

The farthest frontier

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The paper "The Farthest Frontier" is a great example of an article review on gender & sexual studies. In "The Farthest Frontier", journalist Martha Brant uses the Mexican town of Ciudad Juarez to illustrate the shifting nature of gender roles in contemporary Latin America. Located just south of Texas, the city is a border town and the author argues that this location and the assembly plants near there - maquilas -- allow it to develop progressive gender reforms that other Mexican cities lag. "Like their American sisters, these women are finding that economic independence -- and gradual cultural change -- are leading to new attitudes about everything from housework to marriage to sexuality." The article discusses the evolution of the Maquilera workers in 1980 from lowly paid and under-regarded to their current status as supervisors and sometimes engineers. Clearly drawing a distinction between wealth and social privilege, the article seems to argue that the societal shift in wealth that these women have experienced has allowed them more rights and respect as citizens. "As for Arrieta, the 24 men directly reporting to her today don't seem to begrudge her seniority. 'The culture is a little more open now,' she says.

A key issue is whether the plans are exploiting the women or giving them a hand up in their lives. It points out various instances where the companies have adapted to better suit the needs of workers with children but also points out instances where employers refuse to hire pregnant women or demand sex for promotions. The government has even stepped in with progressive reforms, as this summer the Mexican Congress will consider reforms to end hiring discrimination based on pregnancy. Although women have gradually gained more power in the workplace, the article barely

references the low salaries -- \$50 a week - that they continue to receive, a pittance compared to their neighbors to the north. It's clear the while gender roles have shifted because of the economic advantages the maquilas offer, society is still lagging inequitable income for its world citizens.