



# Making Up the Difference (Louann Atkins Temple Women & Culture)

*Erynn Casanova*

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## **Making Up the Difference (Louann Atkins Temple Women & Culture)** Erynn Casanova

Globalization and economic restructuring have decimated formal jobs in developing countries, pushing many women into informal employment such as direct selling of cosmetics, perfume, and other personal care products as a way to "make up the difference" between household income and expenses. In Ecuador, with its persistent economic crisis and few opportunities for financially and personally rewarding work, women increasingly choose direct selling as a way to earn income by activating their social networks. While few women earn the cars and trips that are iconic prizes in the direct selling organization, many use direct selling as part of a set of household survival strategies. In this first in-depth study of a cosmetics direct selling organization in Latin America, Erynn Masi de Casanova explores women's identities as workers, including their juggling of paid work and domestic responsibilities, their ideas about professional appearance, and their strategies for collecting money from customers. Focusing on women who work for the country's leading direct selling organization, she offers fascinating portraits of the everyday lives of women selling personal care products in Ecuador's largest city, Guayaquil. Addressing gender relations (including a look at men's direct and indirect involvement), the importance of image, and the social and economic context of direct selling, Casanova challenges assumptions that this kind of flexible employment resolves women's work/home conflicts and offers an important new perspective on women's work in developing countries.

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