CHANGING FABRICATIONS:

Lives of Appalachian and *Latina* Textile Mill Workers in Southern Appalachia

Rosemarie Mincey, Ph.D.

These findings are based on research conducted during tenure as the
Fall 2000 Rockefeller Scholar-in-Residence at the
Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia (CSEGA)
at Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.

Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia
400 Hal Greer Blvd.
Huntington, West Virginia 25755
http://www.marshall.edu/CSEGA

November 2001

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following individuals and representative organizations for their assistance in providing me with numerous and valuable resources. I am most appreciative for the interest and cooperation offered by them, as these were instrumental in the development and completion of this project.

Rockefeller Foundation for the Humanities
Study Participants
Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia (CSEGA)
Lynda Ann Ewen
Mary Thomas
Roxanne Smith
Linda Spatig
Linda Trollinger
Maura Conway
Loida Velázquez
Patricia Fernández-Kelly
Sheila Webster
Karen Fitchpatrick
Michael Cornebise
Aaron Kohring
Highlander Research & Education Center
UNITE (Tennessee-Kentucky)
Brad Rayson
Susan Williams
Cheryl Wolfe
Rita Roper
Fran Ansley
Julie Fox
Kathy Kahn (author, *Hillbilly Women*)
KACOCA (Knoxville Area Committee on Central America)
Handel K. Wright
Mary Beth Bingman
TIRN (Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network)
Helen Lewis
Bill Troy
Doug Cox
Barbara Ellen Smith
Kristi Disney
Rosie Freeman
Carlos Lopez
Cristina Burgueńo
Carrie Nobel-Kline
Karaleah Reichart
Ann Frisch

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all women who work
in the global textile industry:
la lucha continua
(the struggle continues)

for Ruby, Leila, and Max

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Context 7

Personal Statement 11

Project Objective and Rationale 15

Participants, Methods, Procedures 17

The Global South

Hybrid Identities, Historical Counterparts, and Convergences 19

"Borderless" Nations and Labor 27

Other States, Other Countries: The Movement of Jobs and People 30

Unions: Involvement and Activism 34

Work-Related Health Issues 39

Social Dynamics of Culture and Community 41

Gender, Racial, and Regional Experiences 44

Family 51

Summary 54

References 60

ABSTRACT

Changing Fabrications: Lives of Appalachian and *Latina* Textile Mill Workers in Southern Appalachia

As the human landscape of the U.S. overall and the southern Appalachian region within it continue to change, so too does the population of workers in the region. The region's Latin population is rapidly increasing.

The textile industry of the U.S., specifically, has been profoundly impacted by the evolving changes and conditions in the overall global economy. During the 1980s but particularly in the 1990s, economic globalization and population shifts brought about dramatic changes in the socioeconomic structure and racial and ethnic composition of the workforce of southern Appalachia's textile industry. Women comprise the majority of workers in this industry, and have faced a number of changes and challenges in the global economy.

It is widely held that global economic restructuring has meant the transfer of textile jobs to other countries, particularly to Mexican *maquiladoras* and other locations in Central and Latin America. However, also as a result of changes due to globalization, a large number of workers from other nations have now moved to the Appalachian region and into textile factories. This study, *Changing Fabrications: Lives of Appalachian and Latina Textile Mill Workers in Southern Appalachia,* explores the issues surrounding how women working in textile mills in Southern Appalachia characterize the impact of this work on their lives and communities.

The following arrangement puts a humorous spin on one of the most pressing issues within the globalization of labor, that of trade:

F T A A[1]

Free Trade Agreement of the Americas

(arranged by Mike Prokosh of United for a Fair Economy to the tune of *YMCA* by the Village People)

WORKER Is your job headed south? Well soon
TEMP JOBS will put food in your mouth! And with
PUBLIC sector jobs privatized,
You can kiss your union goodbye!

STUDENTS Do you hate Channel One[2]? I say
CORPORATE takeover has begun. And soon
MONEY will decide who learns what
You can kiss your access goodbye!

We all will pay for the FTAA!
We all will pay for the FTAA!
You can wheel and deal.
You can act like a heel.
You can keep whatever you steal!

CONGRESS you know how you must vote, those free
TRADERS keep your campaign afloat, but we're
WATCHING Don't go changing your vote, or
You can kiss your office goodbye!

It's time to protest the FTAA!
Its time to protest the FTAA!
You can go to Quebec[3],
Or stay home and raise heck,
You can make free trade a wreck!

CONTEXT

As the human landscape of the U.S. and the southern Appalachian region within it continues to change, so too does the population of workers. The region's Latin population, in particular, is rapidly increasing. The United States (U.S.) Commerce Department's Census Bureau (2000) has projected that by the year 2010, the Latin population will be the largest minority sub-group in the nation. Within the last decade, migrations of the Latin population to southern states has increased dramatically, more than doubling in three states, Arkansas (149%), North Carolina (110%), and Georgia (102%), and close to doubling in Tennessee (90%). Hispanic origin (as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000) "refers to persons who are of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Hispanic origin or descent. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race; hence, they are included in the numbers for the white and black populations." While the term "Hispanic" is used more for governmental purposes of categoric representation, the word *Latino* is considered to be more representative of the ethnicity of this reference group within the U.S. (For the purposes of this paper, the use of the words "America" or "American," except where noted otherwise, refer to the history and contemporary society of the U.S. only).

Migratory groups face challenges as individuals, within family units, and as ethnic and racial groups, and often underrepresented demographically because of undocumented legal status. There are a number of "push/pull" factors that drive migrations. Among others, "push" factors include political unrest and conflicts, religious persecution, lack of economic opportunity and social participation, and natural disasters; "pull" factors include economic opportunities, political freedom, and perceived greater access to increased quality of life. In past decades, the Latin population residing in the U.S. has provided a steady supply of labor in low-end service employment and agriculture. Traditionally states such as California and Texas have relied heavily on this worker population, but as the *Latino* population grows throughout the U.S., so too does the reliance of other states on this labor source.

During the 1980s but particularly in the 1990s, economic globalization and population shifts brought about dramatic changes in the socioeconomic structure and racial and ethnic composition of the workforce of southern Appalachia's textile industry. The textile industry includes the manufacture, processing, and fabrication of a number of fabrics and threads for mass-produced consumer items, including yarn, braid, twine, and cordage, as well as intermediary and finished fabrics for apparel, the home accessories/lifestyle industry, carpets and linens, and automobiles, among others. As women

comprise the majority of workers in this industry, they have faced a number of changes and challenges in the global economy of which the region's industries are now a part. It is widely held that global economic restructuring has meant the transfer of textile jobs to other countries, particularly to Mexican *maquiladoras* and other locations in Central and Latin America. However, as Cynthia D. Anderson and Michael D. Schulman (1999) contend, there are instances of industries in the southern U.S. that

> Represent a different form of globalization: instead of moving plants to Third World locations, Third World workers are moving to the plants. In their new-found communities and workplaces, relationships within and among these "new" minority groups, between the 'new' and 'old' minorities as well as between each group and whites, are complex and fluid: they involve the dynamics of racism, racial-ethnic group formation, and nationalism, in which class and gender are also implicated (106).

The textile industry of the U.S. has been profoundly impacted by the evolving changes and conditions in the overall global economy, as labor itself is a sphere that represents perhaps one of the most impacted sectors of globalization. The term "globalization" is an exceptionally broad term, and "currently, scholars, journalists, policy-makers, and business leaders share the vocabulary of 'globalization,' which refers to the trans-national mobility of ideas, investments, products, labor and labor practices, politics, and culture. Such mobility has dramatically increased in scope and speed" (Jon Shefner 2000). This process allows products, services, and capital to transfer more freely among and within nations. While many segments of the global economy flourish in unparalleled economic growth, the same conditions that have made this possible have as well created conditions of unanticipated economic disparity for others.

In addition to other locations worldwide, in both Appalachia and in parts of Latin America, multinational corporations have exploited poor women's need for wage-earning employment. In these regions

> Women were (and continue to be) considered ideal assembly line workers because they could be paid less than men because their incomes were considered supplemental (rather than central) for the survival of their families. Women are expected to behave as cultural stereotypes would dictate - they are assumed to be nimble, docile, obedient (The Globalization of Labor 2000).

Another factor in the relocation of many textile jobs to other countries are the changes that have also taken place in the mechanisms of technological production in textile mills. Increased automation has meant decreasing the number of workers needed while increasing the responsibilities of the workers that remain; this too has resulted in the closing of numerous mills and production facilities. The often limited formal education, work experience, and job skills of older workers (many approaching or at retirement age) also limits the availability of other employment opportunities for displaced workers.

Regarding the enormous changes that have taken place in the structure of the textile industry, Anderson and Schulman assert

> Although the diversified neighborhoods and workplaces may seem racially divided and socially decentralized, they also offer expanded possibilities. No longer insulated within racially exclusive occupational communities, women workers in the Southern textile industry are now black, white, and brown, part of a global economy that, for better or worse, links them in a common class relationship (107).

Additionally, Patricia Fernández-Kelly (2000) affirms there is "one common denominator of the international division of labor—a growing proletariat of Third World women exploited by what some experts are calling 'the global assembly line.'" Worldwide, textile work is an increasingly gendered labor field in a relationship pitted between labor and capital. As the population of the South and within Appalachia continues to become more ethnically and culturally diverse, it is the shared relationship working within the region's textile industry that is providing a commonality of experiential factors, particularly for women workers.

Despite the dramatic changes that have taken place in the international textile industry in recent decades, traditional assumptions that still undervalue the social and economic worth of women's labor continue today. Anderson and Schulman maintain that the economic diversification of the South has led to "a population of new workers, including those from racial and ethnic populations rather than the traditional black and white, who join longtime residents in seeking employment….gone is the homogeneity" (95) of mill towns and mill workers.

In relation to emigrated mill workers, Olivia Given (1997) notes that in the textile industry, characteristically, the "worker is a woman….She is young and, often, missing the chance for an education because she must work long hours to support a family. In America, she is often a recent or undocumented immigrant. She is almost always non-union and usually unaware that, even if she is in this country illegally, she still has rights as a worker." Immigrant workers' lives are often characterized by transience. In an attempt to maintain a steady income, workers frequently must relocate, as has traditionally been the case with the majority of emigrated Latin workers in the U.S, the majority of whom in prior decades have been male migrant agricultural workers. Whereas seasonal agriculture work by its nature almost certainly assures multiple work sites and relocation, the stationary nature of textile factory work locations, in contrast, has meant that larger numbers of the Latin population are settling into more established communities in close proximity to factory work sites.

Due to the broad structural changes that have taken place in the textile industry of southern Appalachia, new research is needed to uncover the effects of these changes in the lives of the women who

work in this industry. While a good deal of scholarly research has been conducted about the history of the Southern textile industry, Anderson and Schulman declare that

> The current struggles of Southern textile women seem relatively neglected in comparison on the focus on the earlier industrialization era…In short, while Southern female textile workers may no longer be hidden from history, their presence in contemporary discussions of class, race, and gender seems obscured by the apparent logic of the emerging global economy (92).

Fernández-Kelly maintains “gender is a preeminent vector of social organization—a relational process resulting in the unequal distribution of power and other resources on the basis of sexual distinctions. In that respect, gender is akin to race in that it is socially built upon physical differences. To conceptualize gender as a process is to challenge perspectives that view sexual roles and inequalities as reflections of biological constraints.” Pierrette Hondgneu-Sotelo states that gender is a construct of social control and power, as “gender refers not to ‘male’ or ‘female,’ but rather to the social and cultural aspects of being a man or woman in a particular society at a particular moment. It is an institutionalized system of social practice for constituting male and female differences so that inequality can be organized around those differences” (3). The study of gender issues is central to the understanding of social operations of difference. “A focus on gender,” Fernández-Kelly asserts, “should illuminate the experience of women …. (through) the character of the relationships between women of varying racial, ethnic and class backgrounds.”

Historically, most of southern Appalachia’s textile factory workers have been representative of women like my mother, who are of Anglo-American descent with family and cultural roots in economically depressed rural areas in the region. One premise of this study has been to provide a glimpse into the lives of non-Anglo women textile workers in southern Appalachia.

The impacts of global restructuring figure prominently in the lives of the women whose words appear here. This paper examines a number of issues that touch upon change in the lives and decisions of these women, and their changing work relations and community lives as textile workers.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

The research of this particular project is grounded in the experiences of my mother and of current issues within the global textile industry. My academic research and activism about the effects of the global economy on the lives of individual working women are a passion for me because of the experiences of my mother as a displaced garment worker. Much of my own work with *Latina* groups in the U.S. and Central America has informed my personal praxis of working towards social and economic justice for all women living within the Appalachian region, and my work as an educator and activist in both Appalachian and Latin American communities has also shaped much of my perspective. I can only speak from my experience as a woman of European-American descent born in southern Appalachia, reared by several generations of southern Appalachians of a working-poor, rural, and disenfranchised class history. I preface this paper by asserting that it is not my intention in any fashion to imply that I am speaking for the experiences of all Appalachian women, or that *Latina* and Appalachian women's experiences can be paralleled or subsumed into a "blanket" experience of oppression. It has been my experience that knowledges of the struggles, resistances, collaborations, and articulations of hybridity can offer considerable insight at a time when Appalachian women are endeavoring to (re)inscribe our location within American society and even within American feminism.

In the process of conducting this research, I began to see that for generations both women and men in my family have worked in textile mills (several siblings of my grandmother worked in cotton mills as children). The companies they have worked for read like a laundry list of east Tennessee's textile mills: Brookside Mills, John H. McDaniel Company; Palm Beach; Normack; Levi-Strauss, Inc. My closest association with the textile industry, however, stems from the Standard Knitting Mill (SKM) in Knoxville, Tennessee, a cotton mill that operated for almost a century but closed at the end of the 1980s as a result of the effects of globalization.

My mother went to work as a cutter at the Standard Knitting Mill in Knoxville, Tennessee, on June 8, 1959, the day after she graduated from a rural county high school, on production for $1.00 an hour. The mill closed in 1989 when she was 49 years old, as the mill's work was contracted to other countries at lower wage and production costs. At this time, she was making $7.23 on production. Throughout successive decades of the mill's operation during the 20th century, several aborted union drives took place, and there was an atmosphere of "unofficial" company policy against collective

organizing (the mill was never unionized). This lack of collective bargaining strength made for disempowered workers with no negotiation position at the mill's end.

In 1969, SKM was sold to Chadbourne Industries of Charlotte, North Carolina (which interestingly enough, was a subsidiary of a German company – while more evident at the beginning of the 21st century, multinational corporations are hardly a new phenomenon). Delta Woodside of Greenville, South Carolina, bought the plant in 1988, and it was under their ownership that the mill closed just one year later (see following pages).

In 1989, after promises of expansion and enhanced worker benefits, Delta Apparel announced to plant workers that the doors would be padlocked in 60 days. Delta management began destroying personnel documents; workers intercepted what they could in terms of documentation (that included, not surprisingly, the thriving stock options of investors/owners). Numerous newspaper articles that document the corporate injustice of the mill's closure began to appear. A group of laid-off workers formed the Delta Displaced Workers Committee as a result of the closing and worked in collaboration with TIRN (Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network)[4].

I have subsequently traveled to 45 countries, and in my travels I began to see a common sight throughout the world, that of women performing arduous physical labor in factories. I have seen girls as young as three in Indonesia operating sewing machines, and female children working at textile factories in Guatemala and Colombia. In 1990, I moved to Bangkok, Thailand, to work as an English teacher. Here, by chance (or possibly not merely chance afterall), I lived beside a sewing factory, where I saw women doing around-the-clock grueling garment work in punishing heat. Prior to this, I had never made the connection of my mother's work in the garment industry to sweatshop work. For 30 years, I only knew she would disappear into a huge red brick building early in the morning, and would emerge in the afternoon exhausted and covered with lint (the mill was often referred to by workers as "the fuzz factory"). In these women's' work on the other side of the globe, the invisibility of my mother's work became perceptible. Viewing garment work in the open and at eye-level, I was stunned by the revelation of what I was seeing and the connection that was made; my mother had worked in what was essentially a legally-sanctioned sweatshop for three decades.

In the late 1970s & early 80s, my mother began to look at the labels of every article of clothing we purchased. If a garment did not indicate that it had been made and/or assembled in the United States, she refused to buy it. I recall numerous occasions of her picking up an item, holding the inside back of the garment closely to get a better look at the fine print, then saying *"forget it"* or *"you can forget that one!"* At this time, I also began to hear the "rhetoric" of jobs going elsewhere. I later learned that this

was not rhetoric. This was reality, an increasing reality that workers like my mother were all too aware of; her refusal to purchase clothing made in other countries was a small but significant act of personal resistance.

Like so many other women who had long depended on such work, my mother faced extremely limited options as a worker after the mill closed - female, middle-aged, no college education, and no job skills beyond the only job she had ever held. Among the mill workers losing their work, depression and divorces grew; this increased domestic conflict reflected the larger and escalating industrial conflict of which they unwillingly had become a part.

As my mother says, after 30 years, she walked out with what she walked in with – *"nothing"* – no retirement, no severance pay, quite literally "nothing." The longest she ever went without a vacation was seven years. When I worked at a literacy research center, I observed a local GED class for adult basic literacy learners. I heard a women relate a story about her previous job. She recounted incidents about how the cotton she sorted was weighed, and the "tricks" supervisor's used to make the cotton appear lighter on a scale, as less weight meant less wages for the worker. Before she said where she had worked, I felt certain she was talking about Standard Knitting Mill. After class I asked her, and she confirmed it. She had also mentioned earlier in her description that she had worked at her job for 47 years, and that the longest stretch she had ever gone without a vacation had been 19 years.

After the mill closed, my mother then went to work at a local snack food plant on 3rd shift. In addition to the psychological rupture that was already ongoing, for a middle-aged person who had worked the first shift for 30 years, to then begin working all night was as well an extremely difficult physical adjustment.

Of the mill's workforce throughout its operation, brown lung, cancer (which my mother fortunately survived in 1978), and repetitive motion injuries were frequent. I was born in 1967 with a severe birth "defect," developmental hip dysplasia (DDH), which required a great deal of orthopedic treatments (full body casts, leg braces, "special" shoes), operations, and lengthy hospital stays. This was long before the Family Medical Leave Act, and the mill management was not going to "rehire" my mother after I was born. She simply went to the Personnel Management office. Personnel had heard she was coming, and had locked the door to keep her out. As she retold this to me, I asked her what she did next. Shrugging her shoulders, she said nonchalantly, *"oh, I just kicked the door in and waited on them to come back. I just waited to talk my business – my baby was sick, I needed to work and I'd work as much as I could, so I was just going to keep my job."* And keep her job she did, for three decades.

As reflective of many towns throughout southern Appalachia, an entire community was arranged around SKM itself, a mill "settlement" surrounded by worker row houses, begun in the year 1900 (see following page). A railroad track ran beside the mill along 6th Avenue, where raw cotton was unloaded. As Carol (48), a co-worker of my mother's for 24 years said in an interview, *"poor black folks would pick the cotton further south and haul it onto the railroad cars, then they'd ship it up to us and the poor white folks would haul it off the cars to wrestle it inside the mill."*

Cotton mill or factory work in this region (or any other) in any era can hardly be idealized, and SKM was no exception. Anderson and Schulman state, "it is important not to romanticize the past. The company towns of the Southern textile industry were places of social cohesion, but they were also sites of intense repression, racism, gender inequality, and class exploitation" (106), and these should not be minimized. However, there was a keen sense of community and a network of social relationships that extended beyond the mill, and for decades mill work did offer considerable job security for many people. Among mill workers a strong informal barter system existed, consisting of trading among food, clothes, and "odds and ends" jobs, providing social networks both inside and outside of the mill. Co-worker relationships extended beyond the confines of the worksite, intersecting well into the surrounding community.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE AND RATIONALE

The purpose of this study has been to develop a rich depiction of how women working in the textile industry in southern Appalachia characterize their perceptions about their own lives. The emergent issues as articulated by the study participants are encompassed by a central question: how do women working in textile mills in Southern Appalachia characterize the impact of this work on their lives? The project is underpinned by the aim of illuminating the differences, but more significantly, the shared experiences of female textile workers who, despite their diverse personal backgrounds, now share common challenges, class positionings, workplaces, and communities in the southern Appalachian region.

Paula Ebron and Anna Lowenhaupt Sing (1995) argue for a project of dialogue across minority discourses, because ultimately, "we have few tools with which to create critical and reflexive conversations that recognize our differences as well as our common stakes" (390). It is from this cross-marginal dialogue that we may begin to "redefine culture to look for strategic moments of self-expression between politically-charged histories. This involves sensitive immersions in the dilemmas of marginalization as experienced from particular margins" (405). An underpinning of the research was to build upon Ebron & Tsing's call for cross-marginal discourse.

Generally without deviation in any context it is the Appalachian man, not the Appalachian woman, who is put forth as the region's normative representation: the female population has been overlooked, both in terms of experiences within and contributions to the region. Appalachian history, writ both large and small, contains a diminished, if not at times altogether absent, feminine presence. As long as this absence continues to exist, both the history and contemporary study of the region are incomplete. It is also of particular significance how those outside of the region have adulterated both historical and contemporary representations of women in Appalachia. Barbara E. Smith (1998) asserts that this has been facilitated by a lack of a critical feminist perspective. Appalachian women's self-determinations in navigating life in Appalachia, long overlooked, must be present also. A feminist critical perspective, more attentive to matters of gender and difference, can render a fuller portrayal of the Appalachian experience and re/incorporate the feminine presence within it.

"Absent a feminist analysis," Smith maintains, "we fail to comprehend not only Appalachian history, but also the present trajectory of class relations and political change. Class, gender, and race may be separatable at a high level of theoretical abstraction, but in the trenches of lived experience they join together" (21). Inquiry is needed to uncover the nexus points where marginalizations meet in these

locations, both physical and cultural. Furthermore, documentation is needed about the challenges working women in the region confront, and how their self-representations are given shape and become operationalized through social relationships related to their work lives and in their communities. As research is limited in not only the history but also the diversity of working class women in southern Appalachia, this project was designed to be a counter to this as well.

While browsing in a used bookstore in Athens, Georgia, several years ago, I saw a title of a book that immediately struck me: *Hillbilly Women* (1973), by Kathy Kahn (see following page). A cursory glance through this tattered-cover book proved that its contents appeared not only promising but also familiar. The photos showed the faces and places that seemed all too recognizable, and I felt like I knew these women and the stories they told. I would later read the words of these women on numerous occasions with tears in my eyes, because I had never before seen the stories of women like my mother, poor "white" women who worked in the textile factories of southern Appalachia. While conducting the research for this project, this book remained a touchstone for me.

PARTICIPANTS, METHODS, AND PROCEDURES

The research for this project entailed conducting in-depth life history interviews with 13 female textile factory workers. A former co-worker of my mother learned of this study and expressed interest in participating in it, and she was also interviewed. She was added to the initial number of 12 comprising six women originally from the Appalachian region of the U.S. and six women who have emigrated from Latin American countries and are now working in the region. Other areas of participants' lives, such as their social relationships as parents, partners, union members and activists, and members of communities were also explored. In addition to direct participant interviews, I also examined oral histories, related labor and demographic materials, and other secondary sources of information, all of which were used as sources for content analysis in the triangulation of relevant data. However, this paper is purposefully presented with a prevalence of direct quotes from the participants to give as much primacy as possible to the perceptions of the issues concerning their lives.

Ages of the entire group ranged from 24-62, and all participants currently live and work within southern Appalachia in southwestern Virginia, eastern Tennessee, and western North Carolina. All interviews were conducted in person with the exception of three *Latina* participants who live in western North Carolina, and these were conducted by telephone. Of the countries of origin of the *Latinas*, one was from Colombia, one from Guatemala, and four from Mexico. These women arrived in the U.S. through connections within the established eastern and western migration patterns from Mexico and Central America, stopping first to work in *maquila* border towns like McAllen and Brownsville, Texas. Some initially settled in larger urban areas in Texas, such as Dallas, before moving onto western North Carolina and east Tennessee. Two first settled in Latin communities in Los Angeles, California, prior to migrating on to the eastern U.S. Each of the women interview were brought up in working poor or working class backgrounds, except three *Latinas,* who identified themselves as being from middle-class, "professional" backgrounds.

While a diversity of representation for participant demographics was sought in terms of race, ethnicity, and country of origin, unfortunately I was only able to interview one African-American participant, Deborah, and I would have found it preferable to have had a wider ethnic representation of women from the region, including Native American[5], Melungeon[6], and other ethnic groups. Within the scope of a larger study and as a continuation of this one, I would emphasize this as a greater focus, as well as other personal contexts such as age, sexualities, and physical abilities. Of the *Latina* participants,

Martina, from Guatemala, identified herself as being of indigenous descent and a Quiché speaker, the largest of Guatemala's estimated 23 distinct indigenous language groups.

Women who agreed to be interviewed were contacted through workplaces identified by social justice educators and activists in KACOCA (Knoxville Area Committee on Central America), local adult education instructors, labor justice leaders, UNITE (Union of Needleworkers, Industrial, and Textile Worker Employees) members, and colleagues with whom I have conducted prior research with at the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee.

The qualitative research approach of narrative inquiry was used to conduct in-depth interviews with the study participants, using a semi-structured, open-ended question format. Questions were designed to elicit the perceptions and changes that participants indicate as being significant in various domains in their lives, centered on the focus of work. Some interviews were conducted primarily in Spanish with *Latina* participants who did not speak English or indicated that she be more comfortable speaking Spanish. In some cases, follow-up phone calls were conducted to clarify information. All responses are represented in English for the purposes of this study, and the analytical frameworks of North American cultural studies and sociocultural anthropology are privileged here only because they are my scholarly and professional subject matter areas of emphasis.

Terms of participation in the project included those normally applied to qualitative research. Specific protection measures were implemented by the use of pseudonyms for each participant. Additionally, much other potentially identifying information has been changed, including several participant work places and geographic locations. Participants signed and dated a "Letter of Informed Consent" that explained the study as planned and the terms of agreement for participation. In reports, presentations, or any other materials where data collected for this study might appear, pseudonyms have been and will be maintained.

The data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using an iterative process. Themes were identified and coded by associations and common relationships among variables. Repetitive pause words or phrases have been removed.

Because a number of disperse but interrelated issues are presented, rather than isolating the emergent themes separately within a "Findings" section, responses are textually situated among related subject areas throughout the remainder of the document.

THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Hybrid Identities, Historical Counterparts, and Convergences

> The cultural landscape is fashioned from the natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result.
>
> Carl Ortwin Sauer[7]

During the 20th century, the North (representative of the Northern hemisphere and linked with Western economic markets) became an acronym for wealth and "development," while the South (representative of the Southern hemisphere) became synonymous with poverty and "underdevelopment." However, when the ideological barriers that before had isolated economies and limited the migrations of people began to change, many prior confines became connected in unprecedented ways. What had been exploitive conditions in segments of the South have now become integral parts of a broader global South, garnered by institutions and corporations that advocate free trade based on the tenets of economic liberalization, privatization, and deregulation.

The U.S. South has long been widely perceived as a "pocket" of the global South in the North, and the Appalachian region further marginalized (and stigmatized) within this. For more than two centuries, a dichotomous racial dynamic of black and white has dominated the racial landscape of the southern U.S., the birthplace of the nation's principal racial division. While much of the larger structure of racial inequality remains standing, the gains made from the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement successfully dismantled legal segregation and, while not ending *de facto* social disfranchisement and lack of opportunity, made great strides in confronting, resisting, and rectifying these. However, the region has never been socially static, and the racial issues of the South are now reconfigured. As Barbara Ellen Smith (1999) maintains

> There is much to learn from the American South. Many of the essential trends and dilemmas of the contemporary United States have a long history here. The weak labor movement, large disparity between rich and poor, and low level of social provision that once distinguished the region from the remainder of the country now put it in the vanguard of national trends. Protestant fundamentalism, with its tradition-bound doctrines on gender and sexuality, has long been widely popular and deeply influential in the South; now it is spreading outward from this regional base to create Bible Belts across the United States. In the political arena, the past three decades of

> presidential elections and congressional actions are incomprehensible without reference to the power of Southern politicians, the shifting allegiances of Southern voters, and the profound impact of the civil rights movement in breaking up the solid South. Above all, a regional consciousness and political economy saturated with race-once considered so anomalous to the enlightened elsewhere—now make the South's history of racial violence and contention a portent (Introduction).

Today, as the racial and ethnic context of the region is profoundly and rapidly changing, issues particular to Latin communities are coming to the forefront (see Pressley 2000,Yeoman 2000, and LeDuff 2000). This diversity also includes tension. As the Southern Regional Council (2001) asserts

> Very recent, rapidly expanding groups of immigrants now also experience racial discrimination in the South, and claim access to the race-specific remedies developed by and for black Southerners. An explosive competition for economic opportunity and political access is beginning to develop among these increasingly diverse and numerous groups.

Within the history of the nation-state of the U.S., Appalachia's population has traditionally been a marginalized social space within a geographically-specific space. Globalization has created displacement for people throughout the world on a number of levels, and has proven that both the Appalachian region and with women living and working within it are directly a part of its effects, despite Appalachia's historical perception as an "isolated" region, removed from larger national and international events. This "within yet not within" situation provides conditions that foster hybridity.

Issues of hybridity of identity are most often viewed within the processes of occupying or moving among more than one space or "trans"gressing spaces and borders, whether they are constructed as transcultural, transgeographic, transnational, transgender, or any other. As Richard Pearce (1999) states of hybridity,

> After the civil rights movement….black power became a rallying cry for black unity. This was followed by the unification of Latinos and Latinas, Asian Americans, and American Indians--all of whom were empowered - psychologically and politically--by a sense of racial identity. Indeed the federal government allocates funding to minorities on the basis of the number of people who identify themselves by each race. So there are good reasons why people do not want to think of themselves as hybrid.
>
> But in recent years many scholars of color have come to understand that identity politics is - at least in part - the reversal of racism, based on an opposition between a privileged and an unprivileged race. They have come to understand that there is no such thing as a pure race, ethnicity, etc. Indeed, one may gain a stronger sense of identity by recognizing the bonds that hold a group of mixed or hybrid people together.

While widely held as being an isolated region with on overwhelmingly homogeneous population of "whites" of primarily Scotch-Irish descent, the region has historically had much more diversity than recognized. Social reality for large population segments Appalachian has for centuries been one that is

liminal, or indicative of its Latin root word "limen," meaning "threshold," the condition of being a part of the U.S. and yet not fully "belonging." Jeff Mann (2001) maintains "Appalachia is often regarded as a liminal region, caught between East and West, past and present, civilization and wilderness" (155). Appalachia as "Other," Elizabeth Fine (1998) maintains, is consistently perpetuated throughout various American media depictions. Rather than posing questions that would illuminate what it is indeed that so persistently places Appalachia as "Other," it is a given assumption for many that the region and its populace are essentially "Other." Stereotypes then build from these presuppositions, depictions that characterize the region and its inhabitants as "backward, strange, and peculiar....trash and ecstatic fundamentalists, classic hillbilly images also found in grotesque, gothic southern fiction" (153-154). Mann consents that "Appalachians, like members of any subculture, are accustomed to finding few reflections of our lives in the mainstream media" (155).

The individual and the collective are inextricably intertwined, at all levels of self and social identity. It is this dialectical relationship of self and social formation, and each individual's unique response that creates and recreates the world of the self and of the social. Self-status, identity, and subjectivity are strong ingredients in the social origins of what constitutes individual attitudes and perspectives of personhood, both as insiders and outsiders. Many Appalachian women are all too familiar with various forms of insider/outsider positionings. An Appalachian woman's social world is as complex, multi-layered, and relational as anywhere else, her expressions and moderations of resistance, transgression, and affirmation as manifold as anyone else's. Despite this, however, Appalachian women remain predominantly represented by broadly assumed characterizations, by others, as Other.

As the dominant American culture has configured Appalachia as a marginalized place and people, this points to questions such as those asked of Michael Morgan & Susan Leggett (1996): "What is the mainstream of a culture? Where are the margins? Where does the center end and the periphery begin - and how rigid is the division between them? How do ideas, artifacts, practices - and people - get assigned to one 'location' or another, and once so designed, must they remain there?" (vii). It is often the entrenched, fixed notion of what is perceived as mainstream or margin that is focused upon, when ultimately, "what is dominant is neither necessarily monolithic or static, and hence, the contours of the 'margins' need not be fixed" (vii). This situation too often becomes a location where, as Ebron and Sing assert, "marginalized groups are collapsed into the dominant center" (391), and therefore remain undistinguished and overlooked. Appalachian women's individual and collective experiences of marginalization, as well as *Latinas* or any others are hardly homogenous, and thus should not be

portrayed as such. It is in the "marginal" contours where much of the fluidity and intersection that is daily lived reality takes place, and as such, call for more specific, critical attention.

Women throughout the Appalachian region continue to confront a double quandary in a dominant society where "male" is norm and "female" Other, and also a society where "mainstream" America is perpetuated to be the norm and what is Appalachian, both in terms of gender and culture, is Other as well. Poonam Pillai (1996) terms this situation as being disassociated and marginalized "in spite of being *within* the nation space" (author's italics 8).

Oppressions as they are experienced by different marginalized groups inhabiting "outskirted" positions are often presented as being uniform, collapsed together and covered by "blanket" oppression. Women's experiences of marginalization in Appalachia are not standard, nor should they be portrayed as such. While sharing the commonality of gender, no two women's experiences are ever the same, even within the additional common groupings of race, nationality, ethnicity, and class. Despite this, however, there exists the implication of "a unidimensional source of group identification based on gender when in fact women experience gender, racial-ethnic, and class statuses concurrently....analyses of feminist consciousness should attend to the dynamics of each social location in framing women's experiences" (Beatriz M. Pesquera & Denise A. Segura 1993:96-97). It is in the marginal contours of society where much of the intersection and fluidity that is daily lived reality takes place, and as such, accounts of these need to be attended with more focus.

A confluence of seemingly disparate elements and experiences, events, social forces, and cultural realities have in some regards placed many Appalachian women in a hybridity of experience, whose complexity is frequently neglected. This hybridity strikes some significant parallels with the Latin concept of *mestiza*[8] identity. Appalachian feminists and those engaged in Appalachian projects for social and economic justice may do well to reflect the work of *Chicanas* engaged in similar struggles and who readily account for the multiplicity of identity formulators in their activities, that there exists the implication of "a unidimensional source of group identification based on gender when in fact women experience gender, racial-ethnic, and statuses concurrently....analyses of feminist consciousness should attend to the dynamics of each social location in framing women's experiences" (96-97). The term *Chicana/o* initially and has most broadly connoted persons of Mexican-American descent with a non-Anglo self-image. However, the word has been expanded beyond cultural or national affiliations to take up conceptual meanings of inclusion, social activism, and political consciousness. *Chicanas*, particularly within the last several decades, have organized and mobilized while continuing to confront struggle, and their multiple social positionings point to Chandra Mohanty's (1992) notion of the "politics of location,"

where "the historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for political definition and self-definition" exist (74). Gloria Anzaldúa is perhaps one of the best-known writers of the contact zone that she calls the "borderland" between Mexico and U.S., and of the locations of existence within *Chicana/o* culture and of *mestiza/o* consciousness. As Pierce maintains of Anzaldúa, "she extends the geographical definition to include cultural, physical, spiritual, sexual, and linguistic spaces" that persons of hybrid identities transverse.

While conducting dissertation research in Guatemala with indigenous *campesinas* (rural women) who were engaged in a popular education social development program, I found there to be a navigation of cultures that evokes a *mestiza* identity construction of hybridity, the fusion of the multiple roles within one's existence on a number of levels. In these instances, women's work and representations have been subsumed by patriarchal social, academic, political, and economic structures, and many Appalachian women also continue to confront similar circumstances. In the concept of *mestiza*, I recognized my own *"dos mundos"* ("two worlds"), the multiple realities I have always known an Appalachian woman (I explore this concept extensively in my doctoral dissertation, Mincey 1997).

Strategies and adaptations of *mestiza* identity formulations located in *Latina* and *Chicana* studies may provide constructive examples and models that may be used to build an social extendibility that will challenge and give rise to new insights as to how these may be taken up in both collective and individual Appalachian gender contexts. The women of Appalachia are at this moment taking up identity formations that are not passive to assigned characteristics, underscoring that it is time for not only de/constructions, but also for a re/formations of deeply-rooted public images that have long been de/formed about Appalachian women by others.

What is the particular significance of examining the growing *Latina* population in southern Appalachia? As aforementioned, there are significant historical and contemporary parallels between *Latinas* and Appalachian women within their collective experiences. Loida Velázquez (Director, High School Equivalency Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville [serving primarily migrant and seasonal farm workers]) and I have conducted collaborative research that explores the "New World" gender histories of Appalachian women and *Latinas.* We found comparable elements in the following:

> Marginalizations through gender, race, class, & formal educational levels and absences of adequate and appropriate health, social, and educational services and resources
>
> Both groups are seldom the focus of specific, engaged, and participatory research and confront stereotyping with images seen as "representative" of cultures that are widely held to be monodimensional and lacking diversity

Ambivalent acculturation – a part of but often viewed as “apart”

Both dominant cultures originated from European patriarchal societies; a strong religious presence has also upheld patriarchy in both

Often assume “adult” family roles and responsibilities at a young age

Both have migrated further north at various periods for employment during economically-driven migrations

Both have been subject to detrimental environmental factors: mining, industrial damage, lack of aid in the aftermath of natural disasters

Both bear legacies of internal and external colonialism (Velázquez and Mincey 2000)

Velázquez (1998) maintains

> *Latinas* in the Southern part of the United States, like *Latinas* all over the nation, are struggling to create a self-image yet at the same time preserve a healthy self-image of their culture. They are committed to fostering issues of diversity and improving the interpersonal relations by building bridges between the Hispanic and local communities. They are also struggling to find a voice and a place in Southern society….Since ethnicity is a human strategy for survival by which people shape a collective identity, *Latinas* in the South are beginning to shape their identity based on cultural traits shared and as a response to experiences of isolation and rejection. But culture also places constraints on experiences and like *Latinas* everywhere, *Latinas* in the South are working through these constraints (20-21).

Of her findings in working as a *Latina* with *Latina* groups and with women of our region, she additionally maintains that she “discovered that a *Latina's* process of constructing a social identity has much in common with the process experienced by Southern rural women” (21). Despite given diversity and differences, *Latina* and Appalachian women have much in common in that they both experience continued restricted social, political, economic, and educational access and participation; they are now experiencing some of the same constraints together within the same physical locations.

Pesquera and Segura maintain that despite the massive research conducted by American feminists, overall, little has been attentive to the feminist concerns of *Chicana* women or women of Mexican descent. The inattention offered by American feminists regarding Appalachian women is reminiscent of this situation. Just as there are rigid public images of *Chicana* and *Latina* women “as submissive and passive and uninterested in feminism” (98), similar stereotypes exist of Appalachian women. Kathy Kahn, in the powerful and compelling work *Hillbilly Women*, maintains that the women of Appalachia have long faced preconceived notions that they are deferential and accepting of their social

conditions, as well facing designations from many as "a culture and an identity that has been the subject of ridicule and scorn from Mammy Yokum to Daisy Mae to the Beverly Hillbillies" (18). It is as well within the unnaming of both groups of women within overall American feminist discourse that reinforces the refusal of each's distinction. This has historically been so for *Chicanas*, as "they have been silent objects....because they are neither included or excluded by name" within American feminism (Pesquera and Segura 100).

It has been my own frequent experience in working with feminist organizations within the U.S. that the particular circumstances and needs of Appalachian women are not only not recognized, but are often absent altogether, thoroughly unnamed. "Without sustained analysis of the diverse feminisms among women and the conditions that motivate them," Pesquera and Segura maintain, "theoretical formulations and strategies for change will continue to veer away for historically subordinate groups" (95). Appalachian women have not only been historically subordinated within U.S. history, but also within their own regional history. A consistent, vigilant examination of the lives of Appalachian women would go far in moving the focus here. A more immediate question that should be posed, however, would be why Appalachian women's concerns continue to be overlooked within the wider national feminist movement. Over 25 years later, Kahn's words remain valid: when the women of Appalachia

> Talk about liberation, they are talking about the liberation of their people from a class system in this country which makes it possible for a few to be comfortable while the rest of the people are forced to fight among themselves for what is left....they need to be freed from the bonds imposed on them by a society that is reaping the benefits of their land and their labors....Hillbilly women are real feminists, they have a history of fighting for the rights of working women in the Southern mountains. But they are also humanists. They are fighting for the liberation of all people (19).

Susan Crane (1997) also raises questions that are valid and in urgent need of response that speak to the experiences of Appalachian women: "who is this 'us' or 'you' or 'me'....Who has history and/or memory, who represents it, who experiences it, and how is it perpetuated? Are the collectives national, ethnic, religious, generational, or does the definition depend on the story being told?" (374). Flawed, neglectful images obscure the struggles of Appalachian women, distorting their histories of representation and resistance. Women are an integral part of not only Appalachian history, but also of the Americas in their entirety, and whose stories of experience have long called out to be heard.

Pillai asserts "the politics and limits of being internal to any hegemonic space must be addressed to any discourse of hybridity and reinscription of center/margin relations" (1996: 9). The politics of Appalachian women's social locations must take into account women's diverse experiential backgrounds within the region that give shape to and operationalize self-representation. Globalization has made the

crossroads of southern Appalachia an even greater location of extraordinary convergence on a number of levels.

“BORDERLESS” NATIONS AND LABOR

> Human life moves between two poles: movement and settlement.
>
> Lewis Mumford

An integral part of globalization, of the transnationalization of capital, creates jobs that are transferred from “developed” countries to newly industrializing ones. As stated at the World Conference Against Racism,

> Even as the wealthy and some sections of the middle-class around the world have progressed economically, the oppressed and poor, especially women and indigenous peoples, have over the last 15 years suffered a major setback in their quest for economic development, social equality and real independence. There has also been a significant and steady erosion of a large portion of the population's economic base. This trend is taking firmer root as the globalization process accelerates and becomes all-pervasive (2001).

Accounts of life along the Mexico-U.S. border are well-characterized by the phenomenon of *maquiladoras*, where primarily American-owned *maquilas* have not provided an adequate quality of life for their workers. According to Fernández-Kelly and Dillon (2001), respectively,

> Mexico’s *Maquiladora* Program, in full bloom by the 1970s, was the main exemplar of this trend. It consisted of government incentives to facilitate foreign investments in the production of exportable goods, mainly garments and electronics products. Assembly plants, known as *maquiladoras,* were allowed by government to operate along the U.S.-Mexico border as directly owned subsidiaries or subcontractors of foreign corporations, most of them located in the United States. Many of the jobs eliminated north of the border as a result of deindustrialization ended up in Mexican *maquiladoras.*
>
> ******
>
> As in other border settlements, Mexican workers earn such miserable wages and American companies pay such minimal taxes that its schools are a shambles, its hospital crumbling, its trash collection slapdash, and its sewage lines collapsed….Over the years, Mexico and its people came to accept these conditions in return for steady jobs. But now everyone from Mexican tax officials to environmental experts in both countries are debating the rules, written and unwritten, under which the mostly American corporations have operated on the border….there is rising concern that as factories making everything from sneakers to televisions have spread through the developing world, labor rights and environmental standards have often been overlooked.

In addition to Mexico, the movement of jobs has also included other Latin American nations. Carol, my mother's former co-worker, stated:

> *During the early 1980s, when we were handling Pony* (a brand name of sportswear), *we had a list of 37 different companies from overseas handling that Pony crap for us to pack and get out…Even prior to that, there was Project 807. With Project 807, they could send their cloth down to Costa Rica to be hand-knitted and/or dyed and then send it back here, which all we had to do was cut it.*

As illustrated by Carol's words, what had once been a thriving full-scale production facility had basically become a shipping warehouse for lower wage garment work whose pieces had been assembled elsewhere. While the garment industry has felt the most widespread effects of globalization, other instances of mass-produced products have also been affected within the overarching textile/manufacturing industry. The Emmy-winning documentary film *The Global Assembly Line* (produced by Lorraine Gray and Patricia Fernández-Kelly *et al*. 1986) chronicles the 1980s shifting of production jobs to other countries, particularly garment, textile, and electronics jobs to Mexico and the Philippines, documenting the impact on displaced workers in Jefferson County, Tennessee, when a large Phillips Magnavox plant left the area.

As Mark Mittelhauser (1997) concurs,

> Every industry in the American economy has been affected in some way by increased globalization and new developments in technology. Few, however, have felt the effects of these trends more acutely than the textiles and apparel industries…What emerges from recent changes in the international economy and the domestic textile and apparel industries is a complex picture of job loss and survival strategies. This dynamic is likely to increase in the coming years, as international trade continues to grow.

The textile industry in U.S. overall, but particularly the garment industry in the Southeast, has also been directly impacted by NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), and more recently, by the FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas). Due to the increased scope and power of the FTAA, it is often referred to by labor activists as "NAFTA on steroids" because of its "Fast Track" status.

Affiliated labor unions oppose "Fast Track" legislation, a procedure that gives the U.S. Congress the authority to negotiate trade agreements with built-in concessions for trade partners. From 1975 through 1994, Fast Track trade agreements eliminated numerous jobs in the U.S., lowered operating standards, working conditions and worker benefits, eroded public health and environmental standards, and sent wages shooting downward in what is often termed within the labor movement as the "race to the bottom." Corporations initially began to relocate their labor-intensive facilities to "Third World" areas in order to avoid U.S. and European trade union demands for worker benefits and environmental health and safety standards. In these conditions of global worker exploitation, workers transverse the boundaries of

geography and labor economies, and corporations now wield so much power they engage in what may be compared to "trafficking" human beings. While within

> A slowing global economy, one sector is bucking the trend. Each year, millions of individuals, the majority women and children, are tricked, sold, coerced or otherwise forced into situations of exploitation from which they cannot escape. They are the commodities in a multi-billion dollar global industry.…it is estimated that 45,000 to 50,000 women and children are trafficked annually to the United States alone. Increasing economic hardship, particularly in developing and transitional countries, onerous obstacles to legal migration and serious armed conflict have coincided with a rise in the number of trafficking cases as well as a spreading of the problem to areas which were previously less affected.
>
> Trafficking is a phenomenon that affects and implicates all regions and most countries of the world. While trafficking routes are constantly changing, one constant factor is the economic distinction between countries of origin and countries of destination. As with all other forms of irregular migration, trafficking invariably involves movement from a poorer country to a wealthier one (World Conference Against Racism 2001).

Particularly evident during the last 25 years of the 20th century, corporations worldwide have most heavily relied on women to make profits rise while keeping labor expenses down. As Julia D. Fox (2001) asserts, "just as single young women were incorporated into the low-wage labor market in the earlier phases of industrial capitalism in the United States, transnational corporations have in recent decades tapped the international labor pool" (237), a phenomenon that is "currently manifested in the use of female labor in Export Processing Zones (EPZs).…in particular, in Mexico, South Korea, and the Philippines" (238). Through multinational, multilevel trade agreements, corporations have become increasingly mobile and "borderless," relocating their operations at will to the devastation of diverse local communities and individual workers. In climates of widespread worker intimidation from management against collective organizing, these factors have also resulted in a consistent drop in rates of union membership. Linda Evans and Eve Goldberg (2001) assert

> Ever since the onset of the Reagan-Bush years in 1980, workers in the United States have been under siege. Aggressive union busting, corporate deregulation, and especially the flight of capital in search of cheaper labor markets, have been crucial factors in the downward plight of American workers.
>
> One wave of capital flight occurred in the 1970s. Manufacturing such as textiles in the Northeast moved south to South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama (non-union states where wages were low). During the 1980s, many more industries (steel, auto, etc.) closed up shop, moving on to the 'more competitive atmospheres' of Mexico, Brazil, or Taiwan where wages were a mere fraction of those in the U.S., and environmental, health and safety standards were much lower. Most seriously hurt by these plant closures and layoffs were African-Americans and other semiskilled workers in urban centers who lost their decent paying industrial jobs.

In the following sections, a wide array of the consequences of globalization are apparent in the words of the participants.

Other States, Other Countries: The Movement of Jobs and People

Latinas' motivations for relocating to the U.S. varied. Overall, the primary reason was for perceived better economic opportunities for themselves and their families. Maria (age 45) worked as a paralegal in her home country of Colombia, but wanted to make a new start for herself and her two children after a contentious divorce. Martina (age 47), who was *"doing OK"* economically in the large Guatemalan community of Los Angeles, relocated to western North Carolina to make a new start for her teenage son, who became a gang member while there and was heavily embroiled in gang violence. She felt that by relocating to the other side of the country, her son would be able to have a fresh start in a new place and with new people; while events with her son have continued to be at times problematic, she is happy with that decision.

Born and raised in southwestern Virginia, Allene's reason for going to work in a factory is certainly counter to the reasons given by the majority of the other participants, and would be atypical to that of most factory workers worldwide. Whereas this work is engaged in generally for economic sustenance, Allene (age 62) said she initially went to work because she was "*bored*." She explained

> *I was a housewife until I was thirty-five years, then I got a job at a sewing factory. I did it because I was bored being home, and I liked it. I stayed there until they (the jobs) just all left the country.*

Work provided Allene with an increased social network and enhanced her self-perception:

> *I felt better about myself because I was out into the world. I wasn't just sitting home. I guess that was the best part about it. I was making friends, had someone to talk and laugh with everyday… You have accomplished something. You are doing something with your life. You are doing it besides just sitting around…I did it for my health, to be out because I don't have any grandchildren and my husband has a retirement and social security and stuff like that, so I really didn't have to do it, but I wanted to do it for myself. It wasn't a very good job, but it was something to do, and I felt sorry for the people who depended on it for a living.*

Interstate borders in the U.S. have paralleled international borders in the movement of jobs for some workers. Pat (age 61) and her co-workers felt the effects of the city of Bristol's unique location as a "border" city between Virginia and Tennessee:

> *They moved us in another building. They moved us to the Tennessee side. I don't know why they did it, but we didn't get any severance pay. It was fixed to where we didn't get any…here I am 61 and it will be four years before I get on Medicare…this is my last week of insurance. And it*

scares me.

Pat and Allene were attending local adult basic education classes at the Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program in Bristol, Virginia, in order to obtain a GED. These classes are provided through a provision for displaced workers, the Trade Adjustment Act, or TAA.[9] Like her job, Allene sees this opportunity as a venue for enhanced personal development and social satisfaction:

> *Now I'm coming down here to school, just because I want to do it for myself and be out with people.*

Carol gave a detailed account of the events my mother and others experienced when their mill closed:

> *Delta came to us and announced that they were buying the mill. Of course, in time we found out what they were telling us and what they were actually doing were two different things. It was a leveraged buy-out: they came in, emptied the coffers. When Delta Apparel first came in and announced they were buying out the plant, we already had feelers out in Charlotte. People here had relatives looking in the papers there to see what was going on here. One woman even claimed that she overheard two managers talking that there were no plans to keep our mill open or keep it going, none at all. We were their competitors, so they just closed us down as soon as they could.*
>
> *When they came in, they boasted that they had bought JP Stevens. Well, we knew JP Stevens were whomped! So then, everybody started to get worried, to say the least. As it went on each department was shut down. They said they were going to keep the Finishing Room open, but of course, that work ended up going to the other two satellite plants in Decatur and Tellico. So we were getting a whole lot of nothin', and what we did get was really bad.*
>
> *When it came apparent that we were going, they came in and made the announcement. Everybody booed. I guess that was the first time that old mill had ever heard any boos. Seven department managers actually tried to buy the mill, but they wouldn't sell it to them, which just reinforces that they in no way wanted a competitor like Healthknit. When you look at it like that, it made more sense - there was a reason.*

Carol continued that she believes that absentee-owners also played a part in the demise of SKM:

> *When Chadbourne bought us that really killed us, because they were there, we were here, and you can't operate a business that way; you have to be on hand. Chadbourne was in North Carolina, and there were about four other companies affiliated with Chadbourne. After they bought us, we started carrying these other brands up at the Mill Shop* (note: The Mill Shop was a "second-hand" outlet of irregular items produced at the mill; employees could purchase these items at a substantial discount).
>
> *If the new owners were doing a promotion they would have the mill make up oodles and oodles of free shirts to hand out to them. I mean it was ridiculous what was going on. One time this one guy even had one of the purchasing agents try to find a packing box big enough so he could send his sailboat's mast off! Just so ridiculous that all this junk was going on while this guy had it!*

SKM could not have had a more efficient or committed "unofficial historian," as she refers to herself, than Carol. She collected and archived thousands of documents pertaining to the mill.

When the mill was shutting down, I accumulated as much as I could for historical reference. I had ways I could get things. Being in Central Shipping, I had friends in about every department. The garbage can is a great place to get things, and trash dumpsters! When we were trying to get information, we had stuff coming at us right and left.

Echoing my mother's experience, several participants noted what a difficult adjustment losing their jobs proved to be. Edna (age 51) said of her job

I like it. I love being a machine operator. 'Cause I think that that was what was so devastating to me when the sewing went to Mexico. Not only did I lose a lot of friends, but I lost (what I did) - I couldn't sew, you know?…When the first sewing went out, and I know this sounds cruel, but I felt like the Mexicans took my job, which it wasn't their fault. They're down there working for forty-cents an hour and I was up here making $13.91 an hour. But I had bad feelings at first. And then, I found out what wages they were making. Some of those who are mothers, they work two jobs making 40-cents an hour, and to me that's cruel. It's a shame that in this day and age that anybody would be working for that kind of wages.

Displaced workers often mention the hostility felt when others begin to occupy their former jobs. Deborah (49) spoke of how her visits to Mexico expanded her consciousness about the consequences of globalization:

I was resentful too. I thought well, they were just stealing our jobs, and I'd say that all the time. But that mentality turned around quick; that was because of lack of education of knowing exactly how the whole process there was working. It wasn't the people. It was the corporations want to make more money. That is all it was. And I had to change my mentality after learning a lot more about it. Spoke to the workers down there and talked to them. They were being threatened the same as we were. Our jobs going to Mexico, theirs' being threatened to go to Bangladesh or some-other-where. These people are human just like I am. They are out here trying to make a living for their children, just like I am…It changed me a lot. It changed me.

I've been down there four times, and I've been in the factories twice. The first time they wouldn't let us go in. The next time they let me go in, but it was only me, it wasn't the group. They took my purse and everything else, like I was going to snap all kinds of pictures. The third time I went they let the group go in. They took us on a tour of that facility. They was talking about this was the people's 'culture' - this is the way they want to live! I mean, it was just…you want to slap them!

Allene said

I worked for Holstein Garment, for Country Miss, for Foremost Garment, and all three of them have gone out of business…they just completely shut the doors down. They couldn't get any work. In this country they couldn't get contracts, 'cause everybody, everything, was going overseas to be made. And it was hard to get any work, so we were off too much. We were off

maybe three days a week 'cause there was no work. We couldn't get contracts…They couldn't get any work in this country, because it was a lot cheaper to send it overseas to Mexico, China, Honduras, wherever they were able to send it…Well, every one I worked at went out of business. Some of them went out because, I guess, they went bankrupt. They never told us the truth about it.

Moving her head slowly from side to side as in an on-going state of disbelief, with a deep sigh, she continued

Oh, when Country Miss was closing, it just broke our heart. The union came in to tell us. They called us into the lunchroom. I never will forget the day, six years ago. I said, 'girls, they're going to close this plant, because they don't never call us into the lunchroom this time of day.' It was in the morning at 11:00 and I was just joking. I said, 'uh-oh, they are going to close the plant.' We walked in there, honey, and the union lady was crying. I knew right then and I said, 'oh, I said that, but I did not know that.' I said, 'that was just a wild guess.' Broke our hearts.

Unions: Involvement and Activism

The majority of the participants interviewed are members of UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees). UNITE is the largest private-sector industrial union in the South, as well as the largest apparel and textile union North America, with approximately 250,000 members. In June 1999, UNITE won an historic election victory at Pillowtex Fieldcrest-Cannon facilities in Cabarrus and Rowan Counties, North Carolina, where the worker population has a large *Latina* representation, and where three of the study participants are employed. A first contract was ratified covering these workers and workers at other Pillowtex facilities in North Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia. Resulting from this victory, UNITE now represents over 9,000 Pillowtex employees working in over fifteen facilities in the U.S. and Canada.

In Knoxville, Tennessee, I met three workers from Beach Athletic Wear, Inc., in the dining section of a local convenience store near the industrial complex where they work, Forks of the River Industrial Park. Edna, Kay (age 48), and Sharon (age 37) are each union stewards, representing their respective departments for the local UNITE chapter. Each of these European-American women, all born and raised in rural areas of East Tennessee, have worked for a number of years in the textile/garment and retail industry. At Beach, Edna has worked 27 years, Kay, 19 years, and Sharon was the "newcomer" with 17 years.

At the time of our meeting, their UNITE chapter was negotiating with company management to extend their collective employment contract with Beach, a negotiation that takes place every three years; one week remained before the September 30 deadline. *"They (management) always wait until the very last minute; they'll push right up to the end,"* Edna stated. Kay and Edna were both wearing prominent stickers on their clothing, with large white letters on a red background that said "Negotiate Now!" Edna elaborated

> *The negotiating is what's holding us up…They don't want to give us no raise on the hourly rate. They're just trying to give us a bonus for the amount of hours that we would work within the month, so you'd still be at the end of your three-year contract, you'd still be at the same rate you was…But, you all are laid off a lot. The cutting room is off at certain parts of the year too.*
>
> *The bonus that the company is offering is like a, like 40 cents per hour, per hour worked each month. So some of our people in the print department, they don't work but maybe 4 months out of the year as a full, schedule, maybe five. It wouldn't benefit a lot of people in the plant.*
>
> *I signed union cards about three weeks after I was there. They didn't start taking dues out on me until I had been there several months. Now things have changed a lot more, it's more up-dated. You fill a card out this week and by next week they can take the dues out the next week…I'm always telling them that my dues go up every time I get a raise! Then when we were laid off, we had to come back, and when we come back, the first thing they raised those dues up.*

And man, it hurt. So then we decided that we'd do it by the week. Now, if we are laid off, they don't go back and pick-up the dues for the time you're laid-off. They dropped that, and so I would rather pay it by the week.

When I mentioned that my mother had worked at SKM for thirty years, Kay and Edna exchanged

Kay *I worked there for about a year, in the Knitting Department. That was about all I needed – I had to get out of there! We got paid little to nothin.' I was on turn and fold. They didn't pay anything, your benefits weren't good or nothin.' So, I got a better job and went to it…the Standard didn't have one (a union), and I think that would have made a whole lot of difference, if they'd had one. They couldn't have gotten taken any worse.*

Edna *You make better money under a union, you know.*

Kay *With the Standard not being union, you got nothing. N-O-T-H-I-N-G.*

Edna *And when it blowed, they got nothing.*

The participants in this study spoke favorably of unions (see Elizabeth Kolbert, 2001, for an opposing opinion of UNITE operations). Allene stated

At Country Miss we had a union…I felt they were helpful, I really did. I really thought they helped me with different things. I supported the union, I really did.

Edna perceived the union as having provided workers with enormous benefits:

The first place I worked was non-union. They didn't even pay you minimum wage. I called the Labor Board about it all the time! Oh Lord, yeah, having a union has helped us. Working at the jobs that weren't union before I came to where I am now, it's better to have one (a union). I just couldn't imagine working anywhere without a union. I worked for places that haven't before, and I know what it was like, 'cause you was always having to call the Labor Board to get them out there and make them even pay you minimum wage. He (the supervisor) would promise vacations, which the Labor Board couldn't do nothing about that. I couldn't imagine working without one.

Margaret (48) stated

It is a good thing (the union). They brought people up from low wages and started something growing, that has growed up all through the years. So, it has made a better place for women, I think. I really get sore when people say that unions are just agitators. I think that the ones before us has really earned what we've gotten. I think that they did it to bring the wages up, and be some decent places for us to work, because if they hadn't done it for the union, I think that we would have been in worster shape.

It's sad, I know. A lot of people put the union down, you know. And I know sometimes I get mad at the representatives we have, and say a few things I shouldn't say sometimes. But I can't image working if there wasn't a union there, 'cause they treat us awful sometimes even with a union.

Deborah maintained

> *In 1982, when the car sales in the automobile industry were going down, it was like 3,000 workers that were affected. They had this huge lay-off and I was one of the ones that got laid-off with two small kids. No income. I didn't know as going to make ends meet. And, when I got recalled back to work, I would always hear all of these rumors about being sold, done something wrong. I've paid dues in the union since the day I went to work, but never did get involved until later.*

The changing textile worker population has also introduced new tensions. Sally Ward Maggard (1999) illustrates how the issues of gender, wage compensation, and language provide barriers for collective organizing. She states

> Higher wages for new hires, especially those who are 'new minorities,' also divides them from older employees, thereby diminishing the potential for solidarity and successful unionization. Management may also use new minority workers to heighten existing employees' fears for their job security. For example, Lisa, an established employee and known union supporter, was required to train a Hispanic male to do her job. According to Lisa, the worker had no textile experience and understood very little English. As she put it, 'I was supposed to train a foreigner to learn something that had taken me twenty-six years to do.'

In conjunction with UNITE, TIRN has sponsored the visits of East Tennessee workers to visit *maquilas* in Mexico to see the conditions where their jobs went, and to lobby politically for better working conditions and more livable wages on both sides of the border (this is chronicled in the film *From the Mountains to the Maquiladoras,* 1991, produced by TIRN). Deborah's participation in one of these early visits is documented in the film. Now president of her local, she feels that her union activism has offered her this and other opportunities she thinks may not have been possible for her otherwise:

> *I have had a lot of opportunities that a lot of people, and a Black female, wouldn't get anyway. I've had the opportunity working with TIRN going to the maquiladoras, four trips to Mexico. I've had an opportunity to speak before the world trade organization in Washington…I've had a lot of opportunities to travel all over the South, to do organizing and meet a lot of different people. Now I enjoy that, I really do. You get to meet different people from everywhere. So, I've had a lot of opportunities, I think, that I would not have normally gotten if I had not gotten involved.*

Deborah's prior experiences activated her union participation and her work on behalf of other groups in the current climate of changing worker populations.

> *(There were discriminatory) comments and stuff and I had to overcome that, because I knew that I needed to work. I thought, well, you'd ask somebody to do something for you, and to me, it felt like they wasn't doing all that they could. So I made up in my mind then, that when I got called back - nobody is going to stand up for me like me. And that is when I really got really deep in it and I've been it ever since. I've been very active since then. That is why I got involved. I felt like I was being shorted, and that kind of experience really has come in handy for me.*

It is because now we have a lot of different people, Blacks are really not the minority in this country anymore. It's a lot of minorities. And we are hiring, and our work force is changing. We have Arabians, we have Mexicans, and we have Blacks. It's amazing how they still do it now. But I can relate to them and think, 'okay, I've been there. So you try to make them feel as comfortable as you can.

The union activists realize that their events are time consuming, but worthy of their efforts. Edna stated

You do spend a lot of outside time with the union, like if there is protesting or they are having a march on something they will call you up and want you to be there at a certain meeting. 'Bring your crew and come to the corner of Central or somewhere' …But we love it. We love it. I mean we'll jump up, board the bus and go to North Carolina and down to Atlanta and just anywhere. Wherever they's rattlin,' that's where we're head to!

If we are boycotting some company, we'll go to certain grocery stores that is selling that product and hand out literature. It does take time from your family, but…My four oldest children, though, they understood more about my duties as working and that I was involved in the union for a reason. My youngest son, he accepts that too, pretty well. Sometimes he says, 'you don't spend enough time with me,' but now that he is older and got girlfriends it don't bother him. It don't matter so much now. Now it's 'go on Mama, get out of the house!' Basically, I believe that I do pretty good at both of them, a balancing act.

Interestingly, Edna also characterized her activism as being "only" political:

I've never been involved really in the community groups and things, except for politics. I don't do much else in our community or anything. Well, I used to go to church, but…well, I ain't going to church now, you know, but I have been saved. I don't do much outside only working with the union.

Now I love mailing letters out for politicians, or knocking on the doors for politicians. Yeah, I even campaign! In fact, I've I stood outside and handed out leaflets with politicians. I'm a Democrat, full-blooded. I'm Democrat to the bone! Will Gore win? I say 'Lord, I sure hope he does!'

(Note: This statement was made just prior to the November 2000 U.S. presidential election. After a contentious election, her favored candidate was not declared the winner.)

Kay remarked

I'm like Edna. You've got these duties at home that you need to do and then, you've got your other duties that you feel like you gotta do to make yourself better at the work place and make it better for other people, too. At the same time. At home I spend quality time with my family and stuff. I don't spend as much as some that wasn't doing different things. But I've been happily married for 25 years. So, I mean, I'm doing something right.

Edna related that she had confronted violence and harassment during one long strike:

I was a picket captain in '72 and in '76, when we were on strike. Twenty-nine days in the hot month of July. And come storms that you would not believe that would blow our tents down. The company would, oh Lord, how they tried to run over us. Oh goodness! The company claimed that they didn't do it. That somebody come and shot at us. We were harassed, yes, bad. Lord, they called the law on us, I tell you. We kept out there twenty days. Yeah, we earned that one. But, it was well worth it...

We got people from all the locals and we loaded up on a bus and went up there and marched with them. They had the cops out there and had their billy-clubs, and all this and the stun-gun stuff, like this was cool. Had 'em lined up. I mean they would step up and put that gun up there on their shoulder, like they were really trained to do the job. You wasn't really doing anything, no violence on our side going on. But just in case - just wanted to flex their muscles where you could see it.

While unionization has historically been discouraged overall by management in the southern Appalachian textile industry, it is notable that together with other Latin women, *Latinas* are also helping Appalachian women with collective organizing in the workplace and the community. Martina asserted

There is no union where I work. I think the idea of unions is new here, but we are beginning to talk to people, to educate them. Maybe in the future, we will have success with the union. It is right to fight to help people who cannot help themselves.

Carmen (age 39) stated

if you are going to be a part of the community, you need to find a way to reach the community. I thought the best way to do this would be to volunteer. I volunteer for many things and help to do a lot of volunteer coordinating for civic groups and cultural events.

Work-Related Health Issues

> It is not just work. It is as if the blood these people shed at their machines, and the fibers they ingested over time — "eatin' cotton," they call it, with a smile — have made (the) mill a part of them and them a part of it, all mixed together, metal, cotton, flesh and bone.
>
> Rick Bragg

My legs hurt. My shoulders and my neck hurt because you had to stand with your arms up in the air all day. The veins in my legs are blue, from top to bottom, but for me, holding my arms up in the air was the worst. The doctor says that I have deteriorated disks now, in my neck and shoulders. I don't think it was safe. Of course, you know OSHA came and checked all the time. They did make them put in a big exhaust fan. As far as being clean, the plant was dirty, all this and that. Dirt, fuzz. They don't keep them that clean.

Working in a factory is hard work, especially when you had to work production because you really had to stay on it. It's hard work. You had to keep moving. If you made any money, you really did, you had to keep moving. And it was not only physical, it was mental stress on you, too. You felt like you been drove all day...it is the hardest work you'll ever do. I have worked on the farm, and nothing is as hard as factory work. (Margaret)

If black lung is perceived as being a "male" work-related health phenomenon associated with the work of many Appalachian men, brown-lung must surely be the "female" counterpart of Appalachian women. Pat said

The ceiling was falling in. It nearly fell on my head one day when the rain was coming down. Just things like that. The old buildings were old and dirty. Oh yeah, lots of lint. We breathed lint. I'd go home and my nose would be full of every color that we did, or you'd have rings around your neck or on your clothes. We breathed lots and lots of lint. Yes, we did.
I had rashes from the dyes and all kinds of respiratory problems from the lint. If you complained they'd just say 'if you don't want to work here someone else will. If you don't want to do the job somebody else will.' No, they never was concerned about our health.

There was lint, purple, purple lint; it all come to purple. I guess all the colors in the garments made purple. It was hanging on the lights, all over everything. When you got home, it was all over you. It was in your nose - I mean, it was full of purple. Your nose, your shoes.I had a lot of allergies and respiratory problems. Some had to wear the mask over their face. I know I kept sinus infections. A lot of the garments break your arms out. The dyes in the material caused a lot of rashes.

Sharon described a former work site as being dangerous.

One place I worked burned down a few years ago. People would fall a lot. I mean it was a rat hole, windows broke out. And in the winter time, Lord, it was cold.

As a result of a long strike, Edna suffered physical affects long after the strike had ended.

I even lost my voice, because, oh, I was so weak. The doctor said I had what was called a sunstroke. It was a long time I couldn't stand to be even in the sun. It would just hit me. I would feel like I was going to vomit.

In 1978, my mother survived advanced cervical cancer, and many of her co-workers through the years experienced this and other forms of cancer; many did not survive. The incidents of women with cancer who worked at SKM seemed inordinantly high. Carole remarked

I'd love to see a study about the amount of women who worked at the mill and cancer. I mean it just seemed astronomical. I've been to so many funerals over the years due to that very thing.

According to the National Cancer Institute (2000), *Latinas* have a high rate of cervical cancer, a relatively uncommon cancer that strikes about 13,000 women a year in the U.S. While estimated to be curable in 90 percent of all cases if detected early, *Latinas*, who along with *Latinos* comprise the most uninsured group in the country, rank second only to Vietnamese women in numbers of the highest cervical cancer death rates.

Additionally, many of the on-the-job injuries Latin workers experience are fostered by a communication gap. "Partly because many do not speak English," Steven Greenhouse (2001) notes, many Latin immigrants "often receive less job and safety training than American-born workers do. Safety experts say language barriers often contribute to the higher Hispanic injury rate, noting, for instance, that at many job sites, safety instructions and warnings appear only in English." Gloria (age 52) stated

I am very tired all the time. I have to put my hands over my head, and it hurts my arms and shoulders. All the time my back hurts. All of the instructions we get or things to read are in English, and this is a problem for the people who don't have good English.

Social Dynamics of Culture and Community

One important strategy of maintaining one's primary culture while living in another culture in the reproduction of cultural practices and observences. Carmen stated

> *In November, we celebrate the people that go away, Dia de los Muertes[10] (Day of the Dead). We put out candles, bread. I think in the United States they don't have that tradition!*

In the North Carolina Humanities Council publication *NC Crossroads* (1999), another Mexican woman likewise commented about this observance

> In Hispanic culture, death is recognized as part of our lives. We joke about it in verse and we eat it as candy; in other words, we coexist with death. This tradition comes horn our pre-Columbian and Spanish roots. The Aztecs recognized the 14th month of their calendar as the month dedicated to death, the *Quecholli* month, which corresponds in Catholic worship to the celebration of All Saints' Day. Since then, our dead are remembered each year when we celebrate the Day of the Dead on November 2. The whole family congregates in the cemeteries with those 'who have gone ahead' or around the offering or *altar* in honor of the grandfather son, or relative who has passed away….we make a big party on the Day of the Dead, with a fair and music because it is not a sad day or something frightening like it is here in the United States. Over there, the whole family participates, the municipal cemetery is visited a lot. The *altares* are set up in all the houses during the last days of October. The first of November is for the *angelitos,* the little angels, that's what we call the children who have died. We leave flowers and candy for them and, on the day itself, November 2. We place on the altar the food liked by those who died as adults (11).

Carmen L. Lucaveche (1999) describes several aspects of her culture that affirm her identity as a *Latina*.

> I live in Durham, North Carolina, far from my birthplace in Chile. But the language, food, music, dancing, the sense of family, of friendship, of community, of belonging, are aspects of my culture that are still essential to me. My culture reverberates in the sound of my mother tongue, where I can express my emotional life with deeper meanings. When I share the same language with someone, it immediately establishes a base of understanding where the exchange of ideas, emotions, feelings, stones, experiences can take place with a certain shared, comforting freedom….Food is very important. We take great efforts to recreate the tastes that we grew up with and are longing for. Eating is a social activity….We do not get together just to eat and drink. We get together for the sustenance of our bonds of friendship and love; food and drink are the means that make them possible (1).

Yolanda (age 27) stated

> *The Hispanic community is increasing. I think it's good here for the economy, because Hispanic people are very hard workers…More professional people are coming from my country (Mexico), like dentists, attorneys, doctors. I am not happy for my country that they have to leave. But, I do think it is good here that people here are getting to see other kinds of Latin people, not only poor migrant workers. I'm talking about stereotypes. There is nothing wrong with being a migrant*

worker. They are very important, because if they don't work, we don't have food on our tables. In the community there many Mexican people…the first time when I see other Latin people here, it was after six months. And actually, I saw them first in Charlotte, and now you can see them wherever you go. It is good because a lot of the people come to the United States to have a better life. It is good for the people to come, and they work. They are really working people.

Spending time in a community in Mexico initially made Deborah anxious, but resulted in a most rewarding experience for her.

> *You know what, it turned out to be all right, but I about made myself sick before I got there! When they was settin' up house, some of them (other visiting U.S. workers) did change their mind, because if you had been there before, all you can think about are the all of the conditions that you already saw.I mean I am really blessed to lay down in my bed and go to sleep at night. I ain't got to step out in all this stuff* (industrial waste from nearby plants that collects in areas surrounding workers' houses). *I thought, 'I'm not going to do it.' Then when I got there, I thought, something just clicked in me and said, 'what makes you think that you better than they are?' and then I thought, 'well, I'm not.' I mean, I talked myself above me and I said, 'just as long as you don't ask yourself – so don't start asking yourself'. But I thought,'what makes you think you're better?' and I said 'I'm not. I've got to do this; it is important.' And was I afraid? Absolutely!*
>
> *I stayed in one of those little huts where they live. You might see one on this hill, one slumped down on another hill, and they all dirt roads and it's dirty water everywhere around the houses. It had been set up with a group that was across the border for us to have these home visits. We were all sort of in the community, so that was okay. I stayed in the house and I had a girl from Texas, college student, for my interpreter. I wasn't totally by myself. But I tell you what, those kids made me feel so comfortable and at home. I was okay. I felt welcome. Yeah, I did. I took pictures, 'cause they told us to bring pictures of your family and stuff and show them so the families could see them. Right before we got ready to split-up, their mom told us that I was going to be her baby-sitter because she had to go to work. (laughter) I thought, 'oh no!' But we done okay. The kids got their pictures out and they showed them to me, and I showed them my daughter's wedding pictures 'cause it wasn't long since she had gotten married. I had a good time! We laid down and went to sleep and it was hot, it was really hot. We had took our own water and stuff. I enjoyed it. I did. Afterwards, that next night they wanted me to stay again. I said no, and it was because I didn't think that I could take the heat one more night! But they had a party, so we went back to their party. One of the kids had graduated from sixth grade. They make a big to-do out of this. They had cake, they had ice cream, they get all dressed up and everybody was dancing outside in the gravel and dirt yards. Having a good time! So it was okay.*

Deborah also spoke of her experience being a long-time resident of a primarily "White" rural community in east Tennessee.

> *When my kids were growing up, when I first was out here there was like, one, two, three, four, five of us. That's all. All, these people here and we were the only African-Americans in the neighborhood. Mrs. Trout still lives up there in the brick house. She's a German lady, sweet as she can be. I like it, being isolated out here! (laughter) I like the solitude. The only thing that was bad was that my kids didn't have anybody to play with. There was older people and there were two kids down here and they were both boys. Mrs. Trout didn't have any young kids. So, they played with the kids that was over on the next street where the school is. It was just odd for*

them because it wasn't a lot of children. My parents still say we live in the country! When my oldest (laughter), well, it's not funny, but she come home one day when she went to Finnigan Elementary. She's come home from school one day and she is standing here. She says, 'Mama, what color am I?" And I said 'HUH!?!' Well, she is real light skinned like her daddy and her hair was sandy. I said, 'WHAT? Why are you asking?' She said, 'Well, them children told me at school that I was White.' I said, 'WHAT?' I said, 'do I look White?' 'Nope.' I said, 'well you're not either,' and she went on. You know, it's something that you just never forget. But they were the only two up there. I guess because she's so light, it seemed like that, and that sandy hair. They asked her, but we didn't have any trouble. I didn't have any trouble what-so-ever. I think that they done a wonderful job teaching my children.

Gender, Racial, and Regional Experiences

While there are myriad forms of discrimination, none operate in exclusivity. When the intersections of these occur, coinciding discriminations become compounded. For many women, factors related to the social constructions race, color, ethnicity, sexuality, region, and national origin are the differences that create disparity. Davydd J. Greenwood (2000) states "the attempts to make a clear distinction between race, ethnicity, and culture turn into intellectual nightmares. Race, culture, and ethnicity are cultural constructs with immensely important human consequences." Gender too is a signifier of enormous consequence, and can have dire bearings on workplace dynamics.

A first happened for me as a result of this conducting this research; one worker called me at home to offer me additional information about a pivotal incident of gender discrimination that, as she termed, she had "blocked out" and "buried." In 1995, work on the sewing floor at Beach Athletic had decreased to the point that Edna and two other women sewers were "bumped" to the receiving floor, an area that has traditionally been a "male" domain of work in terms of physical lifting, carrying, and packing of shipments and operating "heavy" machinery. The "bumped" workers, who normally worked sewing machinery, were now expected to lift and move 100 lb. boxes. She recalled

> *When you asked us what the worst experience we'd ever had at work was, my mind was going so fast thinking about other work stuff, and by quittin' time on Friday my mind's about shot anyway. Then I remembered you askin' us that question, and I remembered something that happened that I try to keep blocked out. It was so awful. I've just buried it all. When we'd try to move the shipments, we couldn't do it by ourselves; they just weighed too much. The men didn't like having us bumped to their area, and they didn't hide it. We'd be strugglin' trying to move it alone and the men would just come and stand around us with their arms folded and laugh at us. Not offer to help us, just laugh at us, make fun of us right out loud. Even the bosses would come down and make fun of us. It was the most horribliest thing that ever happened to us.*

This incident led to changes in the union members' work contract, but not before the women would face more discrimination:

> *The stuff we was trying to move was too much for one person, so it took two of us. Well, then they told us that was against the rules. We eventually got sent back to our department. I don't know how we survived during that time.*

She also spoke of how they were underestimated gender-wise during a labor conflict.

> *There were more women than there were guys working there. When they told the company that they had voted to strike, they said 'aah, just a bunch of women…' They used to have a company bus that they'd haul employees up in from town, so the guy that was driving the company bus come in with that bus load and he found out that a bunch of women could stir up a good stink!*

Management too still remains heavily slanted gender-wise. Sharon maintained

All of the new men they hire are supervisors. They haven't hired any women supervisors off the street in years that I've seen.

Kay asserted

Yeah, we've come a long way. Used to a woman couldn't adopt a child if she didn't have a husband. You used to couldn't buy a car, a home, if you didn't have a husband.

I think we could improve in the work force and towards leadership. I still think we should have a woman for president someday. I think that this world would be a lot better off if we had a woman for president.

Edna maintained

A lot of men, or some men, still nowadays, they think that a woman's place is in the home. They don't think that a woman should get the pay that a man does, you know. Say for instance, my boss. She does the job, but she didn't get the promotion, and I think that it was because she was a woman and that they didn't want to up-grade her. A lot now is the way that you raise your children, because some boys is raised to wash dishes, to cook, to help and then when they marry, they continue to do that. But I know when I was married, I had to work, take care of the kids, do the laundry, clean the house. Come home, start your second job, and work up to ten or eleven o'clock at night when all he did was come in and fall down on the couch, you know. So, I think a lot of things have changed.

Deborah stated there was a time when she thought that attempting to address the discrimination she was subject to at work would have been counter-productive to keeping her job.

I think that the racial resentment history goes really back, really deep. I think that I was cheated in my lifetime growing up because my father protected us from a lot of that stuff. And that is why he was so strict on us. When we went to school he took us. When we went to a ballgame or something he took us. We never rode a bus. So he took us everywhere. I didn't understand it - I just thought he was a strict, mean daddy. I think that I was treated well, but I think that we were sort of, cheated in our lifetime. I was, because I was the oldest, in my lifetime of not learning about what was really going on into the world. But when I stepped out into it, I was able to handle it. In a way, I think it was a blessing and in a way, I think I was cheated because then I don't know, didn't have any idea what racism was, so I wasn't prejudice. So that was good for me. But then to figure out, okay now, when you hear stuff on television, 'wake up, Deborah! You've got to figure out what is going on here.'

So then to study the history and see all the hurt, and it's going on for generations, and generations. I don't think that that will change. I mean, it may ease up some, but I think that what is going to happen is that the Latino population is getting throwed in there with the blacks and it is going to be the same thing. That is just my opinion. It bothers me that it happens, but I can deal with it, and a lot of it is the younger generation coming up now. I see it; I can say this. The younger generation that we have in the plant now, we have school kids. To me they are not as prejudice. It is like a totally different world. I mean they go out together, they party together.

And you used to didn't see that, a long time ago. I see it a lot in the workplace where I am now with the younger kids. I think that people have made some progress. Actually, they have made a big progress. You can see it.

Regarding the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1970s, Deborah stated

Stuff was done so wrong, and it was a lot of racism in the plant back in that time, from'71 when I went to work, it was terrible. It was terrible. There was a time when I was angry. I didn't like people calling us 'niggers.' I hated that word. You could hear them behind your back. They talked loud enough. They would do it to a lot of people, and especially to me because I wouldn't respond, even though it would get me riled up. It would make me mad. But, I never would say anything about it. I needed my job. And I knew at that time, I would be probably the one to get fired. I felt that way, anyway. Why, the supervisors didn't care. There was too many people in there to worry about 'little' stuff like that.

For one Latina worker, exploitation is perceived as being widespread. Gloria stated

I like working in this place, the people are good. In this place its good because they work with the government. But in other companies, when my people have a problem they say, 'we can't do nothing,' and in the future, maybe it's a bigger problem.

Despite the actions of an unfair female supervisor, Melina (age 24) ultimately views herself as being responsible for what she earns on production:

My supervisor is a man. A second supervisor is a lady, a young woman that sometimes I have a problem with because we make on production, but I must work with her. People born in different places, sometimes we work more to make extra and she tries to keep it away. I say that's no good. That's stupid, because if you are going to make money you have to find your work! There are only two machines. Sometimes they are broke or don't run real good, so you don't make money. I don't work with her anymore. Now the machine is my responsibility. If I don't work good I don't make good money, but if I work good I can make good money. You have to take the help for yourself, because no one is going take it for you.

For Deborah, class and region also play a part in people's perceptions of her, and in her own self-perception in opposition to the constructions of others. She stated

Most of the higher up people, most of the upper class folks think, to me, think that Southerners are stupid. They do. That is just my opinion. We're not - we just who we are. And I tell them in a minute: I'm proud to be from the South. I'm proud to be Black and I'm proud to be a woman. I like all of it. And I don't mind being poor, I've been poor all my life, so it don't matter… I mean, I'll tell them in a minute. I'll just tell the rest of them. It is something that you have to grow out of…it's not easy sometimes.

Being Southern…now that can hinder us! Just as soon as you go up north, they'll say 'she's from the South! She's from the South!'

We were in Florida for a union convention. I was sitting in the hotel, and these people kept looking at me and I couldn't figure out why, then a man came over and said, 'where are you from?' I said, 'Tennessee.' He said, 'I figured it.'

I used to feel really uncomfortable around people that are in the upper class too. Sort of

not talk, back off. It took me a while to get over that. I got that experience through my job, when it was Allied Signal. We used to have to go to corporate. I was chosen to go to corporate in Michigan and work on a program that they were doing up there. This was with the higher, big shots. But it was okay because I found out, once talking to them, they come from where I did. Climbed that ladder; they just went a little higher. You meet some people who act like they are better than some people, and I just ignore them and go on. You just go on and ignore them, and go on and just deal with the situation at hand. I used to feel uncomfortable around people like that. I thought it was from class. They had some money. I'm here, a poor little Black girl struggling to make it every day. What am I doing here? I felt out of place. Yeah, but I don't anymore. Not anymore.

Most Latin people working in the U.S. still have family in their "home" countries, and when possible, the opportunity to return home, however briefly, is important. The Beach workers were amused by a strategy used by their co-worker of seven years, who is from Mexico.

What is so bad, is we have to go in or the stewardess in that department has to go in and negotiate with the company to get her like two weeks off to go back to Mexico. Then they wouldn't let her have three weeks; they only let her have two weeks. So, she took a five-day leave of absence. They wouldn't let her have a leave of absence, but anyway, she had to go on a leave of absence. So she brought five doctor's statements in, one for each day she was out! It kind of blowed the company's mind. They couldn't believe it!

Gloria believes that a greater Latin presence in the region will help to lessen the exploitation of Latin workers that currently exists:

We need more people here now because the employers will take Latin people because they say nothing. For example, the people don't say anything even though they are paid very little, no insurance, nothing. We have big problems here.

The status of working in the U.S. without being a citizen has provided Martina with a number of concerns.

I have many American friends now, but a problem for us here is to have the papers. When I got here, I asked for political asylum. Always, always I pay the government for permission to work. The problem is they say I don't have evidence that I need political asylum. This time, for seven years I have not seen my father or my mom, my family. For this, I have pain in my heart. I am waiting for my papers to be a non-resident. As soon as I get my paper, I'm going to Guatemala to see my family. I have a sister who is married to an American man and lives in Nebraska, but it is very far. We only speak by phone.

Martha said

The economic reason I came here is because of my kids, so they can get chance to stick around, so they can be legal. They are legal. Three of them born in Mexico, the youngest born here.

Lucinda (38) had no illusions about life on *"el otro lado"* (the other side). She maintained

> *I didn't have a real dream to come over here. I was OK in Mexico. I didn't think 'I'm going to go over there and have a nice place to live and work and a lot of money.' Some of my family would come back and tell me that it's hard to live in the United States. I didn't have to change how I thought too much because they told me how they have to live. I knew a little bit. The biggest problem is that sometimes it's hard to live in a different place. Sometimes you go to the store and people look bad at you. They don't like Mexican people. I think it's wrong. We live in the same place. We come from different places. Here in the United States there are many different kinds of people.*

Martina stated

> *Many, many Latin people are here now. I feel discrimination. Sometimes people see me and they think bad of my because I am Latina. Many people are good too, but sometimes people think bad of Latinos.*

Gloria has experienced a number of changes in almost 30 years in the U.S. in terms of the Latin population. When she arrived here, the situation she encountered was quite different than today. She stated

> *When I first came, in 1972, it was hard because there were few minorities. I felt alone then, and it was hard to find work.*

Carmen said

> *I say hi to everybody, but I don't have real, real friends at work. It's hard to find real friends. Sometimes you try to find somebody and you tell them everything about you and your family, then somebody else comes and says something about me and they change their minds. When I first went to work at the plant the lady that first trained me was good because she was Mexican. She helped me a lot. She let me know what's going on, so I don't feel too bad.*
>
> *My real, real friend is Isabel. She's a nice lady. When I was pregnant and went to the hospital she helped me with my daughter. After the baby was born, she came and helped me at home. When she goes to Mexico, I go to take care of her house. We have some friends in the community, but not real, real friends. When they have parties they call me and when I have parties they come. Where my husband works as a mechanic, they have about 10-15 Mexicans. When he started, there were only six or seven.*

Allene stated

> *I think that there were maybe three Black people in my whole career that I worked with. I got along well with them. I didn't have any problem with them. I don't discriminate. I have nothing against black people, 'cause I feel like there is always some good and some bad in all races, so I have nothing against anyone. I could work with them anytime, 'cause there are good people, like I said, good and bad in all.*

Allene's perception of her former African-American co-workers is much different than that of a

male co-worker of Deborah. Through their interaction, however, this co-worker gained a transformed perspective. Taking into the context of people's lives is important to Deborah; she applies this as a strategy in her role as a leader in her workplace, and believes it makes a positive difference.

> *Actually, I think people should try to deal with discrimination head-on. I think you should try to figure out why. A lot of times you can't do anything about it because it is really in-ground, but to it figure out, to show this person. I have done this, to make a point that I'm not as bad as you think I am, because I'm Black or because I am a woman. And a lot of times when you do something good, people can see the good that comes out of you, to not respond to the bad things that they do to you. I've seen that work. There's a guy at work who would wear red rebel stuff. They always talk about he's a racist. He wears that rebel flag and I went over and I told him, 'listen, some people get offended by that. Just don't wear it no more. I don't care what you wear.' That's what I'll tell them, 'I don't care what you wear, but some people get offended, and we don't need no stuff'. And he hasn't worn it anymore. Some people just get offended by it, but it don't bother me. He said, 'well, it don't mean…' I said, 'well, I know it don't mean nothing. Let's just try and keep a little peace.' See, he's fine. He was a kid. He was just a young kid, he didn't know no better. Well, I started to go over to him and I'll talk to him. I'll say, 'how are you? How are you doing?' or something like that. One day he was sick, and I went down there and I just and I laid my hand on his shoulder and was talking to him. I said, 'now is there anything I can do to help you? If there is anything I can do to help you let me know.' And I know he had talked about me, terribly. 'Niggers,' I'd hear him at a distance before, and 'my black this'…*
>
> *But sometimes you just have to reach out to people, as an individual. Sometimes you have to. What really got me was he called me back on the phone and told me, 'thank you for all your help.' Now when I go down there I'll speak to him and he'll speak to me, wave his hand. It made a difference. It made a difference because I think now he looks at other women and Blacks in a different sense. I'll try to break through to them first. They'd have to get really belligerent with me, and I mean really awful, before I would even try to do anything. My goal is to try to help people, try to reach out to them, because there's something maybe underlying, under there, that has happened, the reason that they get that way. And that could be the same thing with Blacks. I think poor Blacks and Whites are resentful of each other and don't know they both come out of the same poke! That's what gets me. I think we have more in common.*

Deborah's experiences underscore Melina's views about using her community volunteer activities as a way of addressing discrimination. She asserted

> *if people get to know you, they aren't as likely to discriminate so much.*

Maria stated

> *Knowing English is a big problem for me. I work all the time, and I don't have time to study or take classes. Better English would help me get a better job, but until then, I have to do this work.*

The presence of the Latin community can be seen in a variety of ways in southern Appalachia; business signs and advertisements, food choices and entertainment, and cultural and educational events

reflect this. *El Eco de Las Montanas* (*The Echo of the Mountains*), a Spanish language paper reporting global events based in Asheville, North Carolina, and *Mundo Hispanico* (*Hispanic World*), a bilingual periodical based in Knoxville, Tennessee, are but two examples addressing the increased need for specific informational resources within the Latin community. Martina maintains a linguistic divide exists in her community.

> *Sometimes I have tried to talk to the police or other people. My English is very bad, and they say 'what?' They don't try to understand me. They don't like Latinos, and they say 'why don't you speak English?' This is a problem, that we don't speak English. It is a problem, and I don't know what the solution is. There is a school here, but when I speak with my people, they say they don't have time to go. People here from Mexico and Guatemala work much, much for little money. They want to speak English too, but it is very hard to learn.*

Marta said

> *I don't really want to move back to Mexico right now, because my daughter is in school. It would be hard right now because she is in the 3rd grade. It would be hard because she is starting to learn English, to read and to write. It would be hard if we went back.*

Family

For each of the women interviewed, the primacy of the importance of family was a major issue in their lives, whether for the need for their jobs for economic provisions, or the belief that their work might provide enhanced life opportunities for their children. Without the economic resources or work schedule flexibility of professional women, the participants manage to provide daycare, divide economic contributions and household responsibilities, and obtain emotional support from family members or friends. The concept of family identity extended beyond one's immediate, biological family, as co-workers were also often referred to as "family."

Again, Allene's reply was counter in nature to others' responses. She stated

> *My family does not depend on me. I depend on my husband. Other than that, no. I don't think anyone depends on me.*

In contrast, Maria characterized her role in her family as being a vital:

> *I am muy important to my family. I help to sustain the family. Like a big post. Yes, like a foundation.*

Participants spoke of their experiences as partners and in marriage. Deborah spoke of the gender double-standard favoring males and the trials she and her husband faced because of her work.

> *Growing up, boys had more freedom. I've always thought that. I mean, it was not 'proper' for a girl to do certain things. I know I used to love to play football, but would get in trouble when I did, because that was not 'lady-like.' When you went to church you wore a dress. The guys could stay out a little later than the girls. My brother could even though he's younger than me. It was a man's world. In certain places and in certain businesses, I still think that, because they've not overcome it. It was the man who had to make the most money. I think it was just their ego. They were the ones who made the most money and it was the woman's place to make less. I thought that, for years, or stay home and you know, obey like that. I didn't know it was like a partnership. For the first years of my marriage, I thought well, I am suppose to do this. He is suppose to make more money than me. That's not right.*
>
> *My thinking has changed. Oh, yes. I grew up. I grew up. My husband has changed too. Oh yes, yes he has. And we work as a partnership. It used to be mine and his. It is ours now, but we had to work our way to that mentality.*
>
> *He was very dissatisfied and very unpleased and actually we didn't even get along for a long time because of my union involvement. For many years, I stayed home and raised my children and took them. Then it was time for me to do what I wanted to do. You could like it, or you could die not liking it. I'm going to do what Deborah wants to do for a change, because I dedicated all those years of marriage to him and my kids. And I think that that was good experience for him and because when I started going on the road, traveling, doing organizing, be gone for a week or two at a time. The relationships that he had lost with his children earlier working so much, this gave him time enough to build it back up. And now they have the best*

relationship in the world. He took on the responsibility because before, it was always mama. Then it became daddy, because mama wasn't here like before.

A humorous interchange took place among the workers in the group interview about the issue of marriage:

Kay *I've been married for 25 years…or more.*

Edna *Not me, honey. I can't handle them that long!…that's my story, and I'm sticking to it.*

Sharon *You can tell that she's not married now!*

Edna *Yeah. Then after I divorced them, those suckers died…They're both deceased now, thank God!*

Counter to the perception of religious and socially "traditional" *Latinas* who not only marry but also wed young, Martina framed her response within a broad critical analysis:

I live with my boyfriend. In my life I don't believe in being married. I have lived with him 14 years. He is from Mexico. I don't believe in being married because I like my life to be independent. I never, never like marriage. It's OK, but sometimes we have problems.

I don't like religion. I am independent. Just me and my God, no religion. Religion is for capitalism. When people have their heads full of religion, they don't read other kinds of books. There are many important books! There are things that work in cooperation with religion.

Deborah maintained

My role in my family…to me, I look at it as being the backbone of this family. I mean my husband relies on me, the kids rely on me. My two nieces that live with me rely on me. I have three other nieces that don't live with me that are my sister's kids. So, I'm sort of like the leader of this family.

Sometimes it feels burdensome. Sometimes I wonder - why do I have to make all of these decisions? Why is it my job to do all of this? But I do enjoy it. I like giving and doing and I make it hard on myself sometimes, especially when it comes to my kids.

But, life is harder in other places. Everybody in this little community where I stayed looks out for each other. There was kids who stayed up all night just to watch our van, just to make sure nothing happened to it. We were sort of down in-between a mountain, down in there. Everybody looked out for each other. They really did.. I see a difference in the community. I see a difference in the Mexican family. They are closer, to me, than the American family.

Kay related her "pride" in her "hillbilly" state and family

Tennessee, it's a great place. It may be as they call it, 'hillbilly.' I'm proud of it. Proud of my raisin'. They say we're hillbillies and I always was told, 'you all go barefooted.' Well, of course. A lot of people goes barefooted, you know. I love this part of the country. Good ole Tennessee. I have my own family, but the people I work with I think of as my family too, and they make me proud too. I think that we've got a great state. I'm very proud of it. Proud of them pinto beans and cornbread.

To this, Sharon added

Yeah, cornbread and fried tators too!

Allene spoke of her former co-workers

we're still in contact. We talk every week on the phone. We maybe don't see each other, but we talk. We keep up with each other.

Edna said

I love the people. I love operating machines, sewing machines, but I love the people. Some of them I've worked with, they were there when I came up and really it is just like they are part of your family.

Kay agreed

You stay with them a big part of the day. You're close to a lot of people. It's just like Edna said, you're just part of a family. That is part of your family, because really, in the long run, you spend more time with them than you do your own family.

As Carol stated (see following page)

The mill really was a third-generation plant. If your mom and dad didn't work there, at least your aunt and uncle did. It was like a family breaking apart when it closed.

SUMMARY

> As it has been expressed in American commentary (nature) has two aspects--that of restless mobility….and that of attachment to place….To understand America one must see them as facets of each other--a double beat of migration and a sense of place.…When the beat of migration has fulfilled itself, it may be expected that the same intensity which informed it will be transformed into attachment to place.
>
> Max Lerner

> America is not a place; America is a process.
>
> John Kouwenhoven

The global economy has created a number of changes and challenges for women working in southern Appalachia's textile industry, and these have become part of the navigation of existence for these individuals at this moment. As a way to explore women's lives as they are affected by rapid changes in industrialization and immigration, this study centered on assessing the labor and cultural practices of women textile workers and their extant social communities. Striking changes in the southern Appalachia's economic base, industrialization, and population changes due to in or out migrations, to name but a few factors, indicate that it is a region whose inhabitants have done anything but stand still. Within the sweep of these collective changes, it is the circumstances of individuals, the actors of histories in-the-making, that are pivotal to history itself. As Smith (1999) asserts

> Even though region continues to matter in the South, context matters everywhere. Even though some white Southerners in particular tend to construct and interpret their context in regional terms, especially to outsiders, people everywhere invest meaning in the places they inhabit and create. This may well be another important lesson from the South, ever more pertinent in an age of mobility and dislocation: place matters, whether people construct that meaningful place as a street, neighborhood, hollow, city, or region, whether it is the place people currently reside or a mythic home to which they hope to return. Those who study human diversity in all its forms might do well to take thoughtfully and literally the question that Southerners, especially rural Southerners, ask of strangers all the time: 'Where're you from?' (Introduction).

Whether experienced as a place, process, or both, all are being altered. The Southern Regional Council (2001) states

> These transformations are of far-reaching importance. On the one hand, they open up the fixity of

> the black-white divide, creating new possibilities for community-based organizing and cross-racial alliances. On the other hand, they threaten to explode into xenophobic and racist political movements. For those who hold fast to the prize of racial justice in the South, it is imperative to analyze and develop strategic responses to these racial transformations.

The changing population demographic of southern Appalachia is creating a redefinition of the region's cultural landscape as well, but also with a growing sense of what we share despite overarching difference. Within our shared gender, Appalachian women and *Latinas* know different manifestations of the limitations of social constraint, and despite the differences and oppressions that *Latinas* and others have faced as a whole that Appalachian women have not, we share striking similarities and many regards in the social constrictions we have historically and at present-day confront. It is within these resemblances where the strength and enormous potential for change reside, and it is here that interactions and discourse must grow in order to strengthen social representation and opportunities. The social, historical, and cultural constructions of gender, race, and class in the U.S., in conjunction with positionings within particular identity groups, provide both contrasts and comparabilities for women of diverse backgrounds. However, as Audre Lorde maintains, "we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" (1984:115), and as a result, we frequently construct our self-images "on the edge of consciousness" and in response to

> a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts know 'that is not me.' In america [sic], this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society (116).

For those of us without these characteristics, we know what we have been denied, but we are beginning to recognize the sounds of our own voices, outside of ourselves and within the societies in which we live. Our voices are now reaching beyond the many borders we plot a course for daily. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) asserts

> ….Psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Preface).

The populace of the U.S. nation-state has been cross-cut by difference since its inception, and the concept of "America" has been built upon contested ground, both literally and figuratively. Navigating the elements that comprise identities requires constant social and self-negotiation. This points to the importance of examining the complexities of life in this country, particularly regarding what it has meant

or now means to claim identity within a region of contestation. The shifting of southern Appalachian women from their historically marginal position to the center of focus opens a space to begin to explore ways of transforming experiential knowledge and claiming self-determined representation and fulfillment. The intersections among gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality as categories of analysis or bases of oppression or empowerment inform our strategies. A continuous and open discourse about the dynamics by which our individual identities and those of varied groups in U.S. society have emerged and continue to transform is imperative. This has become heightened, as the terrorist attacks on the U.S. cities of New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, have created increased challenges for non-citizens in this country. Without diligent monitoring, newly-passed anti-terrorist legislation could be used as arbitrary justification for "legal" charges, arrests, and detainment of non-citizens or those perceived to "look" or "act different," fostered by anti-immigration sentiment. Several national organizations, such as the National Immigration Law Center, National Council of *La Raza*, and the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, among others, are emphasizing this issue and advocating immigrant rights.

We often do not think about how ingrained others' lives are in the material products that are part of our everyday lives. There are individual experiences sewn and fabricated within the consumer goods we so readily purchase. As Barbara Ehrenreich (2000) maintains, "every stitch of every garment we wear contains the hidden story of a woman's life and struggles" (44). A foundational effort of this project has been to chronicle the multiplicity and diversity of these women and their coping strategies as they map out and traverse their existences. Borders now yield to crossroads more than ever, and the input of all women in the Appalachian region must be regarded as having consequence if social justice endeavors are to be as representative as possible. Further research and understanding of the work lives of women will contribute to efforts to determine ways to both assess and address the effects of life in gendered labor fields in the Appalachian region. I found it difficult to draw parameters around the myriad issues interlinking the global textile industry and the words of women working within it.

This study does not attempt to be conclusive (nor could it be), but presents vignettes of women's lives. Personal accounts offer insight into situations that broaden the scope of knowledge about them. Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham maintain

> A series of oral testimonies does not make a history. History is worked over more consciously; different sources open up various ways of looking at what happened….interviews are fragments, an individual life is a fragment and as an individual caught for a moment presents a fragment of a fragment. The personal oral account can be a source not for knowing that something was so, but for wondering about questions that are not often considered (1977).

The issues that emerged from these women's stories compel these topics as stimuli for further

research. More inquiry into these areas will provide further insight about the complex contextual factors of the region's labor industries, worker representation and organization, and its constantly changing human landscape. Unsound trade policies, such as NAFTA and more recently, the FTAA, have meant the loss of American jobs by the downward pressure on U.S. wages, working conditions, and worker safety, eroding the ability of particular governments to protect occupational and environmental health and safety within their jurisdictions. These factors have contributed to political and economic instability and growing social inequality worldwide. While this does paint a grim and challenging picture, growing recognition of the ill-effects of globalization and international worker solidarity offers great hope for empowerment and change.

The competitive nature of corporate capitalism is underpinned by traditional divisions and polarizations within society and labor. As a counter to this, community coalition building and collective labor organizing have been and will be increasingly pivotal in creating social and labor justice. Worker rights and economic integrity are primary to social justice, and integral to human rights. We must continue to interrogate global/local corporate practices and identify specific and common concerns to strengthen the positions of all women workers, and indeed all workers, in southern Appalachia, Latin America, and throughout the world.

ENDNOTES

A number of the following endnotes include URLs for links to Internet resources regarding these particular topics and related issues. I have not reviewed each of these in depth, and I do not make any endorsement of the content of these sources. I encourage readers to continue research and consideration of the issues presented here.

[1] FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) is an expansion of NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement), whose purpose is to combine the economies of the Western Hemisphere (at the moment, excluding Cuba) into a single free trade zone.
http://www.ftaa-alca.org/alca_e.asp
http://fedlaw.gsa.gov/legal27qnafta.htm
http://www.stopftaa.org/info/index.html

[2] Channel One is a 12-minute current events television program, containing two minutes of commercials, shown in participating public schools. Channel One provides schools televisions, two VCR's, and a fixed satellite dish that picks up only Channel One signals. Controversy surrounds Channel One, as it is often given as a primary example of the "corporatization" of public schools.
http://www.commercialalert.org/channel_one/

[3] "Quebec" refers to the April 2001 NAFTA meeting in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, focused on the FTAA. This was one of a continuation of international globalization protests ignited by the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle, Washington, in November 1999, and includes protests of policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The G8 protest in Genoa, Italy in July 2001 was met with an increased policing and "crackdown" on summit protestors.
http://www.globalexchange.org/ftaa/
http://www.indymedia.org

[4] TIRN is a coalition of community, church, and labor organizations, formed in 1989 by CORA (Commission on Religion in Appalachia), the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (now UNITE), and the Highlander Research and Education Center to address the onslaught of plant closings in the East Tennessee area. Since its formation, TIRN has sought to strengthen worker solidarity in a number of ways, including a series of worker-to-worker exchanges with Mexico. TIRN works collaboratively with the Mexico Solidarity Network, Global Exchange, Women's Edge, the Alliance for Responsible Trade, the Hemispheric Social Alliance, and the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade.
http://www.tirn.org/

[5] For a revealing essay exploring issues of race and gender in relationship to other social groups in the South (in this case, women of the Waccamaw tribe of North Carolina), see Patricia B. Lerch (1999), "'A Good Ol' Woman:'" Relations of Race and Gender in an Indian Community" in *Neither Separate nor Equal: Women, Race, and Class in the South* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999). Also see the works of Marilou Awiatka, including *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993), and *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet* (Bell Buckle, TN: Iris Press, 1995).

Dr. Linda Tate and Linda Trollinger both explore in their research the complexities of Native American identities, and among other issues, the fragmentation and reclamation of Native heritage.
http://www.fulcrum-books.com/html/awiakta.html
http://www.fulcrum-books.com/html/selu.html
http://webpages.marshall.edu/~johns121/index2.html
http://www.marshall.edu/csega/Trollinger.htm

[6] *Melungeon* is a word connoting a current ethnic heritage movement, located primarily in southern Appalachia, that seeks to identify a complex presence of historically unrecognized, discriminated, and mixed-race ethnic groups of Appalachia, particularly represented by descent from Turkic and other Mediterranean groups.
http://www.geocities.com/BourbonStreet/Inn/1024/
http://members.aol.com/strat43z/melung.html
http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~mtnties/mlgnfaq.html

[7] With the exception of the quote by Rick Bragg (p. 39), all quotations that appear at section openings are taken from the syllabus American Studies 416, *Southern California Culture: A Study of American Regionalism*, taught by Professor Michael Steiner, California State University, Fullerton.

[8] *Mestiza/o* is a broad concept of the "mixture" and fusion of multiple identities that has expanded to encompass race, language, gender, sexuality, geography, nationality, and history.

[9] The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program is a federal entitlement program, established under the Trade Act of 1974, that provides aid to workers who lose their jobs or whose hours of work and wages are reduced as a result

of the decrease of domestic work due to the increase of imports. Workers may be eligible for training, education, job search and relocation allowances, income supplements, and other re-employment services. http://www.doleta.gov/programs/factsht/taa.htm

[10]*Dia de los Muertes* (Day of the Dead) is a Mexican day of remembrance of ancestors and loved ones who are deceased, celebrated on November 2, observed most prominently in the southern regions of the country. http://www.dayofthedead.com/