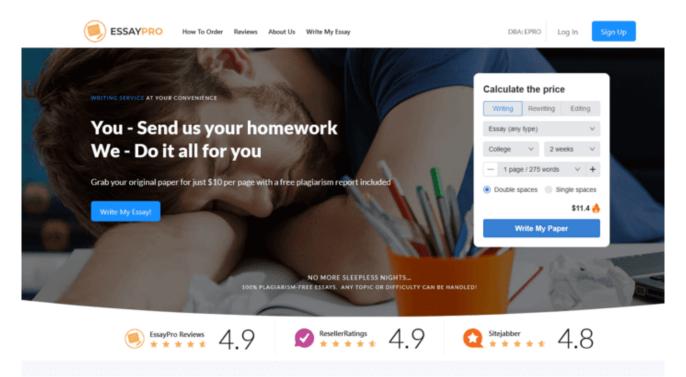
Maquiladoras and the Exploitation of Women's Bodies



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Maquiladoras and the Exploitation of Women's Bodies
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In a changing economic and political climate gender stereotypes in Juárez, Mexico refuse to change. With an increasing number of women forced into the workplace in maquiladoras(1), men's position and women's assumed position in society is being challenged. This changing economic environment in an unchanging cultural environment is part of the reason that young women are <u>disappearing</u> being raped and mutilated before ultimately being killed and "abandoned like meat by-products in the desert" (Pérez, March 2004). These women's bodies are entering unknowingly and unwilling into a war about cultural norms and a changing economic atmosphere.
The exploitation of and war on women's bodies in Juárez was set in motion long before they began being murdered in large numbers; it was instigated in the maquiladoras were they were working. Juárez is a popular site for US Fortune500 companies to place factories that have very law cost and optional taxes. The more than 500 maquiladoras operating in Juárez have drawn an influx of Mexicans who hope to get rich quickly. While

the workers in maquiladoras are better of financially than they would be anywhere else, the maquiladora environment and cities are far from ideal. Maquiladoras employ mostly young women.(2)

In a machismo culture women are <u>preferred</u> to men as workers in the maquiladoras because they can be paid substantially lower wages, while they also have better manual dexterity. Years of sexist attitudes have created an environment where this pay gap not only possible but entirely acceptable. The average wage is from four to seven dollars for a nine-hour work day and there are no benefits offered to workers. ...

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...gainst societal norms that require them to be at home. This violation of the cultural norm may be part of the reason why their bodies are later abducted, raped, mutilated and later left in the desert. This phenomenon of murder is a clear message to the women of Juárez that they are overstepping their bounds and that the murders will continue—either until views change or the women step back into their prescribed roles.

- 1. Spanish word for factory. Used to refer to the factories in Mexico run by American companies where many of the women of Juárez work.
- 2. Although most of these factories have an official policy of hiring only women aged sixteen or older, many workers can forge documents and be hired as young as twelve possibly younger.
- 3. Mestiza means mixed in Spanish. Mestiza was originally used to refer to someone with mixed native and European blood.

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