes the study and develops a theoretical framework for analyzing this phenomenon. The work will be the basis for an article in which the model will be applied to a case study of a First Nations sewing cooperative in Winnipeg's North End and the nation-wide context in which First Nations contemporary fashion designers are forging new pathways for economic development.

METHODOLOGY

I joined the Winnipeg garment industry (WGI) research team in January of 2004. I brought with me the fieldwork I had conducted among First Nations fashion designers in Ontario between 1997 and 2000. Shortly after I joined the team, we hired two Aboriginal community researchers: Temperance McDonald, a recent graduate of the Clothing and Textiles Program at the University of Manitoba, and Aaron Pettman, a recent graduate of the Global Political Economy Program at the University of Manitoba. As with my former work and the rest of our WGI research team, we took a qualitative case study approach. It is pertinent to my methodology that I am trained in fashion design and pattern drafting as well as industrial sewing, cutting and grading techniques. I've worked in garment factories in a variety of capacities, as well as in vintage and contemporary retail clothing stores. As a material culture specialist, I am also very concerned with the collection of visual data to use for both illustrative and demonstrative purposes. These skills and experiences inform my research to a significant extent.

Throughout the spring of 2004, I took primary responsibility for the sub-team of Temperance and Aaron. I worked closely with Temperance to find First Nations fashion designers in Winnipeg and across Canada, as well as to develop an interview schedule for them. Temperance is a First Nations fashion designer herself and, at the time we hired her, she had just produced a very successful fashion show at a downtown art gallery (which I videotaped). Her knowledge of design and sewing gave her a distinct advantage in interviewing designers. Meanwhile, Aaron's background in public policy was an asset

in developing a strategy for investigating the social, economic and political framework within which First Nations designers and sewing machine operators (SMOs) worked in Winnipeg. We were not able to develop an interview schedule for Aaron's investigation because each organization had its own distinct set of questions to be addressed. Our sub-team had regular meetings. We also attended regular meetings with the full WGI research team.

DATA AND DATA LIMITATIONS

Our sub-team was able to collect about ten interviews in varying degrees of depth from brief informal untaped conversations to hour-long taped interviews following an interview schedule. In addition, we collected visual data on two fashion shows and the production and retail spaces of an Aboriginal secondary textile workers' co-operative. Combined with our Internet sources and my former research, this provides a rich body of original data for analysis. Nevertheless, it is not as complete as I would have liked. On the one hand, there were some leads that we had to abandon due to less than enthusiastic responses to our inquiries. For example, one Winnipeg First Nations designer agreed to an interview, but then postponed the date several times until finally the date was left open-ended. At this point we deemed it polite to desist. On the other hand, there are still a number of leads that may yet be following up. For example, one of the most prominent First Nations fashion designers lives in Ft. Simpson, NWT, but he commissions a unionized Winnipeg manufacturer to produce one of his lines of activewear. As of yet, we have not been able to secure an interview with him or with the Winnipeg firm. We have also yet to follow up a lead to a workers' cooperative in Brandon, Manitoba that has close ties to the Winnipeg Native community. These shortcomings are in large part due to the fact that the team dispersed last spring and I moved to southern Illinois. Aaron Pettman was rehired for a short period in the spring of 2005, but his brief appointment did not allow enough time for all the necessary work. With plans to present this work at an upcoming Association of Canadian Scholarship in the United States (ACSUS), however, I have been pursuing these threads as far as possible under the circumstances.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the Industrial Revolution, the field of social relations in the garment industry, which distinguishes power on the basis of class, gender, race and ethnicity, has become “objectified” so that relations of dominance reproduce themselves without any need of conscious intent or positive action on the part of those who dominate (Bourdieu 1977:183-92). In the mainstream garment industry, this has meant that women of lower uneducated classes, as well as immigrants with poor official language skills and “visible minorities” (i.e., non-White races and ethnicities), have automatically filled the subordinate positions of wage labourers. The effect of objectification of the social system is compounded by a pattern of deliberate exploitation of these groups based on various configurations of spatial organization of production (e.g., centralization in factories, “outsourcing”, “home-working”, “offshore” labour and immigrant labour). It is therefore politically expedient for proponents of CED to retain the geographic meaning of the “local” implied in the MRA’s working definition, which I shall subsequently discuss in detail.²

In dealing with First Nations involvement with the needle trades, however, I suggest that the definition of CED must encompass the relationship between the local, national and global, rather than merely focusing on the local. Moreover, the definition of the New Economy must be adapted to include an emphasis on symbolic cultural capital, in addition to the human capital and information technologies upon which the MRA project is generally focused. The role of symbolic capital is increasingly important in all aspects of the New Economy because it is in large part a function of the “development and availability of new information technology”³ that enables communication and commerce to transcend geographic boundaries. Placement on the balance between CED in the local material means of production and entrepreneurship in the national and international arenas of symbolic capital characterizes the bicultural role of First Nations “radical entrepreneurship”. As Lakota sociologist Patricia Albers (1996:250) points out,

² Manitoba Research Alliance website: <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca/cedall.html> (June 28th, 2005).

³ *Ibid.*

the “new and provocative theories of Jean Baudrillard (1975; 1981) and others” provide a theoretical framework for understanding “Native American labour issues under postindustrial capitalism”:

In focusing on the rising power and play of symbolic over utilitarian forms of production, these writers present an important literature for understanding the dilemmas Native Americans face as workers whose ethnicity has been stereotyped and appropriated in various mass cultural forums... Clearly whether the American Indian stands as an idol for New Age religions, a fetish for chic interior design, or an icon for wilderness preservation, the use of this image making and its impact on the work Native Americans perform cannot be ignored either now or in the past. (Albers 1996:250-51)

Concerning Native Canadian fashion designers in particular, I suggest that as clothing designers they are eminently equipped with a form of symbolic capital that is capable of counter-appropriating the image of “Indianness”. This is because the creation and maintenance of social identities is inherently expressed through clothed appearances. By materializing the symbolic appearance of a recognized role for bicultural and upwardly mobile Fourth World identities within the objectified structure of First World class and race relations, they are not only strategically placed to transform the field of social relations in which labour takes place, but also to objectify the new identities throughout society as a whole. An analogous process may be seen in the history of women’s adoption of pants insofar as the structure of social relations transformed to admit roles for women in men’s domains that did not jeopardize or sacrifice their female gender identities. The analogy ends, however, where it concerns the process itself in that fashion designers were not so much responsible for women’s initial adoption of trousers as were the contingencies of wartime economics. Yet, in the midst of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, they did create the pant suit and Unisex fashions, which secured the place of women’s trousers and ultimately facilitated the objectification of—i.e., institutionalization of—bi-gendered roles for women in society at large.

To explain the central role played by symbolic capital in First Nations designers’ radical entrepreneurship, I shall reframe the context of the research from a two dimensional local/global axis to a multidimensional interplay of competing political and cultural nation-scapes. From this point of view I engage a twofold argument. First, I suggest that members of First Nations may be culturally ill-adapted to the systems of

wage labour that operate in the mainstream garment industry, and structurally, they are in an antagonistic relationship with the various classes and nationalities of immigrants who typically occupy the unskilled low wage positions. Additionally, the garment industry is now in a state of crisis that can only be offset by offshore production and/or “deskilling” (i.e., mechanizing labour) and modular production (i.e., specialization of tasks on a production line rather than sewing complete garments as in piece work). Therefore, programs that focus on training First Nations SMOs for the mainstream Winnipeg garment industry serve only a limited function. They may assist a small number of individuals to enter a shrinking low wage labour market, but they leave intact the structure of race and class relations that relegates First Nations to the lower classes. Key to economic development among low income First Nations peoples in the secondary textile industries is the formation of workers’ cooperatives in order to maximize the human capital potential of the group.⁴ Although local production remains essential, as in the Neechi Co-op’s CED model, marketing in the New Economy depends upon mobilizing symbolic capital by developing a cultural product and promoting it within national and global networks.

Therefore, in the second phase of my argument I suggest that a broader vision of First Nations entrepreneurialism is needed to realize the full potential of Aboriginal CED in the intersection of the New Economy with the Winnipeg garment industry. Radical entrepreneurial initiatives aim to transform the structure of social relations in two ways: 1) to help establish a First Nations “ethnic economy”; and 2) to create upwardly mobile paths for First Nations human capital. Light *et al.* (1995:25) point out that the term “ethnic economy” originally included only coethnic employers and employees, but not coethnic consumers. Because capital typically drains rapidly out of First Nations economies, however, I deem it critical to also consider the role of consumers in the definition. “Upward mobility” falls into two distinct classes within Native communities. The challenge for the lower classes is to move from welfare to stable employment. For

⁴ Neil Loughran and Russ Rothney. 2004. Cooperative Business Development: Winnipeg Pilot Project Summative Evaluation Report. Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance, University of Manitoba. p.1. http://ius.uwinnipeg.ca/wira_publications.html (July 25th, 2005).

the more highly educated middle classes, the thrust is from stable employment to private ownership of entrepreneurial enterprises.

Contrary to the imposed model of assimilation, these entrepreneurial strategies do not sacrifice indigenous identities and/or traditions, but rather draw upon them. Although reciprocal gift giving and sharing are central features of most indigenous traditional economies, so too are many characteristics associated with entrepreneurship. The cultural traits of entrepreneurialism may be utilized to advantage in the unanticipated shift towards small scale business that has accompanied the New Economy. In the garment industry, this trend favours high fashion and ethnic niche markets that are well suited to entrepreneurial enterprises. At the same time, First Nations entrepreneurs are able to avoid or lessen the alienation that typically accompanies the commodification of labour by employing principles of reciprocity to their production process and by counter-appropriating the symbolic capital of their indigenous identities in the material form of their products. Therefore, First Nations entrepreneurial fashion designers can potentially be successful in economic, political and humane dimensions.

In order to undertake the above argument, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of some key terms. The Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA) recognizes three defining characteristics of the New Economy (“a rise in general education levels; the development and availability of new information technology; and an increase in ‘invisible’ trade in services, mergers and acquisitions, and the flow of information”) which “affect the spatial character of economic activity and government policy”.⁵ MRA’s definition of CED likewise refers to the spatial aspects of economic activities. The first six of its eleven principles employ the term, “local,” in contexts that imply geographic location and/or movement:

1. Use of locally produced goods and services;
2. Production of goods and services for local use;
3. Local re-investment of profits;

⁵ Manitoba Research Alliance website: <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca/cedall.html> (June 28th, 2005).

4. Long term employment of residents;
5. Local skill development;
6. Local decision making⁶

The concept of “local” in the Old Economy is based on geography because the process through which value is created rests on the means of production, in which human and technological capital are essentially material in nature. That is, in the classic model, human capital is physical labour and technological capital is mechanical equipment. This model is particularly applicable to the mainstream garment industry. Some radical technological innovations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were harbingers of the Industrial Revolution. Until very recently, however, there have been no further improvements upon the manual skills of human labour due to the manipulations of fabric inherent in the processes of production in the garment industry. Those few technological innovations that have removed the need for human labour have been inconsequential in the macroeconomics of the New Economy.⁷ With very little flexibility in human and technological capital, the maintenance of value depends upon the organization and reorganization of the social relations of production which, as noted previously, have historically been linked to place: in-house versus home-workers, out-sourcing and contracting, as well as—within the context of globalization—“off-shore” production and immigrant labour issues.

If we understand Aboriginal approaches to CED in the New Economy as the mobilization of cultural (symbolic) capital towards the creation of economically and socially successful bicultural identities in the field of social relations in which production takes place, it then follows that the creation of value rests not only on the material means of production, but also on the imagined community of cultural nationalism (i.e., social/cultural/political identity) (Anderson 1991 [1983]; Rosaldo 1994). In general, as geographic barriers between social groups recede and dissolve through globalization processes, symbols of distinctive cultural identity become symbolic capital that operates to produce and reproduce value. This effect is particularly so with First Nations because,

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See *Technology in the Winnipeg Garment Industry* by Leigh Hayden, this volume.

as is the case of American nationalism, Canadians have appropriated “Indian” cultural symbols in the process of creating the cultural identity of Canadian nationalism (Silverstein-Willmott [forthcoming]). Thus, an economic struggle is entailed between Natives and non-Natives to gain and retain control of symbols of Native Canadian cultural identity in the realms of the material means of production and the markets that maintain value.

In the context of a struggle over symbolic capital in the realm of cultural identities, the definition of “local” in Aboriginal approaches to CED in the New Economy must be redefined in terms of the community of bicultural peers engaged in the same entrepreneurial practices rather than by the close geographic proximity normally attributed to the term. To be effective in both economic and political realms, First Nations designers must forge social and economic bonds across geographically diverse communities in order to produce and promote their goods, as well as tap into international markets to sell them, while competing with non-Aboriginal designers for the same markets.

For this reason, examination of entrepreneurial initiatives in any isolated region does not reveal the full picture of First Nations’ engagement with CED in the New Economy. Nevertheless, the authenticity of cultural identity upon which the value of symbolic capital depends is founded upon social relations embedded in geographically local First Nations communities, including those in urban centres. Maintaining ties with local communities at the production end entails commitment to the reciprocal socio-economic relations of traditional indigenous economies. It also ensures the close tie between workers and the products of their labour necessary to avoid the alienation of labour. Hence, it is at once a personal imperative, a social obligation, and an economic advantage for First Nations entrepreneurs to employ principles of CED that stimulate economic growth in their “home” communities.

Specifically, “radical entrepreneurialism” includes such defining characteristics of entrepreneurs as opportunity seeking, risk taking and innovation. Especially pertinent to this study is the criteria cited by an early French economist: “The entrepreneur shifts economic resources out of an area of lower and into an area of higher productivity and greater yield” (Jean Baptiste Say in Dees *et al.* 2001:3). At the turn of the nineteenth

century, when this statement was made, it probably referred to human and technological capital. Dees *et al.* (2001), however, interpret it to mean that “entrepreneurs create value”. For them, entrepreneurs are “innovative, opportunity-oriented, resourceful, value-creating change agents”. This definition works well with their concept of the “social entrepreneur” who has “an explicit social mission in mind” in order to “make the world a better place”. Success for social entrepreneurs may not be measured in economic terms alone, but rather must take into account the impact of the enterprise on the quality of life, or more particularly, the “extent to which they create social value” (Dees *et al.* 2001:4-5). The term “radical entrepreneurialism” shares this combination of economic expansion and social activism, but additionally alludes to two historic meanings of “radical”: 1) “forming the root, basis, or foundation; original, primary”; and 2) “going to the root or origin; touching or acting upon what is essential and fundamental; thorough”.⁸ I intend the first of these meanings to apply specifically to drawing from indigenous cultural “roots,” whereas the second meaning refers to aiming for the “roots” of social transformation. That is, as in Bourdieu’s model, transforming the objectified institutions that govern the social structures within which social interaction takes place. We therefore arrive at a definition of “radical entrepreneurialism” that consists of opportunistic risk taking and economically viable action aimed at:

- creating and/or fostering an ethnic economy, in terms of both production and distribution;
- facilitating upward mobility, either from not working to working, or from wage labour to independent enterprise;
- creating social value, including but not limited to avoiding the alienation of labour and developing community support networks;
- drawing from cultural roots, in the areas of aesthetic design and social processes; and
- transforming the roots of social, economic and political institutions.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical model developed above raises some interesting questions for the application of CED in the New Economy. In particular, I believe one must ask in each case whether one can assume the geographical emphasis of the CED definition of the

⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, online subscription.

“local”. The model was developed in relation to organic food production and distribution, but might not be applicable to all industries. I present the concept of the “radical entrepreneur” as an alternative that is at this point merely a work-in-progress. Its utility remains to be demonstrated with the completion of this study.

Conclusions and Propositions

Raymond Wiest

This collection of papers is based upon a multidimensional and complex research project with a political economy focus and a qualitative research methodology. Although products of a team research effort, each of the papers of this collection has been constructed independently. As editor of the collection, it has been my responsibility to assure connection and continuity, however, because of the commonality of understanding and interpretation, achievement of connectedness has been a relatively straightforward task. In this final essay I will highlight some of the main findings of our team project, findings that initially were sketched by our team as part of an interim report, and underscore major issues that have been the subject of more detailed discussion in the foregoing papers of this collection. In a final section I will venture several propositions that grow out of our team research and comparative information from other similar scenarios.

PROJECT FINDINGS

Characteristics of the Winnipeg Garment Industry

The garment industry in Winnipeg is built around family-owned independent operations. Like the garment industry in most North American garment industry centres, it relies heavily upon immigrant labour. Government has subsidized the industry through special labour recruitment initiatives in search of suitable workers. The Federal Government has also been involved with the industry by setting, i.e., agreeing to, import

and export quotas that have become particularly important in the age of transnational or globalized assembly.

The different levels of government have largely subsidized the Manitoba garment industry (Golz, Millar Roberts 1991:22; Ghorayshi 1990:280; Lepp, Millar and Roberts 1987). Lepp, Millar and Roberts concluded, “the grateful taxpayer has to a large extent funded the flooding of this labour market, and the perpetuation of female job ghettos with low-paying, dead-end jobs” (1987:150). Government aid has taken the following forms: direct grants for new technology, new plants and productivity, forgivable loans, wage subsidies, depreciation and other corporate tax shelters, import restrictions, import relaxations in fabrics and direct recruitment of immigrants, federal and provincial training and vocational education programs, low hydro rates, low municipal taxes (Lepp, Millar and Roberts 1987:167). With all that public money support, the working conditions for garment workers are still inadequate. Although not typically “sweatshop”, conditions are such that labour supply continues to be predicated upon ‘entrapment’ associated with conditions set for immigrant workers.

The labour force is graded, with sewing positions largely occupied by women. Labour is unionized in Winnipeg’s major plants. As elsewhere in the world, the search for “nimble fingers”—dexterity and manual skill—drives the choice of recruitment to a great extent, even though the belief in who possesses nimble fingers changes as the rationalization for favouring this or that ethnic group or gender undergoes shifts. The primary consideration is the cost of labour.

The industry has not been very proactive with policy to address employment needs in the inner city. Training programs exist among the established industry leaders, but there have not been successful initiatives with the Aboriginal population of Winnipeg. For many First Nations people the garment industry is not an environment that nurtures respect for different cultural values or the creativity of the individual; indeed, it has even been characterized as representing a form of colonial oppression.

Industry Trends

In a labour intensive industry built on capacity to respond to rapidly changing market conditions—including shifting tastes and variable response to advertising—there

has long been an emphasis on keeping costs of labour down to remain competitive. This basic characteristic of capitalist enterprises has become even more pronounced in the most recent wave of globalization marked by reduction of trade barriers, barriers that for a considerable period of time acted to shelter the local garment industry from production zones with substantially lower costs of labour.

Under the neo-liberal agenda associated with globalized production, there are two interrelated trends in the industry to deal with the cost of labour issue. One trend is global restructuring in relation to the cost of labour in production, and also to changes in long standing quota systems—Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) and Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC)—phased out completely by January 2005. It should be noted that considerable dissent was raised in Parliament against signing onto the removal of the quotas,¹ and the government of Paul Martin promised to respond with financial support for a threatened garment industry.² The Winnipeg garment industry has been affected strongly by the modified global agreements, responding largely by joining the global manoeuvre to capture labour at lower cost to remain competitive. Winnipeg plant closures are a direct response to these changes and are associated with the move to offshore production.

A second trend is internal plant restructuring and reorganization, which is addressed in several ways. One way is through plant reorganization—referred to as “re-engineering”—in the form of assembly line sewing production in conjunction with new sewing technologies. A particular example is the “team work system”—AMS (Alternative Manufacturing System). Another way to restructure and reorganize has been through modifying the product i.e., the industry move from specialty utilitarian garments to “high fashion”, where the competition is in the area of *design*. This shift is associated with the full integration of design, production, and retailing of “branded products”, expressed as “vertical organization”. In this arrangement, mainstream hi-tech production

¹ Garment Industry Debate, 38th Parliament, 1st Session. November 20, 2004; <http://www.patmartin.ca/ndp.php/SEC428281d310798/ART4282c08f7d398>.

² “Feds say aid on the way for garment industry”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 1, 2004; “\$600M for garment industry: Feds succumb to pressure, table aid package”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 15, 2004.

is closely linked to retail outlets. Examples are specialty or niche market ‘premium price product’ production.

Adoption of new technology—CAD, CAM, 3-D body imaging, and computerized communication (World-Wide-Web and email) applied to production, promotion and distribution of products—is a significant change affecting the Winnipeg garment industry. Of these, the technology affecting design, and the technology associated with rapid communication—including images—has been most influential. Body-imaging, touted by some as a key to the industry’s future, has not yet had great impact. The introduction of Computer-Assisted Design (CAD) systems is linked directly to production changes. CAD systems have resulted in more effective marking and use of fabric, greater accuracy and speed in cutting fabric, as well as modifying labour needs and expectations.

Technological and Organizational Changes: Implications for Labour

Global restructuring has led to industry plant closures and layoffs associated with an increased emphasis on outsourcing of assembly. This may give rise to pressure on government to absorb the unemployed immigrant workforce in other sectors in response to garment industry closures and outsourcing. However, the impression in the industry is that many who are losing their jobs will retire. Hence, demographic indicators may obscure the true number of layoffs. Nonetheless, demands for retraining are expected and likely within a short period of time.

Plants that continue garment construction (i.e., sewing) in Winnipeg, are likely to continue to rely on immigrant workers to make up the majority of the workforce, because immigrant workers are highly motivated, and their immigration status makes them more vulnerable and less likely to press for higher wages or improved working conditions.

Internal restructuring of plants is associated primarily with a few showcase plants (e.g., ARTS2) with high tech ergonomic work stations oriented to limited and quick production runs that are linked to research and development (R&D), and/or to plants with volume runs of limited-range fashion products. Some of the organizational changes made were initially opposed by many workers—especially the move to work in a standing rather than sitting position—to the extent that some sewing machine operators (SMOs)

left their jobs. However, workers seemed to adjust to the new arrangements, and some who left their jobs later sought re-entry. Nonetheless, most firms have not gone to the expense of reorganizing with ergonomic workstations, so it remains a relatively limited issue across the Winnipeg industry.

The introduction of new technology in the industry, as part of the New Economy, has led to a generalized “deskilling” of sewing operations. Deskilling results from adoption of new technology where machines take over some phases of sewing. Workers become “machine operators” rather than “sewing machine operators”; they may only need to push buttons rather than manipulate cloth. With newer technology there is an increased specialization of sewing tasks to form an assembly line mode. Rather than having one individual sew a garment from beginning to end, labour is often re-organized to accommodate the mechanization of some aspects of production, i.e., *some* aspects of production because construction of a garment must follow a set order (even with the introduction of new technologies). Therefore, factories may restructure labour so that each worker sews only one phase. The workspace in such a system is reorganized into a series of stations designed for one specific task. The garments move through the stations, which may include both sewing machine operators and *automated* sewing machine operators. The repetitive actions of only doing one task also saves time and therefore saves money by generally lowering the cost of labour. However, the downside of repetitive and segmented tasks is alienation of labour.

A general trend is to avoid deskilling and its alienating side effects because it is still cheaper to move to offshore labour than to restructure internally. Offshore labour—sticking with piecework—is still cheaper, because the assembly line approach with the new technology is extremely inflexible. The physical environment has to be changed in order to change production of different styles. Basically, it only works for utilitarian items, so it is inconsistent with another trend in Winnipeg, namely, away from utilitarian wear towards “fashion”, including jeans, because of a shrinking market for utilitarian garments and an expanding market for fashion garments.

Outsourcing is the competitive alternative to organizational costs of technological enhancement, including the impacts of deskilling. To paraphrase one leading company executive, “The industry is going away from emphasis on deskilling and technologically

minimizing the cost factor because our industry has been able to find new countries with lower wages; so the technology has been overshadowed by those wage elements”.³

There are other impacts of new technology in the Winnipeg garment industry. Industry leaders in Winnipeg (both large-scale and smaller scale specialized product producers) have emphasized Winnipeg as a ‘Research and Development’ centre, plus niche market production, with rising demand for new technology skills, designing skills, and marketing skills. However, despite promotion of these new technologies by training programs, industry organizations and government granting programs, they are only adopted under a variety of specialized circumstances. Thus, it has not led to retraining and/or industry-wide hiring initiatives around the new technology. Where new technology has been introduced, there is growing concern among workers who feel threatened with expectation to use new technology in the absence of adequate training provisions, and concern—whether well-founded or not—with application of new technology (i.e., via computerized surveillance) to monitor movements and individual productivity.

Labour Recruitment and Training in the Winnipeg Garment Industry

Recruitment of SMOs has relied heavily on immigrant labour for reasons indicated above and discussed in several papers in this collection. Such a labour recruitment strategy requires government and industry cooperation, which has changed over time with different governments and with fluctuating market conditions affecting the industry. For a time the Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI) was in place with one objective being to facilitate industry worker training of both SMOs and designers. With the formal closure of MFI, an established training centre is no longer in place. Workers either learn “on the job” or gain some experience through work in small-scale operations.

Our team research involved an explicit effort to discover more about industry predispositions towards categories of people as potential workers and hiring criteria within the industry, as well as perspectives on the industry among inner city residents as potential garment industry workers, including First Nations people. We found a

³ Interview: Michael Silver, president, Silver Jeans, May 14, 2004.

considerable disjuncture between the views and expectations found within industry management, and views and expectations of First Nations people. Our research also draws attention to class-affected immigrant worker characterizations of Aboriginal peoples in the workforce. Research team authors offer considerable insight into the complex issues surrounding these interethnic perceptions, underscoring discordant value differences that interfere with worker solidarity and generally play out in favour of the garment industry's continued reliance on immigrant labour (see especially selection 6 by Khatun, selection 7 by Stephens and Mossman, and selection 9 by Willmott).

Implications of Industry Changes for Community Economic Development

Our team project grappled with the relationship between labour and changes in the garment industry, and how there might be a connection with Community Economic Development (CED). One way of seeing it is that the mainstream garment industry, fundamentally capitalist in character, is beholden to the globalization model—outsourced assembly to reduce labour costs; plant closures; etc.—which seems to leave little if any prospect for articulation with CED.

An alternative view was to focus on small-scale niche production and marketing. Our project thus expanded to examine small-scale entrepreneurial economic development (S-SEED) initiatives in association with Aboriginal fashion design, specialty high-end niche production, and fashion modelling. Members of underprivileged and/or anti-establishment groups, such as First Nations, youth counterculture and artistic avant-garde, often choose such a strategy for maintaining control of the means and social relations of production, as cogently argued by Willmott in selection 9.

S-SEED initiatives, on the one hand, are particularly vulnerable to the balance between labour supply and production runs. Hiring additional labour is therefore problematic because it highlights the critical balance between production expansion, provision of labour opportunity, and responsibility to adequately sustain employees. On the other hand, computer technology is accessible and economically feasible for such initiatives, and often plays a key role in their development.

Our team research suggests that S-SEED has more development potential than CED for Aboriginal communities, partly because of some mistrust of co-operative

ventures based upon external stimulus and funding (i.e., government-funded ventures often lack organizational and funding continuity), and because of the differences in cultural values and the role of symbolic capital, as noted by Willmott in selection 9. There might be opportunity for businesses that support the technological advancements and outsourcing of sewing operations in the city, i.e., opportunity for businesses to do CAD-consulting and marketing operations in the city. And there is some indication of potential to merge elements of a large-scale industrial model and a CED model, e.g., MWG Apparel's Nats'enelu and connections to Dene First Nation, NWT, an initiative based in the work of D'arcy Moses, whose position is that, if a CED model cannot supply adequate production force, work is to be assigned to unionized plants.⁴

The foregoing highlights some of the principle observations of our research team; it is not a satisfactory substitute for the more detailed analyses and arguments to be found in each of the papers in the collection.

TRAINING AS A PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Conclusions to this project must underscore one of the important objectives of the project, namely, training of student researchers. The best indication of the success of this project in this regard is in the substance of each of the papers in this collection. Meeting regularly and working together cooperatively on chosen parts of the overall project, the team effort was an exceptional success. Even though there were the real pressures of competing applications of time in an academic environment, the team forged ahead, constantly reviewing the objectives and critically assessing the feasibility of carrying out the work.

Interviewing offered the student participants an opportunity to learn and hone data collection skills, to confront the difficulties of timely and accurate transcription, and to critically evaluate differing views on the same issue. The pooling of documentary resources and first-hand interviews encouraged thoughtful discussion. The selection of topic and emphasis by each team member reflects to a large extent personal interest, but

⁴ <http://www.mwgapparel.com/nats'enelu.htm>.

also an organizational framework and division of labour agreed upon in the phases of the research project to cover the relevant issues.

There are clear limitations in this project as set out in the Introduction to this collection of papers, but part of the training was to sensitize to these limitations and to make them explicit. The individual and joint efforts speak positively to the training success.

PROPOSITIONS

In this final section, I will turn to issues that our team pondered on various occasions, but which were not part of our limited research agenda. These ideas are presented in the form of “propositions” in the sense of alternatives to be considered within the established Winnipeg garment industry, among small-scale alternative vision operations, and within government and the development policy community. I acknowledge specific contributions and suggestions of team members, especially some stimulating and encouraging, yet cautionary, exchanges with team member Aaron Pettman. Aaron represented an “insider’s perspective” to me, both as member of the Aboriginal community, and as “representative” of government and business (via his research focus and ear to the ground). In my deliberations to include a “propositions” discussion, I paraphrase Aaron: “even if deemed quite unrealistic, alternatives need to be voiced”.⁵ In this spirit, I introduce three issues—propositions for consideration—but also note some of the associated “barriers” to their embrace and realization.

“Backward Linkages” to Reflect Regional Characteristics

My first proposition is to suggest that serious consideration be given by industry and government to what is commonly referred to as “backward linkages” in the garment industry, or linkages with production of fibres and their processing into fabric or textiles. What might be the prospects for a unique regional backward/forward linkage between production and processing of flax (linen) and hemp fibre and a specialized garment industry in Manitoba? Inasmuch as there has long been an important emphasis on flax

⁵ Email communication with Aaron Pettman, June 20, 2005.

production, and a recent return to the sustainable production of hemp, the Manitoba context is a prime candidate to develop sophisticated processing and use of these two highly desired fibres in the production of apparel. It would seem logical, as well as feasible, to stimulate an interdependence of these industries, especially given the demonstrable market appeal for apparel using both these fibres.

This particular connection between desirable fibres for apparel (as well as other textile applications) and the productive potential of the agricultural sector in Manitoba could be enhanced with attention to R&D in technology associated with processing these particular fibres.

Further attention should be given to a detailed examination of the ready-made garment industry in the context of the new economy and introduction of information technology—ranging from global integration of fashion design, production decisions, inventory monitoring, and production and delivery information processing on the one hand, to technological and business investment initiatives designed to generate backward linkages into local textile production, processing, and supply. In other areas of the world attention is being given to such industrial sector linkages that broaden the industrial base, carve out market niches, and make regional enterprises less dependent on the vicissitudes of the global marketplace. In Bangladesh, for example, a great deal of attention has been given to the argument for backward linkages from the ready-made apparel industry to the production and local processing of cotton and jute fibres. But we need not go far away to discover that the attention has been given to fibre production and processing elsewhere in Canada, witness the hemp mill planned for Craik, Saskatchewan, in association with Hemptown Clothing Inc.⁶

The barriers to realization of such a grand scale vision are several. The predominant line of thinking among business leaders is that the garment industry is on its way out except for a few specialized exceptions. And, as Pettman notes in selection 2 of this collection, the industry is not viewed as a high priority by the current Manitoba government. With both business and government unwilling to contemplate alternative

⁶ <http://hemptown.com/sites/hemptown/files/Craik.pdf>.

visions of industrial linkages—e.g., of sustainable fibre production and processing in relation to specialized ready-made garment production—there is little possibility for such linkages to develop. The government also has other competing priorities—biotech, transport, aerospace, and/or hydro development. However, none of these has the backward-forward linkage characteristics of the fibre production and ready-made apparel industry connection.

Making CED Initiatives a Priority in Apparel Design and Production

Why, with some political dedication and concerted effort, could Winnipeg not become an exemplary case of progressive action on the training front in a niche market garment industry that is related especially to Aboriginal initiatives in design? Such a special initiative, if supported over a sufficient period of time, could be part of building a “culture of confidence”⁷ and worth based in neighbourhood cooperation rather than a culture of consumption built on a commodified labour emphasis.

Hardly novel in our team project, my attention to this issue in this context is to draw upon the Manitoba Research Alliance report from Jim Silver *et al.* on the Spence neighbourhood,⁸ and offer the proposition that their ideas be linked to apparel design and production in a way that builds upon some of the ongoing initiatives that are discussed in two of the reports in this collection, selection 8 by Jonasson, and selection 9 by Willmott.

Such a special initiative would require embrace and initiative of the Aboriginal community. Whether Aboriginal fashion design could be linked to a larger scale community-based CED production initiative in Winnipeg along the lines of MWG Apparel’s Nats'enelu and connections to Dene First Nation noted above, would depend on leadership priorities. Pettman makes the following points. Aboriginal initiatives are responding mainly to concrete opportunities in “tried and true” sectors like the trades, or getting in on hydro development. At the same time, Aboriginal leadership must deal with issues such as building basic literacy. Since they are concerned with very pressing issues,

⁷ Silver, Jim, with Joan Hay and Peter Gorzen. 2005. *Aboriginal Involvement in Community Development: The Case of Winnipeg’s Spence Neighbourhood* Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—Manitoba, <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca/Documents/spence-neighbourhood.pdf>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

fashion, design and apparel manufacture is not likely to be a priority, especially since fashion tends to be classified with “arts and crafts”. While “arts and crafts” are important in the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal leadership is more likely to focus on the trades over fashion design.⁹

While these practical realities are persuasive, the merits of building upon a rich Aboriginal cultural tradition of design in the midst of high level technical knowledge and marketing skill available in the local garment industry, does offer considerable promise on the Winnipeg horizon. After all, Winnipeg is exemplary for re-inventing some important elements of the garment industry as it is exemplary for its Aboriginal initiatives. If there were the vision and the will, the proposition has real potential. This could be so especially in light of the next proposition introduced here.

Application of a “Vertical Integration” Model

A third proposition stems from exploration of a “vertically integrated” firm, American Apparel. Research team member Sara Komarnisky suggested that we give attention to the example of American Apparel, a Los Angeles garment plant built upon a model of “vertical integration”.¹⁰ The proposition is that serious consideration be given to observing and perhaps emulating this “model factory”.

Vertical integration means for American Apparel that all stages of production are consolidated under one roof at their downtown Los Angeles factory. It is an efficient system that cuts out the middlemen, that enables the company to be sweatshop free, and that enables it to be competitive within the global market. Their firm’s mission statement is: “Every aspect of the production of our garments is done in-house, which enables us to pursue efficiencies that other companies cannot because of their over-reliance on outsourcing”.¹¹ But most important, American Apparel argues that it is an example of a “labour sensitive production system”, one that is “sweatshop free”, meaning that all of their employees, from sewers to administrators, receive basic benefits. These include, for

⁹ Email communication with Aaron Pettman, June 20, 2005.

¹⁰ <http://www.americanapparel.net/mission/facts.html>. All information cited in this account is from the American Apparel website.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

example, “affordable healthcare for workers and their families, company-subsidized lunches, bus passes, free ESL classes, on-site masseurs, free parking, proper lighting and ventilation, and the most up-to-date equipment (be it the latest cutting machine or software)”. The company believes that a positive work environment is a more productive one. They claim to pay the highest wages in the garment industry, offering year-round employment and job security, with the goal of lifetime employment.

Clothing is manufactured on site, which they argue offers superior quality control, including the freedom to make changes and improvements to their garments without the delays experienced by companies that outsource. The company argues that providing employees with decent working conditions in a technology-driven environment allows the company to attain the highest levels of efficiency. The company is committed to paying fair wages, arguing it is considered to have some of the highest-paid apparel employees in the country. The company’s goal is to offer full-time and lifetime employment. Basic health care is offered for employees and their families in a company-subsidized health insurance for \$8 per week, and is available to spouses and children of workers for a modest weekly fee. These benefits, and others, make this company an example to study carefully, and to ponder why there cannot be more sensitivity and positive initiative in the Winnipeg context to achieve some of these employment characteristics. It is interesting that the brainchild of American Apparel is Montrealer Dov Charney.

The only barrier to emulation of the vertical integration model in Winnipeg would be the priorities given by firm owners/managers to treatment and support of labour in an industry that has been notable for exploitation of labour. Despite a growing consciousness regarding “ethical trade”, especially in relation to ready-made garments,¹² in recent years a good portion of the Winnipeg industry has elected to go the way of outsourcing to reduce labour costs rather than to explore and seriously engage alternative models.

¹² Hale, Angela. “What hope for ‘ethical’ trade in the globalised garment industry?”. Retrieved January 17, 2004 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.amrc.org.hk/alu/ALU37/013704.htm>.

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