WEST INDIAN CHILDCARE PROVIDERS IN BROOKLYN: CREATING COMMUNITY IN PUBLIC SPACES AND PRIVATE PLACES

by

TAMARA MOSE BROWN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2008

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____	_____
Date	Chair of Examining Committee Prof. Barbara Katz Rothman
_____	_____
Date	Executive Officer Prof. Philip Kasinitz
	Prof. William Kornblum
	_____
	Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

WEST INDIAN CHILDCARE PROVIDERS IN BROOKLYN:
CREATING COMMUNITY IN PUBLIC SPACES AND PRIVATE PLACES

by

Tamara Mose Brown

Advisor: Barbara Katz Rothman

Childcare labor is an integral sector of New York City's economic infrastructure. This dissertation is an ethnographic study of a community of West Indian childcare providers working in gentrified neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. My research illuminates a collective life among this group of women and their ability to preserve their West Indian culture through daily social interactions in public places. I learned from these women about the social world that is created based on ethnic identifiers such as food, language, and economic systems that shape workdays beyond the responsibilities of taking care of children. I observed how these childcare providers created community in both public and private spaces through the use of cellular phones and through labor organizing. Moreover, I discovered how public park employees and others engaged in the surveillance of childcare providers in public spaces. This research demonstrates the textures of childcare providers' daily work, not only the subordination they feel as employees, but of the continuous attempt to temporarily invert this subordination allowing providers to work with a sense that they are in control of how their workdays are shaped. It is this inversion that allows West Indian childcare providers to tolerate challenges and devise solutions to be carried out during their workday. Because childcare is embedded in the larger economic structures, providers view their work as

unchangeable, therefore, negotiating public places in gentrifying Brooklyn proved to be an ongoing struggle for providers while at the same time providing them with social spaces needed to resist isolation.

Preface

My desire to understand the relationship between paid childcare providers and their use of public places emerged from my experience as a scholar who suddenly plunged into motherhood. While not a paid childcare provider, I am a mother of two toddlers and have spent many hours of many days in public places while caring for children. After giving birth to my first child, a daughter, in 2004, I began gravitating to the public park three blocks from the apartment that my husband and I rented because I had been socialized to believe that was what you do when you're a new mother. Even though my daughter was far too young to appreciate the playground activities made available to her, I continued visiting the park on a daily basis, (twice a day once my son was born a year later) to break the monotony of days filled with graduate coursework, changing diapers, multiple feedings, and talking to this little creature who could only stare back at me and gesture. At first, it did not strike me as odd that most park users were either adult Latina or Filipina caregivers with small white children since I had just come from Los Angeles. Once I became a regular Brooklyn park user, however, I was intrigued by the familiar West Indian accents I heard from the Black women caregivers using public parks. I recognized these accents since I had grown up in a Trinidadian immigrant household in Canada, and this peaked my interest.

After frequenting the parks for some weeks, I began to notice that these Caribbean-born women and their charges were, in fact, the primary users of this park during weekdays. Although I had lived in the area for over a year before my first park visit, I realized I had never seen any of these women living in the neighborhood. I wondered where these women lived and why they came to these parks in such large

numbers to take care of children whom I assumed to be other people's, an assumption I later found to be correct. After all, I had found an Italian-American part-time babysitter who lived right next to me in the home where she was raised. Would there not be enough babysitters available in the neighborhood that families could call on? Furthermore, I questioned the rationale of having a West Indian babysitter who might bring a different ethos to a home and to a public park that was generally not in a West Indian community. I decided at that moment to investigate the matter.

The connection between West Indian childcare providers and their use of public places was not a subject of intellectual importance during my academic study, where I encountered matters of race, ethnicity, immigration, political economy, and transnational motherhood. However, my path did lead me to topics involving care, culture, globalization and its effects, and issues of urban gentrification. The relationship between West Indian domestic workers and the use of public places/spaces such as public parks seemed worthy of further investigation.

As I encountered West Indian childcare providers over a two-year span in public places and discussed everyday activities and shared food with them, or simply allowed the children to play with one another, I became more aware of the significance of the relationship between West Indian childcare providers and public parks. There was something more than simply getting out of the house and going to the parks with their charges that brought these women to such public places in neighborhoods that perhaps would otherwise reject them. I discovered that most of these "sitters" or "nannies," as they call themselves, lived near Flatbush Avenue, one of the major West Indian ethnic enclaves and shopping districts in Brooklyn, which is at most seven major street blocks

away from the area in which their employers lived. This fact awakened me to the role of gentrification in the employment of these women.

Simple walks down the street with West Indian babysitters in a gentrifying Brooklyn neighborhood slowly turned into note-taking events, interviews, and observations of social networks being developed. In this work, I provide insights into a social world that has been written about extensively, but without reference to the human relations babysitters form that help stave off some of the frequently noted isolation felt among paid childcare providers.

I use Simmel's concept of "sociability" to frame and characterize the micro interactions that were observed since there was distinct satisfaction derived from the sociation between babysitters that manifested through various social forms (1964). Other sociological studies have used this concept of sociability to problematize other social groups and their community identity in public places (Duneier 1992; Gans 1962; Wacquant 2004). Among West Indian babysitters, the unconscious (and sometimes conscious) use of cultural preservation tactics combated what may be perceived as potential isolation in their daily work routines. They created, if only temporarily, social spaces in public places thus transforming their workdays into ongoing interaction. As Simmel states:

> They are factors in sociation only when they transform the mere aggregation of isolated individuals into specific forms of being with and for one another—forms that are subsumed under the general concept of interaction. Sociation thus is the form….in which individuals grow together into units that satisfy their interests. These interests, whether they are sensuous or ideal, momentary or lasting, conscious or unconscious, causal or teleological, form the basis of human societies (1964:41)

Simmel explains how "…these sociations are also characterized, precisely, by a feeling, among their members, of being sociated and by the satisfaction derived from this" (1964:43). This *play-form of sociation* he calls sociability "…entirely depends on the personalities among whom it occurs" (Simmel 1964:45). These personalities then mold the social gatherings that are regulated through relations with one another in public places. It is through this lens that I approach the varied ways that West Indian childcare providers create social spaces in public places.

Table of Contents

Introduction

At least two to three mornings a week around 9:30am, after eating breakfast, showering, getting dressed and giving a quick send off to my husband through the "waving window," I prepare a diaper bag and walk my one-year-old son and two-year-old daughter in their double jogger stroller across the highway bridge and then five blocks to the park. As I arrive at the second block, after walking by a local bakery, I pass a three foot high Mother of Mary statue embedded in the front stoop area of a brownstone home that indicates I should say a "Hail Mary." Like the good Catholic my mother always wanted, I say my Hail Mary to clear my conscience. With the fresh smell of coffee and chocolate stuffed croissants on my mind, I continue along my path in this once predominantly Catholic, Italian neighborhood towards one of Brooklyn's oldest public parks. As I look at my surroundings, I am reminded of the changes that are continuously occurring in the area.

This newly gentrified area has a high density of three-to five-story brownstones on almost every street. Many of these building are under renovation by the incoming young white middle-class who are buying homes for close to and often over one million dollars, or renting homes at near-Manhattan rates. Where lunching on pizza was once the choice for many in the mid-day rush hour and sitting on your front stoop was your main form of entertainment, I now find organic paninis with vegan options and a "mommy and me" yoga class on every block. The "Grups"[1] with their fashionable white iPod earplugs, over the shoulder messenger bag, and t-shirts that appear torn at the seams yet cost well

[1] This term was inspired by Star Trek where a virus killed anyone who demonstrated the signs of the aging process. It is used by Adam Sternbergh in New York magazine as an alternative to the term yuppie or hipster (2007).

over fifty dollars, are the newest cultural group in Brooklyn's gentrifying neighborhoods. Where is the older generation? I see evidence of the once dominant ethnic group in the form of older Italian men in their collared dress shirts with front pleated slacks and worn dark-colored shoes. Some congregate along the perimeter of the park for regular discussions of daily events or to find out when the next great bocce ball tournament will take place. Others can be seen chatting through the dimly-lit doors of Italian social clubs adorned with signs stating "Members Only" that practically demand a peek from passersby.

I usually arrive at the park around ten o'clock. I enter through the open gates of the basketball courts just off one of the main shopping streets, directly across from an Italian restaurant, a pet store, local grocery, insurance company, senior center, and laundromat. I walk diagonally across the basketball courts, typically empty during that time of the weekday, past the fenced-in bocce ball alley to my right, and through the second entrance of a fence that separates the recently-painted courts from the large courtyard area in the middle there of which there is a statue commemorating those men who gave their lives in World War I. Twenty-one green park benches and three picnic tables border the edges of this space. It is sparsely populated by babysitters, stay-at-home parents, and older local residents, many of whom are Italian immigrants, and of course children, strollers, and pigeons waiting patiently until a child drops a snack. Behind the benches are several large trees, which in the summer can look lush, but in the winter stand strong and naked. On the south side of the park, and regardless of where you are sitting, you can see the neighborhood elementary school, and on the north side, the newly

opened chain drug store, several four-story brownstone homes, and the entrance to a subway station.

I continue my walk across the courtyard, through a narrow ramp bordered by a cast iron fence. This ramp leads downward toward a playground where a children's sprinkler separates two play areas, one for infants and toddlers, and the other for older children. Both have swing sets and jungle gyms and are enclosed by iron gates. There is a public restroom area with a sink and two stalls (one for men and one for women) separated by a storage space with upkeep equipment such as brooms, rakes, leaf blowers, and cleaners. The city park employees (many of them African American) who use this equipment wear blue and green uniforms and have begun their duties for the day by the time I arrive. At this point, I usually look out for some of the West Indian sitters that regularly enter the park area after ten o'clock. As a neighborhood resident, I always feel self-conscious as I prepare to absorb the daily events that may or may not arise in the West Indian childcare community, not knowing how they actually perceive me.

As I sit, a svelte woman walks toward me, well-groomed from head to toe. Her jet black hair is tied up in a large pony tail—pin straight, and if I close my eyes and take a deep breath, the fresh smell of Dark and Lovely hair relaxer penetrates my nostrils. Her voluptuous lips, marking the beauty of her ancestors, are red like strawberries, her eyes deep black. Black women with white children can be seen at every turn.

***

I have lived in the neighborhood of one of my observation sites for over three years, just a few blocks away from the main park where many childcare providers spend their days. As a user of this public place I first became interested in what it means to

work in the community as a childcare provider. These community streets and public parks in Brooklyn became quasi offices for several babysitters, thus rendering them visible to the rest of the community and ultimately their employers.

For several days each week, I spent time in the park with my daughter and eventually both my daughter and son. My purpose was two-fold. My children benefited from playing and socializing with other children and adults and I would participate in the conversations and daily activities of different types of park constituents. Mainly I spent time with West Indian childcare providers because I was visibly marked as "other than potential employer status" in the eyes of the sitters. After all, I was with two children who were of similar complexion to me rendering me "mother to the children" and not a potential nuisance. Somehow my lighter but obviously black phenotype meant that I didn't fit the common characteristic of a neighborhood member (meaning white) and because I was using the parks during the weekdays I also was not a "working mother" in the eyes of the sitters at first. This issue of phenotype and my own West Indian identity among the sitters will be taken up in later chapters. In the beginning, I believed that the park acted as a throughway for expelling the energy of children and deterring some of the monotony of the workday at home, but I later found it to be much more than that. The public park was a venue for participating in sociability and cultural preservation for many babysitters, as well as stay-at-home parents. While cultural preservation occurred on multiple levels for various park goers, it was complex and partially determined the daily events that children would be involved in. For babysitters, the park became, among other things: a place where food is exchanged and talked about frequently, a central point for meeting before going about daily activities, and a place where solidarity was formed.

The children being cared for in this public place became the benefactors of such solidarity and sociability in part by forming relationships with other children and their caregivers in their neighborhoods, sometimes unbeknownst to their parents.

In this dissertation, I provide a framework for understanding how social spaces are shaped by West Indian babysitters who move between public and private places in a gentrified neighborhood, how their identities are reconstructed through these spaces, and the meanings they create in their everyday interactions.

My position as a field researcher creates inevitable self-consciousness and biases in terms of the interpretations I offer. This is a given drawback in doing fieldwork. However, I am able to obtain access to certain information which has not yet been written about. Through the similarity between my heritage and that of my participants I was allowed to move from location to location, both public and private, and to trace daily social space construction by looking beyond domestic work alone to define these women's lived experiences. This knowledge is augmented by the longitudinal approach of my participant observation. Although I cannot truly confirm my acceptance in the group I studied, I have throughout this process, had experiences that place me uniquely among participants. Through this ethnic similarity, I was able to gain insights into a world filled with juxtaposition and solidarity.

***

Daily life in the park is filled with mundane activity—caregivers feeding a child, children playing on a slide, then on a swing, then going back to the slide, and another feeding by caregivers. But the women presented in this research have somehow managed to develop a sense of community out of, or in spite of, these routines. The park is a

public place, which I define as a physical and geographical structure with specific boundaries[2]. Specifically, I will look at public places as the point of contact for sociability, as do other urban and community studies (Anderson 2004; Duneier 1999; Jacobs 1961).

Work for many female domestic workers is seen as an extension of the care they give to their own family members (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) and when that work is put into question by the employer, disappointment prevails among childcare providers. This work defines, in many ways, the caregivers as mothers and it is in public places (i.e. parks, libraries, other play spaces, and even commercial streets) in which these self-concepts are reified. Over time, I observed that a social space (Fainstein and Campbell 2003) was created by territorializing these public places through the cultural differences (language, food culture, forms of discipline) that were continuously exercised through the process of interaction[3] (between sitters and children and between the sitters themselves). This difference in culture from the employers who hired these childcare providers allowed for resistance to the homogenization of the spaces around the providers, thereby creating power within the group of West Indian babysitters. The public places, then, were rematerialized where codes and signs become evidenced through interests that organized their daily routines into meaningful interaction (Simmel 1964). In this created social space, the importance of community became a point of investigation. Shared experiences, whether cultural, historical, or mundane, created solidarity within a social space (Venkatesh 2000; Whyte 1943). So when I would hear sitters on their cell phones

---

[2] There are contradictory interpretations of whether places and spaces are different constructs see Berman 2002, Harvey 2002, Lefebvre 2002.

[3] See Lefebvre (1991) for in depth discussion of public places used in the interaction process.

or watch them share food or even observe them "on the bench", I observed that specific linguistic cues and physical codes were used to differentiate their social space from others in the parks (see chapter four for more information). This ability to participate in sociability (Simmel 1964) and ultimately create a unique social space, I argue, leads to cultural preservation, which for many is a successful alternative to employer imposed isolation when working in domestic arenas.

Social Space and Public Place

Why are place and space important? The city location alone cannot provide enough information about a group of people. The study of the "symbolic association" of people and community helps one to truly comprehend how places and spaces are created (Evans 2003). The social spaces occupied by babysitters along with the relationships with families for which they provide care are considerably more intimate than any other kind of work space (Tronto 2002), especially given that babysitters are being paid to demonstrate care in a variety of ways and places. Yet many studies of West Indian domestic workers, which are up to twenty years old, bypass the importance of the interaction order (Goffman 1983) within the public place of the park. While it is known that public parks in Brooklyn act as an anchor to the larger community, how they anchor the face-to-face interactions of West Indian sitters specifically is largely missing from studies. Thus, the formation of community and the meanings created by these women within public parks have been overlooked.

Gentrification

One of my sites was once a working-class neighborhood composed primarily of first generation Latinos and Italians, and saw a change in population from 1995-2005.[4] The population is now made up of mostly white middle-class residents from a variety of backgrounds (both European and American), many of whom are former Manhattanites with young children. The community is currently regarded as an area where professional and college-educated young couples move in (Smith 1981). Many of these residents work both in and out of the home. With a higher median household income than in the 1980's[5], these families seek the comforts of a friendly neighborhood with the unique "Manhattan-style" conveniences. Metaphorically, gentrification has been described as the "taming and civilization of wild or savage environments…making a home or familial place from what was previously foreign or hostile territory" (Miller et al. 1998:197). More concretely, gentrification is defined as "a process of spatial and social differentiation" that results from the influx of middle-class people into low-income areas (Zukin 1987:131). Gentrification, then, always focuses on changes in residents.

Gentrification includes changes in commercial streets and services, but more importantly, changes in population demographics and the lifestyle accommodations that

---

[4] Census data shows a significant decline in Italian and Spanish speaking homes over the last three decades and a simultaneous increase in English spoken in the home. This is a common concern among the first generation immigrant residents of gentrified neighborhoods in Brooklyn. *Language Spoken at Home for residence of Carroll Gardens/Red Hook (1980, 1990,2000)* Infoshare online New York: Community Studies of New York, Inc.

[5] See Appendix A to view median household income numbers for one research site from 1980, 1990, and 2000: Carroll Gardens/Red Hook.

are made on behalf of the incoming group. This lifestyle change of gentrified areas in Brooklyn includes two-income households in which both parents work in Manhattan, requiring the services of childcare providers for longer hours to accommodate commuting to and from to Brooklyn. There are also those employers who are part of what Richard Florida (2005) calls the "Creative Class"[6] or what Julia Wrigley calls the "cultural specialists" (1999), working as freelancers from home (four parents in this research worked from home regularly), but requiring childcare while they work, thus forcing childcare providers out of the home and into public places. The issue with creative class workers for many of employees is that this creates a flexible workday making childcare more difficult, not less. When the employer is home, providers have limited use of the private space of the employer and does not necessarily feel comfortable using the private spaces in the way that she normally would. Often, childcare providers have to keep the noise level to a minimum so that the employer can work from home, which is challenging when dealing with small children. In addition, childcare providers have to continuously explain to the children why they cannot enter the area the parent is working in, which can create further distractions throughout the day. It is because of these changes, childcare providers often spend more weekday hours in the neighborhood that their employers live in. Gentrification of an area also raises issues related to entitlement to public places

[6] Florida describes this class of young and talented workers who migrated to metro areas in the 1990's with skills in product design, video editing, consulting, and hedge funding as a class that demanded higher salaries that adjusted quickly with higher housing prices and rising living costs. This creative class created cultural wars with those who held traditional virtues and obligations (2004).

because of race and class and surveillance tactics used by employers while working away from home[7].

West Indian sitters use public spaces for work on behalf of the middle class, mainly during the weekdays, and essentially act the keepers of this middle-class status based on their presence alone. My research looks at the contradictions that arise out of the obvious racial differences between sitters, their employers, children/babies, and stay-at-home mothers. These contradictions are continuously negotiated in both the public social spaces created in public parks and the private spaces of the employer's home. This project, therefore, also aims to discuss the sitters' bodies as marked by class and race locations within the social order of public spaces, thereby juxtaposing their authority in the private space of the employer's home with the public social spaces of the "white" gentrified neighborhood (Berman 2002; Mitchell and Staeheli 2005; Zukin 1995). Through the aesthetics and control of a public place and space we understand the setting for West Indian babysitters and their daily interactions.

I learned about the various ways in which West Indian babysitters express their unique social space in the face of the controls and tensions inherent in their work.

---

[7] The gentrified neighborhood that I resided in and used as one of my research sites maintains a presence from the pre-gentrification population or "old timers" who are predominantly Italian, and some Latino. There were some blacks living in the neighborhood, but the majority resided in nearby housing projects that were considered hostile territory. Some housing project residents would shop on nearby commercial streets that bordered the gentrifying neighborhood, but that spill over was limited. This is important because it means that participants in my study were marked racially and probably considered outsiders to many of the old timers thereby perhaps fostering surveillance in public places. Other gentrifying neighborhoods in Brooklyn with a predominantly black population such as Fort Greene and Prospect-Lefferts Gardens or a substantial black minority among older working class residents from a variety of backgrounds in areas such as Park Slope and Boerum Hill may not see my participants as outsiders in the same way.

Specifically, I observed their acute awareness and understanding of racial and ethnic identity, and the implications for their workdays. In the parks, I witnessed how special events organized by babysitters for babysitters, and typically centered on the sharing of food, solidified their relationships and even sometimes hindered them.

I also learned from sitters and domestic workers' advocates how employers' practice of ranking orders of ethnicity through the internet can affect the hiring process for babysitters, but that word-of-mouth truly carries weight in the hiring process. Some West Indian women I interviewed were cognizant of their vulnerability in the hiring process as well as in maintaining their current positions and therefore made sacrifices to accommodate their employers while suffering in what appeared to be a silenced world.

While my research took place mainly in smaller public parks in Brooklyn, I explored areas outside of that public place. I also studied the meanings created by West Indian babysitters in the public library, other local play spaces, and even in my own home where several sitters came to spend time with the children they cared for. Through this shadowing and as an example of extended place methods (Duneier 1999), I learned of the intimate relationships these women had with one another and how social spaces could be mobilized and yet severed as providers entered the private spaces of their employer's home. Aside from learning about the workday experiences of these women, I learnt about the educational aspirations that many have. This allowed me to understand aspects of the private lives of first-generation immigrant women. Though some women expressed fears about going back to school, more often the providers expressed a desire to further educate themselves. In this aim, they had the moral support of the older babysitters. This highlighted for me the idea that domestic work for younger West Indian

babysitters was often a temporary transition to living the American Dream, while for the older ones, their work was often seen as a means to an end of maintaining their established aspirations to the American Dream.

Most of my time in public parks focused on West Indian women who were hired to care for white children. I slowly discovered that the structure of the workday had several components that led to a social order that embodied race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. In addition, this ordered workday became a mechanism through which potential employers and other park goers categorize babysitters. Similar studies demonstrate how West Indian women migrate to the U.S. with the objective of finding work that can better their family's life chances[8] and depend on the existing cultural networks to find domestic work. My research is different because it focuses on the lived experiences of work.

Public Place Methods

I first entered this social group through frequent visits to the local park with my newborn daughter in 2004. This is critical because my child acted as an aide throughout my research (Cassell 1987). In the park, I came to know Hazel, a Guyanese childcare provider, who later introduced me to others in her occupational and social circle including West Indian babysitters from Guyana, Trinidad, and St. Lucia.

After two months, I became a fixture among this group of women and introductions to other sitters and participation in daily activities took place among a variety of social groups with overlapping membership. After two years in the field, I spent several hours two to three days each week with babysitters at the park and in other

[8] Life Chances can encompass, but are not limited to, health status, socioeconomic environment, joblessness, educational attainment, and longer life expectancy.

public places such as the local library, children's movement classes, and on playdates held in private homes. While I did not work as a babysitter for other people's children, I spent my days as someone who cares for children throughout the workdays with additional paid childcare, from the Fall of 2004 to Spring 2007 and thus felt that I could somewhat relate to the monotony of the days these childcare providers endured. It is noteworthy that many of these women also have their own biological children to care for outside of their duties to their employers, making their job more difficult than my own privileged situation.

As a member of the same racial and ethnic group these women belong to, I found myself treated as a cultural "insider" after spending some time in the parks. This was displayed through the sitters' use of specific West Indian idioms and intentional accent dramatizations that only someone familiar with West Indian culture would understand. I was also seen as a student and college teacher who could help some of the younger babysitters navigate the higher educational system in New York City (see Methods chapter for more information). However, I was also continuously met with challenges due to my ethnic background. There was a seemingly inherent mistrust among the West Indian babysitters that didn't allow many of them to know each other's names, even after seeing one another at parks and other play spaces for over three years. Once I entered the field and babysitters began to understand that not only was I participating in activities as a parent, but that I had an interest in what West Indian babysitters "do", some sitters chose not to "go on record" to tell me the details of their lives, but did continue to interact with me and tell me specific information that they felt would be useful for my research. Sometimes it appeared as though having someone to listen to their story was better than

having no one listen at all. They needed a witness to their daily lived experiences and I was the sitters' witness (not in a legal sense).

My field participation was used to observe meanings as they were being constructed by participants as well to show patterns of action in their immediate context (Katz 1997). It also allowed me to trace any inconsistencies inherent in the reflexive meanings that are attributed by participants during the formal interview process (Becker 1996; Katz 1997; Wieder 1974). Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to reflect on events while providing more in-depth narratives as constructed or remembered. Some of these semi-structured interviews took place in my own home where some of the babysitters and I cooked West Indian food for lunch while the kids played in the house.

I wanted to understand the politics behind efforts to organize these women into a more cohesive group where wages were discussed openly and benefits negotiated with employers for a better standard of living. For this reason, additional interviews were conducted at the offices of volunteer organizations such as Domestic Workers United and Immigrants Justice Solidarity Project (IJSP) where I also volunteered my time. Through participant observation at the DWU and IJSP organizations, I was able to experience the monthly efforts made in outreach work to domestic workers from all over New York City, but primarily West Indian women from Brooklyn. At the volunteer organizations, concerns were addressed on multiple levels from training sessions in CPR to free legal services for those whose rights were violated in their workplace. I also questioned local residents, the employers of West Indian childcare providers, local store owners, and park personnel. More than twenty five interviews with babysitters were conducted in which I asked about their "immigrant story" and its connection to childcare work. These

interviews, carried out on park benches, at private homes, and in coffee shops, lasted between one and four hours. I paid the babysitters fifty dollars when the interviews were complete. This was compensation for their time outside of work.

After two years, it became clear which of the daily events, conversations, and activities were typical of everyday public place interaction. Over this period, I was able to fine tune and expand my ethnographic methods with the use of a digital voice recorder. The recorder itself was usually attached to an outer pocket in my jacket or jeans, or sometimes on my diaper bag. It was used to pick up ambient noises along with some of the conversations I had with those babysitters whom I only met a few times in the park. All sitters were made aware that the recorder was turned on. Real names are not used due to the sensitive nature of the work these women do, the range of immigration statuses, and the anonymity of which I had ensured them. For those voices that were not intended to be recorded in public places (i.e. when a babysitter came up to talk with a sitter that I was interviewing or with whom I was having recorded conversations) I also use pseudonyms.

My goal is to make the ideas, sentiments, and voices of the participants heard. To ensure this, I have included in quotation marks reasonably accurate transcriptions of conversations. In some cases, I have taken the liberty to slightly edit some of the accents without risking points of intention in order to illustrate main ideas more clearly (i.e. when they said “deh” I would write it out as “they”). All descriptions of events have been ordered in actual time. Descriptors of the main participants may sometimes be altered in order to preserve anonymity since some babysitters could be easily identified. The terms

babysitter, sitter, nanny, and childcare provider are used interchangeably, reflecting the usage by participants themselves who appear to use these terms synonymously.

Terminology

I sat at a coffee table with my readings for my oral exams as I overheard what appeared to be a 'middle class white woman' with her navy blue $800 bugaboo baby stroller and her maybe one year old son in it (the age based on the fact that he was walking, but a little wobbly) as they were leaving through the door. The woman was talking on the phone saying, " I need someone just a few days a week. I just want to cry. It's not that Thomas's too much, it's that everything is too much."

But who is this someone? In order to construct a meaningful way of discussing childcare providers and probably due to some residue that lingered from when I worked in a more corporate environment where categorization "meant" something, I wanted to have a concrete term that would be respectful to the people participating in this work, the people who are fighting for the labor rights of these workers, and to the readers of this dissertation. Rollins pointed out that domestic workers did not like the term "girl" as did Colen when she said, "Many protest being referred to as 'the girl' or 'the maid." (1989:182).

The terms "nanny," as popularized by shows such as "Supernanny" and "Nanny 911" whose characters are all white and British, was used among West Indian childcare providers, and throughout popular journal writings (i.e. "nanny-cams"). It was only once I had immersed myself among West Indian childcare providers and their employers that I noticed terms such as babysitter, sitter, and caregiver being used interchangeably with the term nanny. In an effort to understand this further, I asked some of my participants to

explain how they define their role in the work that they do. The public use of the terms, I imagined, would have a different meaning than terms used in private spheres. What terms were employers using among their peers or with their "own" child. I wanted to know if they used terms such as servants in the way that Julia Wrigley writes about domestic workers (2005). One November morning, while swinging my children on the swingset in the public park beside Hazel (who is from Grenada) and the child she cared for, I asked, "Do you call yourselves "nannies?" She told me that they call themselves sitters or babysitters, but that the "parents call them nannies in order to make themselves seem important." What Hazel is alluding to is the (re)construction of middle-class status by having private in-home childcare, which is a means to maintaining class distinctions among white women (Palmer 1989, Rollins 1985).

By demonstrating the ability to hire an outside childcare provider, middle-class employers are publicly announcing their class status and thereby symbolically reconstituting it at the same time. It should be noted that no employer ever used the term servant as was used in traditional societies in the U.S., nor did West Indian workers ever use that term. However, not all babysitters felt the same way about specific terminology.

During a conversation with Janet one afternoon, she used the term "nanny" to describe the other West Indian women in the neighborhood that she works with. I stopped her right there to ask: "Why do you say Nanny and not babysitter?" She said, "Nanny, babysitter, it's the same thing". Molly, Rachel, and Debbie who were all close by seemed to agree. Rachel however, seemed more critical of my question and said, "Well, some people may think that nanny is at the very bottom [of the social/employment hierarchy] and then some people may think that saying nanny is something more than just

a babysitter because maybe they cook and clean. Molly and Debbie began to explore this further by saying that they know women who "cook, clean, shop, wash clothes…" I asked: "Do these sitters get paid more than if they only care for the children?" and Molly said no, not necessarily. So while some of the childcare providers make a distinction between terms as a reflection on the employer's status, other deem it a result of the amount of responsibilities that one does during a workday. In the end, it didn't matter which term I used in the field, all of the childcare providers encountered multiple terms, but in the end understood whom the employers or others were speaking of.

I asked the same questions of a worker at Domestic Workers United, an organization that is currently attempting to organize domestic workers in New York City (see chapter seven for more information). I asked the question about domestic workers' title such as "nanny," "housekeeper," "childcare worker," to determine which titles was most reflective of the work domestics do, or most respected by employees. I wanted to understand how domestics perceive their position. Ai-jen responded,

> I think that there's a range. I think that what we try to… do in terms of language…and recognizing that language is also very powerful in how people view this work… we try to really like talk about our identity and our role as workers…And then I think we like to recognize that it's important to also reclaim…and bring dignity to some ways in which we are defined by society…But that terms like 'help,' for example, aren't helpful…Or maid, you know, we don't generally use those kind of terms…But, anything like worker or housekeeper, or anything like that, we feel like yeah, that's the profession, and it should be respected.

I then asked Ai-jen more specifically about the terms "nanny" versus "babysitter" since that seemed to be part of the contention in my fieldwork when it came to work position terminology. Ai-jen disagreed and explained that in her work the contention does come up, but that "it's not usually that significant." She then continued,

> I mean, it definitely comes up, and some people prefer babysitter and some people prefer nanny. Like some people feel like nanny sounds more professional…And some people feel the other way around…So, I think in general we tend to support the ways in which workers define it, or what they like to be called…Unless it is in some way directly derogatory or something…Unless, you know, people feel like we need to reclaim 'maid,'" which some workers may feel better reflects the work that is being done.

Recognizing that language does play a role in how society in general views domestic work and childcare work more specifically, Ai-jen offers more explanation about using a term such as "maid" to describe the work that domestic workers do,

> You know, and they feel like that might make sense under some set of conditions. But in general it's about really talking about the fact that without this work, nothing else could happen. And that's always been true, and… it's part of how patriarchy has shaped our society and economy that like the whole system and society is built on taking for granted the work that women have done to raise families…You know, there would be no working class without women raising the working class, you know?

Echoing what Glenn has said about Japanese American women domestics, the American labor system structure affects how families are reconstituted (1986). Oakley (1974) adds to this discussion by demonstrating how the home becomes privatized as a result of this same industrial labor structure while Dill shows how the lack of standardization causes "negative structural condition" (1994). It is this lack of standardization of domestic work in general that Domestic Workers United is attempting to restructure into a more coherent work situation for domestics nationally (see chapter six for more on this). The ambivalence of childcare providers in terms of the title that is used to describe the work they do, left me to believe that the importance is really in the work that is done (although that work seems to go unrecognized often by the employers), not the categorization of the work, which could cause further fractures in the domestic worker's fight for equal labor rights. The work title that is used may also have to do with

the social organization of childcare and the individual class status' of West Indian domestic workers "back home."

I use childcare provider when speaking of my participants in general, but where the providers themselves use a specific title, I adhere to that specific term. In addition, I use other terms such as sitter or babysitter since this is the most common term used in the field among West Indian childcare providers.

"My" Child

While West Indian babysitters do not encourage the children they care for to call them anything but their first name, the amount of awake hours, hands-on caring hours that include everything from feeding, being tucked in for naps, and being taken out to play in the park by these women contribute to the socialization of children to refer to their sitters as "Mommy" or "Mamma". The sitters themselves often refer to the children they care for as "My Child" that mimics a parental feel when said. The children are often not corrected when out in the playground until they "should know better" according to a sitter I overheard one day in the park. Often, these sitters take on the responsibility of treating the children they care for as their own while understanding that there is no parallel to the same term being used for the employer/mother.

In order to help me further understand, Flora explained that she liked coming to the park and she proceeds to comment on the other nannies in the park as being "mostly nice, but some are not so attentive with the children, but most of them are nice." She continued, "We all take care of these children as if they are our own because we wouldn't want someone not taking care of our children."

Alluding to a form of closeness to the children these women are hired to care for, Sara, from Grenada, hosted a "play date" in the private space of her employer's home, which I was invited to join with my daughter. During the many milk feedings that occurred in the hours that I was participating in this play date, the nannies would all boast that about which child could hold their bottle on his or her own. But it was more than boasting, it was the personal attachment that they felt towards these children that turned the boasting into a competition. Catherine could be heard saying "look at Sally, look at her, well, *my* child can already hold her bottle by herself." All the babysitters laughed and then soon after, Molly piped up to say "well, *my* child can almost stand up and she's only nine months old." This professional competition of who could do what continued indicating that the childcare worker was doing well at her job, but what is most striking is the term "my child" that was used consistently throughout the conversation and in a tone that emphasized possessiveness.

Another instance was at the public library for storytime, where Molly held my son while I tried my best to reason with my daughter. The two year old girl that Molly cared for came up to her as Debbie said to the little girl from over my left shoulder, "you want your mamma." Molly then stated that the little girl was jealous because she was holding another baby. I took my son back up in my arms and then heard Taylor as she came to Debbie and called her "Mamma" and again two more times "mamma, mamma" and Debbie responded to her without a flinch. This term of endearment I imagined would slice the heart of any mother if they ever heard their child calling their childcare provider by that title (or not because it is an indication that the child feels secure). It was not the first time I had heard the term "mamma" or "mommy" being used with the sitters by the

children they care for. The sitters don't correct them, but rather respond knowingly to the term since the provider understands that she is being hired for that time that she is being called "mamma." Perhaps this should come as no surprise given the ambivalence that West Indian babysitters have toward the work title they are given by employers, other babysitters, and the media. It became increasingly obvious that these children were close to the childcare workers who will later be replaced (usually permanently) by school and other family members or family friends where there is no mistaking who is *your mamma*.

Providers and Employers

In my fieldwork, I had never heard a childcare provider call their employer by their first name. They would often refer to the employer as "the mother of the child." It would be considered disrespectful to call one's employer by their first name, or else show the reverse, that the provider was "too close" to their employer (an issue taken up later in the dissertation). Some employees couldn't even remember the name of their employers because they do not reference them by name (similar to the way providers do not know each other's names, but recognize them). When I ask them the name of their employer, they have to think about for a while. This could also be from the frequent turnover in families (some providers work for more than one family at a time or within a span of few years).

Employers are at times less comfortable with the term babysitter than the childcare providers because it devalues the work being done in the home or it makes them feel uncomfortable to admit that they (the employer) need childcare. Other employers, however, use the term freely to demonstrate the flexibility of the work in an

effort to devalue the time being spent apart from their children. Some simply use the term because that is the term the provider herself has used.

The Ladies

The term "ladies" is used by sitters to refer to other West Indian sitters. I would often hear one provider speak of other West Indian providers as "the ladies sitting over there" or "the ladies will be coming to the park just now." It appeared that the term is used not as a job based identity, but rather in some way to elevate the childcare provider's status. In addition, using the term "ladies" could be seen as a call for respect when referring to other childcare providers since in the Caribbean titles are often used for family members or even close friends of the family. For example, my children called all of the providers they met in the park "Auntie" because in Trinidad you must address your elders you visit with regularly with respect. To call a person by their first name, especially an elder, is considered somewhat rude or distant.

***

While several of the childcare providers who informed my research made clear what should be presented as an accurate portrait of their lives, I have solely selected the narratives and other material I feel illustrate life in public and private places. Interpretations of the research material presented in this dissertation are based on my own working knowledge and the tools of ethnographic analysis, which I detail in the following chapter on Methods.

I begin the empirical portion of this dissertation with a chapter addressing the historical path of domestic work in New York City and how it is that West Indian women came to be one of the dominant groups that does this type of work. This first chapter also

looks at the economic conditions in New York households, specifically those of the white middle-class, that create the demand for low-wage workers. Through an analysis of national ethnic identity, this chapter shows how West Indian childcare providers see their role in the Brooklyn communities where they work, as well, it is through this identity, which I am calling West Indianness, that we see the divisiveness between childcare providers of different ethnic and racial identities. The second chapter involves research that takes childcare providers out of the home of their employers and into the public places and spaces that they occupy during the workweek. I look at how West Indian childcare providers use and interact in Brooklyn public parks and how they are perceived by local residents, parents, and a park employee who observe them while occupying public places. There is also a focus on how providers use the public libraries as well as movement studios and how moving from place to place shapes the workday for many providers.

Throughout this research, West Indian foodways became a key element to preserving culture among the childcare providers. Chapter three takes a closer look at these foodways in a variety of public and private places to determine what meaning West Indian food has for this group of women in terms of culture and identity. In addition, providers were able to express how food is shared between them, and how food is an expression of motherhood. The chapter also reveals how the employers who hire providers are judged by their lack of ability to cook West Indian foods. The use of cellular phones became a point of interest in studying providers in public places because of the frequency of use. In chapter four, cellular phones are discussed as part of the tool set that providers should have in order to do their job effectively. However, the question

of who is responsible for ensuring that this "tool" is managed and paid for becomes important to understanding how domestic work has evolved. Providers viewed their personal cellular phones as a means for reaching out to one another and to family back in the islands, but for some employers, cellular phones should be used primarily for work related issues such as keeping employers involved in what is going on at home or emergencies. I also found that surveillance through the use of both cellular phones and the internet created another dimension that West Indian providers had to contend with as part of their daily employment. Nanny-Cams, web blogs, and frequent calls by employers created a dynamic between employers and employees that often goes unacknowledged by domestic work studies.

Chapter five looks at the informal economic savings called susus among West Indian childcare providers. This chapter provides a small window into the world of providers that is rooted in the preservation of culture. The providers go into detail about the structure of susus, how the money that is saved is used, and their critical analysis of why it works or doesn't work. Lastly, chapter six looks specifically at how one organization, Domestic Workers United, is making attempts to connect with West Indian domestic workers and others in and around New York City to formally organize for labor rights that would include a minimum hourly rate, a signed contract between employer and employee, severance, and other benefits.

This dissertation takes into consideration all of the voices used to describe how West Indian childcare providers use public places and how they use the workweek to create collective lives.

Methods

I chose to do an ethnographic dissertation with the hopes of finding a lost voice that ethnographers haven't heard in nearly ten years, that of the West Indian childcare provider (Cohen 1991; Colen 1995, 1986; Foner 1979, 1999; Rollins 1989; Wrigley 1991, 1999). This ethnography is one of the first contributions in the 21st century to give prominent voice to this group of workers and to their complicated networks that result in a collective life. The intent of this study was to discover if there was any change in the domestic workplace or these women's views on their work. In addition, I wondered if, as a second generation West Indian researcher, I could add anything to the literature that already existed on these women and their work.

By using ethnographic methods I was able to study what my participants did as well as what they said. In line with Howard Becker's ideologies of qualitative research where he suggests that a researcher measure the process of actions in the field, I determined that my participants did not always give stable or consistent meaning to their actions, therefore I found myself in the field for a three year period attempting to piece together what was enacted in public and private spaces and what was said during the interview process. What might have appeared as mundane activity to one researcher became over time, to this researcher, an offshoot of a more profound system of relationships (Becker 1996). For example, women eating in public parks or providers offering one another food could be taken for granted as mundane activity and not interpreted as having some deeper connection to cultural preservation. Participating in the field as an observer allowed order and meaning to gradually come together. Similar to Dorinne Kondo's work in *Crafting Selves* (1991) I wanted to place myself as an

ethnographer who could not only write quality descriptions of events, but who could delve into my material with reflection and analysis that would aid the understanding of a multifaceted segment of worklife. In doing so, I was able to create a body of research that demonstrated process. My interpretations of events, relationships, and work function, then, came from an "extended witnessing" (Thorne 1993), allowing me to orchestrate traditional ethnographic encounters that produced more detail as time passed.

While studying West Indian childcare providers working in gentrified neighborhoods, I quickly realized that there was another variable to be evaluated in the field—the researcher. I was deemed the "girl who was writing the book" by many providers, which legitimated my position as a resident in the types of neighborhoods where these women worked. Rather than getting paid to care for children though, I was positioned as a privileged mom who could afford to stay home caring for her children while attending graduate school. For three years, I endeavored to collect data about the childcare work being carried out in public places, and how this contributed to a unique lived experience for West Indian providers. Beyond looking at childcare work, I also analyzed my research experiences with the women in the field.

As an ethnographer, I attempted to ask myself, and my participants, questions that would bring to light the varied social spaces that were at work and how differing roles intertwined to produce enduring work relationships. Although I did not set out to do so, I contributed to an analysis that was consistent with feminist ethnographic methods by using critical reflexivity. Many of the principles of feminist methodology have simply been forgotten or absorbed into what is considered "good ethnography." Earlier ethnographic works written by men (Duneier 1992; Liebow 1967; Humphreys 1970) and

even later work (Wacquant 2004) looked at other men as primary subjects without critically analyzing the role that the women assumed in their lives. Women were studied peripherally in the context of the men. Dorothy Smith (1987), however, states that by learning about the everyday lives of oppressed people, social scientists can 'study up' and critique the structures of power in which they are embedded and to which they are subject—this structure includes the experiences of women, whether it be mothers, sisters, friends, or wives, in the lives of men. Feminists also brought forth the idea that by having a female researcher study female participants, a dynamic is created to allow for a more open dialogue. Further, Carol Warren reminds us that motherhood is a key mutual identification marker between women researchers and participants (2001). Matching the researcher and participants by gender, race, language, marital status, and culture, though, is not enough to eliminate the class differences that prevail while doing ethnographic research (Wolf 1996; Lal 1996; Warren 2001). My efforts were intended to present a point of view from a historically ignored group of women who do paid "motherwork" (Naples 1992) and offer a new perspective on how the lived experiences of providers take place in both private and public spaces. This type of taken-for-granted domestic work has been written about extensively, but these writings have often neglected the multiple spaces that organize the lives of the women providers, and have not demonstrated some of the deeper cultural connections that these women create.

This ethnography attempts to fill that void in earlier studies by following the lead of other women ethnographers who place themselves as both insiders and outsiders (Lan 2006; Joseph 1996; Stack 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Naples 2003). My research methodology in the field was shaped by the relationships I had with my research

participants. These complex relationships were then mediated by similarities and differences in our racial and ethnic identity, social class, and place within the community. Methodologically, it was necessary to be reflexive about the following roles and identities while analyzing my field notes: racial and ethnic identity, social class/education, role as a researcher, and role as a mother, but first, I will describe my research site and participants.

Description of the Fieldwork Site and Research Participants

For this dissertation, I conducted participation observation over a three-year period, from 2004 to 2007. During this time, I observed dozens of childcare providers, the majority of whom were West Indian. I interviewed in-depth twenty-five West Indian childcare providers whom I also regularly shadowed throughout the workday in parks, in employers' homes, during children's lessons, at the public library, and on the neighborhood sidewalks. All were first generation West Indian women migrants to the U.S. Nine were born in Grenada, six in Trinidad, three in Guyana, two in St. Lucia, two in Jamaica, two in St. Vincent, and one in Barbados. The age range of these childcare providers is from twenty-five to sixty-one years old. No means were conducted on ages since several women did not feel comfortable disclosing this information[9]. It is reasonable to estimate that five women were in their thirties, three were in their twenties, and the remaining seventeen women were over forty years of age at the time of the interviews.

[9] Some of the younger sitters told me that they lied about their age in the beginning of their careers in order to get a job. There was an ongoing joke about some sitters not revealing their ages. After years in the field I wasn't able to get them to divulge this information.

I conducted interviews with one childcare provider of Hungarian descent and one domestic worker of Mexican descent. I also observed several childcare providers of Filipino, Polish, Latin American, and Nepalese heritage. These interviews and observations may also serve as the beginning of what may become future research on childcare providers. Their interactions with West Indian childcare providers were minimal, but their presence was ongoing in the public places I studied and so I included them for a more robust understanding of the public places being used. This dissertation also included interviews and observations of five members of Domestic Workers United, a public librarian, an activist/documentarian, and a dance studio owner.

All quotation marks used in the text are direct quotations taken from either tape-recorded interviews (digital and manual recorders) or fieldnotes taken within three hours after my work in the field. When quotation marks are not used, I am recalling events that occurred later while using field notes for reference in order to provide reasonable accuracy with regard to the points being made by participants.

My Place as an Insider/Outsider

While West Indian childcare providers used the public places found in the neighborhoods where they worked, I sensed that I, as the researcher, didn't quite fit the insider role. Sitters with whom I had not developed relationships peered at me with what felt like curiosity. I neither carried a large notebook around with me nor took notes while in public places. I did not thrust a tape recorder in people's faces when we spoke. The fact that I had two children with me who looked like they were my own (not white) made me an anomaly in the neighborhoods I studied. Curiosity often led to questions between sitters who did and those who did not know me. This eventually led some who didn't

know me in the beginning to want to share their stories with me once they discovered what I was researching. For three years, in public places, alongside these childcare providers, I collected data about their work and, more importantly, their collective lives. Beyond observing and asking questions about the lived experiences of these women, I also had the unique opportunity to look closely at my own experiences as a researcher, a mother, a resident of Brooklyn, and a person of West Indian heritage. I found that the ability to unpack these kinds of details of the experience was significant when doing ethnographic fieldwork. These details are explored more fully in the body of the dissertation.

I became aware of my presence in a variety of social spaces, of my identity, and my role as a researcher. I attempted to place myself through cultural identity as an insider although this did not always appear to be successful. For example, when I would slip into my ever-so-Canadian "eh?" at the end of a statement, or when childcare providers would see me on the street in clothing that was somehow marked "employer" status (i.e, carrying a briefcase to school while dressed in heels and a suit), these facts differentiated me from my participants. However, at times I managed to identify simultaneously as an insider and outsider, especially when talking with both employers and employees.

One year into my research I began my in-depth tape recorded interviews with childcare participants. Providers began calling me "the woman who is writing a book about nannies" instead of the person one of my subjects affectionately had referred to as being "like one of us." The formality of recording voices by a machine meant that I was serious about telling my participants' stories, which became at times problematic. The formality of tape recording also appeared to place me more on the side of the employer in

the eyes of some childcare providers who had never seen such digital recording devices and who probably wondered how much it cost and whether their voices would be recognized had I allowed their employers listen to my recordings (which I did not do).

For the twenty or more employers with whom I spoke over three years, and the ten I interviewed, and for the most part lived among, my presence and research was of interest from a networking and surveillance standpoint. Employers often asked me to refer childcare workers to them or their friends. They would also at various points ask me if particular events were considered normal or acceptable. For example, Rose, a mother and employer, once asked me in the park if using a "credit" system (where an employer pays for time not spent working due to an employer emergency but then expects that time to be made up at a later point) was appropriate. She had a miscommunication one day with her sitter who did not realize that the time she was working was part of the credit owed to her employer and, therefore, she would not get paid. I asked Rose if she had told the sitter before her arrival at work that this would be considered the credited time that they had agreed on. She said, "No, she should have just known that." I explained that if you are planning to have an employee work without pay, you should probably let them know ahead of time. Questions of this type would often be asked by employers.

Employer interviews indicated that employers' perceptions of their working relationship and behaviors that were observed by me as the researcher were distinctly different. I found myself often referencing my fieldnotes based on observed behavior to determine the meanings and interactions as experienced by both employer and employee. These sets of fieldnotes read as moments of truth in cases where casual discussions with

some employers were more revealing than those in my more formal interviews with other employers. More often than not, employers would say things to me on the sidewalks or in the parks that related the stresses they felt in their relationships with West Indian childcare providers. They also related several stories about their discomfort with their employees' perceived coldness or distant nature. As Jennie, one childcare provider, explains, "we don't like people knowing our business," a sentiment I heard over and over again in the field among West Indian providers. Although the employer's experiences are unique and warrant further research, this was not the perspective that I was most interested in as a researcher.

I used employer interviews to ground the experiences of West Indian childcare providers as they moved between public places, and to complicate issues about how these providers socialize among themselves. This emphasis on caregivers' experiences, perhaps, is the greatest weakness of this study, but given the lack of voice among domestic workers within the vast amount of literature already written on this group, I chose to focus more attention on the childcare providers and their own expression of their daily experiences. In the same vein, the providers wanted to tell the story of how unfairly they were treated as a group. I believe I have been able to capture this unique relationship between employers and employees and the tensions it produces throughout the dissertation.

Many of my interactions with both employers and employees left me feeling exhausted. Because I lived near three of my public park sites, I'm not sure that I was ever out of the field. Anxiety-producing encounters with sitters as I walked down a local street with their employers, often left me wondering what workers really thought of my

research. Did they view me as the "other"? Was I being used by employers to gain insights into the workday of their employees? How did West Indian childcare providers view my motherhood when they encountered me with my children? And ultimately, did any of this even matter? Hammersley and Atkinson challenge ethnographers to be aware that they may not in fact be the audience to which participants' actions and behaviors are directed (1991). In other words, participants may expect what they divulge to be discussed with others who could effect change in their lives (Hammersley and Atkinson 1991).

Race and Ethnicity

While exploring the everyday complexities of relationships among the sitters themselves, and between sitters and their employers, I realized I had come upon a community that based its entire identity almost exclusively on work, race, and ethnicity[10]. This group of women defined themselves by their West Indianness, a term I elaborate on in the chapter one. However, it was my lack of authenticity in expressing West Indianness that was made apparent. For example, at the park one day when I asked Carol, a childcare provider from Trinidad, about the *Naparima* cookbook (a famous cookbook from Trinidad that has exclusively West Indian recipes, and that every West Indian woman should have in her kitchen, or so I'm told) she couldn't believe I didn't have a copy. She told me to get one right away from a relative "back home." She said, "You can't cook without it because it tells you exactly what is what and how to cook every dish you can imagine." When I asked her later on in this conversation about whether to put a hot red pepper on top of pelau (a traditional Trinidadian one-pot meal)

[10] See Regis and Lashley 1992 for a more elaborate discussion of connections between Caribbean immigrants.

for flavoring, she was shocked that I didn't know the correct answer. She rolled her eyes and said, "Of course...didn't your mother tell you…it gives the proper flavor, but make sure you don't stir it in too much, just let it sit right on top towards the end because if it busts, you've ruined the whole thing."

My West Indianness was constantly being challenged by the women in my study since I am the daughter of Trinidadian parents who emigrated to Canada during the 1960's. Growing up in Canada I identified as Canadian first, and then West Indian and constructed a particular racial identity (both black Trinidadian and Indian Trinidadian) that will be discussed later.

Our social interactions (mine and the providers) were often predicated on my first demonstrating some underlying knowledge of a West Indian custom or tradition. This game, as I like to call it, put me in the position of student. The childcare providers seemed to see me as a learner of West Indian culture and sometimes even as a daughter where the elder sitters were concerned. They would constantly tell me how I should discipline my children "the proper way" and not "like these Americans." Although burdensome at times, my learning about the boundaries within which my participants worked, facilitated my fieldwork in terms of learning more about their collective lives. It also invited a critical analysis of my cultural orientation to the field where meanings are analyzed and people are situated[11]. The development of the cultural orientation[12], then, was duly reflected in more mature fieldnotes that I wrote as my research progressed.

---

[11] See Wolcott's book entitled *Ethnography: a way of seeing* (1999) and Sanjek's book *Fieldnotes The Makings of Anthropology* (1990) for more on constructing meaning in the field.

[12] Venkatesh's book *American Project* demonstrated this topic in his research with the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago where he examined the relations and social production

One example of this were topics such as men and politics that only came up in conversation sporadically and did not appear to shape the way work or social interactions were carried out during the day. Men were not often spoken about because many of the relationships these women had with men were either severed permanently or tentatively by distance, or not considered healthy relationships, and sometimes even abusive. To state the perceived sentiment bluntly as Grace does, "Men don't work, men don't work, men don't work, men don't work, women work, they don't need men." While she knew this was not true of many men and that men did indeed work, she stated this as a testament to the hard work that childcare providers endure and that possibly no man could understand. Also, during my conversations and interviews, West Indian women discussed how talking about one's male partner was intrusive and shouldn't be done among other workers. Privacy was of the utmost importance when it came to talk of husbands and boyfriends. Some of the younger childcare providers would discuss dates they had been on, but not in any detail.

Politics were mostly discussed as it related to disaster or crime in the homeland. U.S. politics did not shape the conversations in public spaces, but when a hurricane hit the islands in the Caribbean or when the crime rate in Trinidad and Jamaica hit all-time highs, there was an abundance of debate and concern for family and friends. The one time I did notice discussions centered around a U.S. catastrophe, was when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in September 2005. The media portrayed the demise of several thousand black residents of that area as well as the failures of the American government.

---

between the fieldworker and observed participants (2000). Stack (1979) also suggests that biases from both fieldworker and the observed tend to mold views and the quality of interactions.

Discussions centered around the media coverage and how black people were being treated. While distanced from the events (none of my participants disclosed that they knew people in that area) there was a sense of understanding that came with being "black." This led to empathy and some talk of black people being treated unfairly.

I often wondered how men and politics might have been discussed differently had I been a first-generation West Indian immigrant. Would this have elicited different responses to my questions? Would I have had access to these same women and their employers? Would there have been a social cue that told me of the inappropriateness of my actions during research? What information would these women hold back from me?

Being a Dougla Girl

I remember going to an Eastern Sociological Society conference where I listened to two professors (a white man and an Indo-Trinidadian woman) talk about Trinidadian food based on their fieldwork there. I later found out that they were a married couple. Upon my asking a few questions after the lecture, the woman said to me "What are you? Where are you from?" I told her that I was from Canada, but that my parents are Trinidadian. She then asked, "Are you Indian Trinidadian or Black Trinidadian?" Knowing that there was a long ongoing historical background to this question, I said truthfully, "Both." She exclaimed, "You're a dougla[13] girl!" Confused at her public use of a West Indian colloquial term (one that could be considered offensive by some since at one time it was derogatory to call someone by that label), but remembering that my uncles used to tease me and my cousins by calling out to us, "Dougla, go get this" or

[13] According to its use in the Might Dougla calypso, the term "dougla" is "a pejorative word for a person of mixed Negro and East Indian descent" (Lowenthal 1968; footnote 74).

"Dougla, go get that" I knew what she meant. She was defining me as a Trinidadian with a particular combination of characteristics that included longer wavy hair. Being part black, part Indian, part British and part European Trinidadian, gave me an appearance that was unlike some West Indian women. My skin pigmentation and eye color are lighter than many black Trinidadians and my hair texture not as tightly curled, but rather wavy, showing that I had traces of "otherness" in me. This comment during the time of my fieldwork made me more aware of how I might be perceived among the women I studied. While many of the sitters that I observed were of either African or Indian Caribbean descent, none quite looked like me. I wondered if being a "dougla girl" meant that I was seen as an outsider while in the field. Did I exhibit some form of privilege by being able to "pass" as either Indo-Trinidadian or Afro-Trinidadian? In other words, was I demonstrating that I could cross some of the social barriers between these two groups by emphasizing one or another of my ancestral veins. Did it matter to these women once I got to know them? Did they see this as part of the reason I was able to live among their employers? How did this affect their responses to me? I never did get to the answers to these questions, but in hindsight I should have considered them before going into the field. Perhaps, I was able to uncover things despite my being "dougla," in a phenomenon similar to what Duneier affectionately calls the "Becker principle" (1999:338). According to this principle, the daily routines of my participants are far more influential than the distractions I may bring to the field. For example, the women I interviewed would still go to the parks with their charges, talk on their cellular phones, participate in the informal economy, and share food regardless of the social impact that I impose as a field researcher.

The extensive political discourse surrounding Indo versus Afro ethnicity in Trinidad is too lengthy to explore in depth in this particular dissertation and would require undertaking an entirely different project, but it has some significance here. It is important to understand that the racial divide among West Indians, especially those of Trinidadian descent, means many more gainful employment opportunities, even today, are open to those of "mixed-bloods." While some argue that Indians in Trinidad do not gain income increases over Blacks (Sudama 1994), those of African descent have a legacy of being placed in inferior positions both culturally and in business[14] (Singh 1994). The women who migrate to the U.S. must be considered within the context of this racial legacy and this could be a starting point for further research.

Role As Researcher

Many West Indian childcare providers seemed to claim our relationship was a reciprocal one. As they became more comfortable with me in the field, they would call on me for small favors that included watching the child in their care at the park while they grabbed some lunch down the street, or calling me at home to use my bathroom during the day because a local park lacked a public restroom. On colder or rainy days we

[14] Once the Indian population was brought into Trinidad as indentured servants in the late 19th century, there was a distinct notion that they were inferior to the Blacks that inhabited the land since they were considered uneducated and found themselves positioned at the bottom of the social order that they were entering (Sudama 1994). In addition, because of their distinct culture and strong identity formation, the Indian population was seen as a separate people from the Black Trinidadians (Ryan 1972; Singh 1994). However, once the Indian population began to educate themselves (mostly the offspring of the indentured laborers) and continually found greater strength through their cultural divide from the Black natives, they became the "model" minority in a country that was predominantly Black (Ryan 1972). Over the last twenty years, Black and Indian Trinidadians have evened out their roles in positions of Civil Service, teaching, in the police force and the armed forces. However, Indians predominate in the legal and medical professions.

would gather at my home where I would cook lunch for everyone or we would cook together, often while listening and dancing to reggae and calypso music. The women also sought me out for counsel in academic matters. Rachel, who wanted to find out more about going to college, once asked me to go with her to meet with a counselor at Hunter College in Manhattan, where I was teaching at the time. After the meeting where she discovered her options as an undocumented worker, we discussed at length her studies for the General Education Diploma. I acted as part of her support system: other childcare providers and I encouraged her to keep studying and take the exam. In addition, I often supplied sitters with hard copy college applications. These types of favors, along with the fact that I could often be seen with my two young children, led to a seemingly positive and receptive relationship between the women and me, similar to Carol Stacks's experiences as a single mother in *The Flats* (1972). I had to balance and negotiate how willing I would be to help and how this affected my research and personal life. There were feelings of obligation to do certain things because I came to the field with a form of cultural and social capital (through my education and social networks) that allowed me to easily navigate mainstream institutions. However, I really didn't mind doing these things because I had forged good relationships with the providers. They often gave me the opportunity to run to my home from the park while my children were under their care at no charge for five minutes or would simply be a listening ear to my woes as a student, wife, and mother. This relationship also helped with fact checking as I moved forward with research and had to call providers or meet with them to clarify details of our interviews.

Initially in my research, I felt as though I had to speak with providers each time I passed about how they and their families were doing or to use certain colloquial terms to maintain my legitimacy. At the time I wasn't always sure why I did this, but over the course of several months, and as I began to feel more comfortable in my position as researcher, I engaged less in this conscious behavior and acknowledged them with ease (although I did still ask about families and use colloquial language). I became used to managing impressions of myself and the groups with which I associated (Goffman 1959).

Months after my dissertation research was complete, I noticed that I was able to maintain relationships with many of the women I encountered. They still came over for playdates with my children and would use my home to heat up their West Indian foods in the microwave, either because their employers didn't use one, they felt the employer's kitchen was filthy, or because they did not want the aroma of West Indian food to be in the employer's home and risk having to explain why the home smelled a certain way. Molly would invite me to her annual Brooklyn Carnival Day Parade Luncheons where dozens, if not hundreds, of friends and family members would gather at a buffet restaurant on Utica Avenue (located in a West Indian shopping enclave). She also invited me to cookout parties at her private residence. Although we couldn't attend all, my husband and children would join me in some of these festivities. Because of this ongoing relationship, I found myself placed in an awkward position while writing my dissertation. I couldn't simply go down my neighborhood street in my shorts and tank top without makeup and feel comfortable because I was still "in the field." While writing, I was constantly bombarded with questions such as, "What did your professors think of what you wrote?", "When will the book be finished?" or my favorite, "Aren't you done yet?"

The women chose not to understand that it would take years to complete this work. It was their lives that were being documented and I became their number one resource for "telling the truth about the work." For this reason, I've never left the field.

Social Class

Although my research participants and I share a racial and ethnic identity, our class status and educational backgrounds are noticeably different. Unlike the participants in my study, who spent a portion of their lives in the Caribbean and now live in predominantly urban working class immigrant communities in Brooklyn, I was raised in a predominantly white middle class community by parents who are educated professionals. In terms of social class, in many ways I am seen as having more in common with the employers than I do with the sitters. For example, I am married to a professional and therefore able to afford living in an upper middle class community that is financially inaccessible to the childcare providers that I studied. However, it should be noted that many of my participants came from what would be considered middle-class status (and sometime upper-middle given Molly's status as a trader) in the islands where the population is predominantly black. Although they did not necessarily have a college education, many of them worked as professionals in positions with the government, in schools, or in business offices after years of schooling. They owned their own homes, had families, owned their cars, traveled, and were financially able to send their children abroad to the U.S. to continue their education or to find employment. They all had aspirations for their children that included a college education and stable employment. All of these "symbols" create the middle-class status that many of these women uphold. Perhaps, then, West Indian childcare providers are not so different from their employers

and maybe, one could argue, this is a reason why some employers feel comfortable hiring such women. Is this is a case where West Indian providers are experiencing downward mobility once they arrive in the U.S?

In negotiating my hours in the field, which included public parks and other places in an area where I currently reside, I had to consider and carefully time my work as a researcher and as a resident. While not all of my sites for observation were in my neighborhood, several were, and this raised issues.

At times I felt as though my social position was marked because of my ability to reside among several employers of West Indian childcare providers. Not only was I marked visibly by my children as I walked down the sidewalks in the neighborhood, but often, as was mentioned before, on my way to teach as an adjunct lecturer I wore clothes that were significantly different than those I wore in the parks. Often my hair would be styled in a way that showed its natural length (straightened with a hot iron) which further exhibited my dougla status since many participants wore their hair in shorter styles or wore straightened weaves in order to gain length. When I encountered the women I studied, they always made reference to what I was wearing, how my hair was kept, or even the official nature of my walk with a bright red briefcase on my shoulder. It became an ongoing joke amongst us; and I found myself having to justify "the look." For the sake of my dissertation, I wanted these women to feel a sense of comfort with me and not necessarily associate me with their employer's status. While I was earning less than what the sitters were making (I made $2500 over a four month semester as an adjunct teaching two hours a week while preparing and correcting work for six hours a week) and although I wasn't working as many hours as they did, I still felt that they associated me

with the bourgeois residents they encountered on a daily basis while in the neighborhood since I had the "option" of staying home with my children and not have to worry about making an income.

My part-time babysitter was another indicator of my class status in the eyes of the providers I studied. Members of the community I lived in, which is predominantly white, usually hire West Indian providers [and women from other immigrant groups] to care for their children, however my family, considered a West Indian/Canadian/Black professional family, hired a white woman (an Italian-American who happened to live next to me when I had my first child) as our childcare provider. We chose our provider based on the fact that we did not know anyone in the neighborhood and community members recommended her since she was raised in the neighborhood. This issue of having a white provider did not at first dawn on me as worthy of discussion, but I quickly found out that the providers noticed this white woman with black children at the park. I found myself explaining over and over again how she came to be our babysitter, but the providers never pressed any further in an effort to reserve explicit judgment (although it was still felt by me when they would comment on her dress or amount of makeup on her face).

Role as Mother

While my relationship with West Indian childcare providers was growing, I found myself constantly looking for their approval or perhaps even more, their disapproval. For example, dress often indicated to participants that I was not one of them and accentuated the fact that I was a "mother." When sitting on one of the park benches one day with Molly and another sitter in September 2007, I was wearing denim shorts,

running shoes, and a t-shirt. This is not considered appropriate workday attire for a West Indian childcare provider. Although I was not a childcare provider and my participants knew this, the way I dressed was brought up indirectly. Molly commented about my babysitter wearing really short shorts. I said, "If it's ninety degrees out, why would I care if she is wearing what she is comfortable in? I wear similar shorts." Molly, careful not to be critical of me, said, "Yes, and that's okay for you to wear short shorts because you are the mother, but if you are the sitter, you should not have your cleavage showing and your legs bare like that." Molly's comment made me aware of the personal boundaries of appropriate attire for work. She made it clear that I was a "mother" and therefore had a right to wear what I wanted. Molly explained childcare providers should remain covered and demure because employers often feel jealousy towards their sitters for a variety of reasons. She told me that West Indian sitters should not expose themselves too much, especially if the husband is around. This exposure could instigate an argument between employer couples. Again, Molly was clearly marking my body with a "mother" stamp, and not as a true insider, because of my dress. However, this went beyond my clothing as a marker of "other," and allowed me deeper insight into the West Indian perspective on clothing issues in the caregiver/parent relationship.

Children in The Field

Often students and professors ask me how I managed to enter the world of West Indian childcare providers. My answer was simple: "I am of West Indian descent and I have two small children whom I brought to the park everyday." The matter-of-factness didn't dawn on me until I read the anthropological work *Children in The Field* (Cassell 1987).

In this anthology of anthropological fieldwork, researchers discuss their experiences with their own children as part of the research process. Renate Fernandez, in his chapter on deciding where to do fieldwork, emphasized how "…children influence the choice of field site…" (1987:186). This was absolutely true for me. It was while sitting in a public park with my first child that I decided this was the research site for me since I could envision this as a place that was both beneficial to her upbringing and to my sanity—being in the fresh air with trees and other small children all around us while getting my research done.

Similar to many stories in Cassell's book, my fieldwork was enhanced by the fact that I had two small children. It seemed that the women I encountered viewed my motherhood as a legitimate marker of "caring." Once the women in this study viewed my regular participation in the neighborhood, they appeared to feel more comfortable with me as a researcher, a resident, and a mother. Having children in the field also promoted interactions in my home where sitters could bring their charges: they knew that the house was "child-proof" and there were ample toys to choose from. The women and I shared event information because of our common interest in "getting out of the house" and finding things to do during the day, such as park fairs, library events, and park birthday parties.

I believe that having my children in the field helped me to understand the position of childcare providers better because I experienced something similar to the monotony of their days and the physical exhaustion they felt from taking care of small children. In addition, many of the complaints I had as a new mother often elicited sympathy from the women who were experiencing similar milestone events with their charges (i.e.,

tantrums). This allowed me to understand more fully some of the pains and many of the joys these women had in taking care of small children.

My children also acted as a hindrance at times in completing this research. In the beginning months of my research I often had to leave the parks, library, or playdates earlier than expected because I chose to nurse my children. Participating in such an intimate activity such as breastfeeding was something that West Indian providers commented on as "not appropriate" for public display even when a cover was used. It was seen as too revealing and a private matter that should be taken care of at home unless you have pumped milk and are using a bottle to feed. This caused me to have to explain why I couldn't "hang around" as long as I would have liked to, and sometimes created long lapses of time between meetings. In addition to nursing calls, I was concerned with my limited hours childcare. I employed my babysitter (as she labels herself) anywhere from ten hours a week in the first year to twenty hours a week by the third year in order to finish my in-class studies. This meant time away from the field, but while in the field it meant I was always with my children. The problem with having my children with me all of the time is that I constantly had to tend to them, feed them, run after them, and discipline them. It also potentially left holes in my research that required me to remain in the field longer than I had anticipated. However, I do feel that their presence enabled this research in ways that would not have been possible without them.

The Husband Factor

Yes, the husband factor. My husband was often part of my research. He supported my position among employers by being college-educated and an active community member—he was the president of our condominium board and was often in

the parks with our children on the weekends. Also, he demonstrated to the West Indian childcare providers who worked in my neighborhood that he was an involved parent and even more importantly of West Indian parentage. He came with me to several parks in the mornings with the children on his way to work. Several mornings he would see the childcare providers on his own and talk with them on the sidewalks. The women seemed to enjoy telling me that they saw and spoke with him and would confirm that he was a good man. Many of the providers would comment on the fact that he was Jamaican, and, as Molly said, "One of the good ones." This fact legitimized my West Indianness among the women I studied and probably aided in the comfort felt between myself and my participants as a whole.

Evaluating my place in the field allowed me to dissect the realities I was attempting to understand by studying West Indian childcare providers. The three years I spent with these women enabled an ongoing dialogue that I hope will serve as a starting point for further research. Not only this, but understanding one's shortcomings while doing fieldwork informs researchers about their personal exchange value (value to others) in the field and how this affects the outcomes of research.

Chapter I: West Indian History and Identity

"…After you know that we were once enslaved, and knowing how we were treated by white people and how our forefathers were treated by white people, how could you not treat us better after you know what it's like, I mean what it still is…I think we have slavery now, it just happens differently…" –Interview with Jennie 2007

History of Domestic Work in U.S.

As early as the 1640's a racial caste system developed as indentured servants of African descent were separated from white servants and "forced into a lifetime of servitude" (Amott 1996). During the 1700's and 1800's, some slave women worked in the "master's main house as servants conducting daily work that encompassed everything from midwifery, sewing, washing, to nursing and caring for white children" (Amott 1996). According to Angela Davis and a point debated among other scholars, these responsibilities in the master's house often gave such women "special power in the slave community," since the household was considered "a freer arena than the more public arena of slave labor" (Amott 1996). Early industrialization established firm lines between female and male labor patterns where men worked to provide for their family and women "balance[d] their time between productive and reproductive activities" (Tilly and Scott 1978:228) thus developing a "cult of domesticity" (Hongagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Domestic service in the United States is rooted in modern industrial society where the home became privatized (Dill 1994; Rollins 1985). With a few exceptions historically in the United States domestic work had been relegated to women of color, and more specifically immigrant women (Dill 1994; Glenn 1992; Rollins 1985; Romero 1992; Parrenas 2001).

From the mid 1800's to the 1900's, few free African American women were able to pool their resources and enjoy leisure as did their white elite counterparts, and the

majority of black women by the 1890's were still employed in agriculture and domestic service and were barred from most other jobs (Amott 1996). In the early 1900s, domestic service was dominated by European whites in Northern regions and African Americans in the Southern regions (Dill 1994). But as Amott describes, 1.2 million blacks uprooted themselves, migrating North between 1910 and 1930, and black women again found themselves excluded from jobs other than domestic work (1996). Migration patterns of Southern blacks to the North, especially that of women, further changed the way domestic service was provided and racialized in the U.S. White women left their domestic jobs for "better" jobs as black women replaced them.

Domestic employment became a marker of class division for the emerging middle-class, especially in the 1930s when it became routine for middle-class families to hire domestic workers as a solution to the dual income family (Palmer 1989; Katz Rothman 2001; Wrigley 1995). Not until immigration policies allowed immigrants to reside in the U.S. under the "domestic worker" rubric, was there a decline in African American domestic workers (Colen 1986; Sutton and Chaney 1987; Glenn 1994). There is no consensus as to what caused this decline. Some believe that domestic work became a low-status position once immigrant Blacks and Latinos came to the U.S. (Martin and Segrave 1985) to carry out what is considered "unimportant motherwork" (Katz Rothman 2001) of the working middle-class at lower wages than native-born domestic workers (Foner 1987), while others argue that it has always been considered low-status (Martin

and Segrave 1985). By the 1940s, Caribbean-born immigrant women, the subject of this book, mainly gained employment as domestic workers[15] (Watkins-Owens 2001).

History of West Indian Immigration and Domestic Work

West Indian migration to New York began in the late 19th century and continued to the early 20th century as a result of unemployment push factors from the Caribbean and U.S. opportunity pull factors (Watkins-Owens 2001). Between 1900 and 1910, around 30,000 West Indians immigrated to the U.S, many of whom were highly literate and highly skilled as professionals or white-collar workers—more so even than the native-born white population in the United States or European immigrants[16]. This group laid the foundation for Afro-Caribbean life in New York City (Holder 1980; Walter 1977). A steady increase in immigration, due to the economic hardships of the declining sugar industry between 1910 and 1924, brought this number to 100,000 when immigration was halted by Congress. This Immigration Act of 1924 restricted nonwhite and European immigration to a quota system that stunted Caribbean migration to the U.S. By the

---

[15] Domestic work was not traditionally a West Indian domain back in the islands. A majority of the women in this study were considered professionals (as in the example of Molly who was a trades person in a variety of countries), government workers, or teachers. Most West Indian domestic workers came from a variety of class backgrounds and never anticipated or aspired to doing such work, as will be discussed later by Jennie. These women do, however, speak English and were used to working outside of the home, which perhaps made it appealing to some degree to get into domestic work as a way in to the economic infrastructure of the U.S.

[16] See Distribution of Immigrants' Occupations on Entry in the U.S. 1899-1910 and 1913-1914 by Percentages by Those with Occupations. See also table Literacy of Black immigrants and Occupational status of Black Immigrants entering the U.S) Sources: Adapted and calculated from Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission, vol. 1, table 13, p. 101; and Immigration Reports, 1913 (Table X, pp. 66-69), and 1914 (Table X, pp. 62-67). http://www.inmotionaame.org/texts/viewer.cfm?id=10_006BT&page=1

1930's, one half of black immigrants went to New York—a continuing trend among the foreign-born population that concentrate in metropolitan areas (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). Over 90% of these immigrants were of Caribbean descent, constituting a fifth to a quarter of New York's black population (Watkins-Owens 2001). By that time, it was said that Harlem housed a larger West Indian group than the entire island of Jamaica, since New York was one of the primary states for foreign-black immigrant entry[17]. Between 1940 and 1950, over 400,000 African American women left domestic employment to obtain work in factories and other lower wage arenas. At the same time, Caribbean immigration began to increase and these immigrants found work in agriculture and soon, in other sectors of the American economy (Thomas 1988), since the percentage of professionals among West Indian immigrants began to decline (Kalmijn 1996). By 1945 African American women resisted the return to domestic service and found jobs in manufacturing and in offices, allowing Caribbean immigrants to reestablish low-wage employment that resurged after the mid 1970's (Watkins-Owens 1996; Amott, 1996). This post-WWII (World War II) period found Caribbean women obtaining American visas much easier than Caribbean males and thus solidified their position in the domestic sphere (Bonnett 1990). By 2001, West Indians ages 25-54 made up 58% percent of New York's black population (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). Economic, political, social, and cultural factors in both the Caribbean and in New York shape "why West Indians leave their homelands and what happens after they move" (Foner 1999:7).

---

[17] "Frank R. Crosswaith and the Negro Labor Committee" from Afro-Americans in New York Life and History, vol. 3, no. 2 (July 1979) by John C. Walter http://www.inmotionaame.org/texts/viewer.cfm?id=10_006T&page=35

West Indian women have been crucial to the composition of New York's economy by providing low-wage domestic services, thus supporting white middle-class employment (Cancian et al. 2002; Sutton and Chaney 1987). These women came to New York with the assurance of gaining a work visa for domestic work that would eventually allow for future mobility (Colen 1995; Foner 1999; Sutton and Chaney 1987). West Indian women who came to the U.S. typically overstayed their tourist visas to remain in the U.S., a practice that continues today (Wrigley 1991). They were also considered more likely to send money back home (compared to their male counterparts) in the form of remittances (Watkins-Owens 2001). These women made substantial sacrifices, which sometimes included leaving more prestigious professional careers back in their native homelands in order to provide their families with the "American Dream" (Colen 1995; Foner 1999). This American Dream, however, would be limited for first-generation West Indian women who, as early as the 1920's, experienced downward mobility, housing segregation, and limited economic opportunities leading to their employment in the domestic services sector (Watkins-Owens 2001).

In New York City, where the majority of non-Hispanic black immigrants live (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2002; Foner 1999), white middle-class working women often depend on this group for their domestic needs, specifically childcare. In particular, West Indian domestic workers/childcare providers are hired for a variety of reasons, including the fact that, for most, their native language is English (Wrigley 1991), that they have higher educational levels on average as compared to their Latino immigrant counterparts (Foner 1999), and that they will accept lower wages than some other groups of childcare providers (Sutton and Chaney 1987).

White middle-class households continue to maintain distinct divisions of labor by both gender and class lines (Wrigley 1991). Although males have become more participatory over the last few decades in household and childcare responsibilities, it remains the primary responsibility of women, and employed women, to maintain these areas of domesticity (Colen 1995). Women are forced into a "balancing act" of contributing to economic changes as wage-earning women while experiencing a crisis in terms of meeting in-home domestic responsibilities (Hochschild 1997; Katz Rothman 2001). Dual responsibility, or "the second shift" as termed by Hochschild and Machung (1989)—both taking care of the home and working outside of the home—leads to stress and guilt[18] among working middle-class women who feel that their children may suffer due to their non-presence (Tronto 2002; Wrigley 1991). In order to cope with these feelings in the absence of publicly provided childcare or available assistance from family members (Katz Rothman 2001; Michel and Mahon 2002), white working women who can afford it often look for outside domestic help, specifically low-cost "off the books" immigrant domestic help (Katz Rothman 2001; Tronto 2002; Wrigley 1991). This allows them to feel secure in their "commitments to personal ideologies of care" (Cancian et al. 2002). These personal ideologies include having a private childcare worker in the home of the employer instead of using outside public daycare (Colen 1995).

Recent West Indian Migration to New York

[18] Guilt for this generation of mothers in Brooklyn is prominent as evidenced through the various parenting blogs on the internet and even the observations and interviews conducted as part of this research. Making decisions about opting out of the formal economy or working outside of the home are constantly met with guilt and debate between employers. Often, this added stress to childrearing is taken out on childcare providers in a variety of forms including surveillance or lack of appreciation.

Looking broadly at New York City census tract figures across the span of the three decades ending in 1980, 1990, and 2000, we can show that by using place of birth to identify West Indian populations, and then looking at employment by gender to get a sense of the broad patterns, there are significant increases in West Indian women employed in New York City compared to their male counterparts[19]. These numbers are not adjusted for the probable undercounting of undocumented people.

Census data also show the increase of employed West Indian women over three decades (1980, 1990, 2000) in the childcare occupation. Again, numbers are not adjusted for the possible undercounting of undocumented people. West Indian women in the occupation of *Childcare Workers* in 1980 numbered 1400, in 1990 they numbered 2069, and then exponentially this number grew in the year 2000 to 6362. These numbers can only at best be estimated since many West Indian women are reluctant to say they are babysitters or childcare workers and perhaps say instead that they are cosmetologists or whatever other training they may have received. Many are working for cash and may be reluctant to say too much to the Census.

Transnational families have changed in their patterns of settlement. In the early 1900's, men typically settled overseas and gradually brought their other family members to join them (otherwise known as sojourners) and then later returned to their homeland with their families. In recent decades, mothers migrate and leave their families behind in the homeland. This familial structure is termed "transnational motherhood" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Transnational mothers are Filipinas (Salazar-Parrenas 2001) and Latin Americans (Dreby 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) as well as some West Indian

[19] See Appendix B for West Indian population figures according to the 2001 U.S. Census Tract for 1980, 1990, 2000.

women, who together make up the great majority of transnational mothers in the U.S. (Dreby 2007). However, over the past decade, West Indian childcare providers have come to the U.S. with their families or on their own and express aspirations of betterment in New York.

In speaking with Flora, an Indo-Trinidadian[20] sitter in her mid-30's, who has two children (ages eight and eleven), and is married to a West Indian man, I discovered that there were very similar "push factors"[21] that brought West Indian women to New York and Brooklyn more specifically. She moved to the U.S. with her husband fifteen years ago, since occupational opportunities in Trinidad were limited. She states,

> There is a lack of opportunity in Trinidad—if you are not highly educated and working for the government, there is little reason to remain there. Everyone here does an honest day's work… you can do anything and work as anything here…crime rates in Trinidad have escalated in the past few years and it is because of the government… All of the top executives are pocketing the international monies being made instead of giving it to the people through the creation of jobs.

Catherine, a sitter from Guyana (in her mid-20's) is single and has no children. She moved to New York around five years ago and now lives in Brooklyn. Back home in Guyana, she worked as a data entry analyst, but now has found employment in childcare. When I asked her if this was her career, she replied "no, this is just for now until I make enough money… I want to go to school for nursing eventually, but haven't found the time to research how to go about doing it…Many of the sitters feel the same way, but do actually enjoy what they are doing." When I asked why she chose New York, she said that she had family already living here. This seemed to be a recurring theme among

---

[20] See Methods chapter for a discussion about Indo and Afro-Caribbeans/West Indians.
[21] Push factors are said to factors including economic, social, and political hardships that contribute to labor flows from one country to another. See Alejandro Portes (1989) for a more detailed discussion of how this term is used insufficiently.

sitters. Many of these women find the transition to New York easier when they have family already living here who can put them in contact with employers and who have an established residence that may serve as an interim place to stay (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). In a sense, these women themselves are fostered into the homes of their relatives. Specifically, West Indians find it easier to settle in the borough of Brooklyn where there is a distinct Caribbean ethnic enclave that includes stores run by West Indians which sell many of the products, including both West Indian produce, other foods and spices, and hair care products, they would get in their homelands, giving them a sense of comfort.

In 2002, women comprised 56 % of the new West Indian immigrant population in Brooklyn out of a recorded 10,452. This percentage represents an increase from 1996, when women made up only 26% of the emigrant population from the West Indies which settled in Brooklyn. This increase in female West Indian immigrants, which is reflected in the childcare industry along with the fact that Brooklyn houses one of the largest West Indian ethnic enclaves, makes Brooklyn a prime area for the study of West Indian women and domestic work.

Concept of "West Indianness" and group ethnic identity

It is important to understand the framing of the term "West Indian" as it is used throughout this book to identify childcare provider participants. The term "West Indian" implies a uniform group identity that all of the childcare providers under study used throughout my years in the field. While some providers came from Guyana, which is geographically part of South America, they all referred to themselves as West Indian or Caribbean and as such, identified with other childcare providers from the Caribbean

region[22]. This group identity differs from the racial identity of being black (as defined by physical attributes according to Waters 1999), although many of the childcare providers also identified that way as well. Kasinitz problematizes the notion of "black" and reminds us that it is a social construction whose meaning varies across space and time (1992:4) and therefore cannot be ignored entirely when speaking of people of West Indian descent.

This social construction of race, then, differs from the term ethnicity which "…implies that a group shares a real or mythological common past and cultural focus, the central defining characteristic of ethnic groups is the belief in their own existence as groups…" (Kasinitz 1992:4). These common features that lend to group ethnic identity include shared "practices, languages, behaviors, or ancestral origins" (Waters 1999:45). The West Indian women I encountered often referred to themselves as black, Caribbean, or West Indian.

Consistent with Waters' research on West Indians, I found identities among the childcare providers to be interchangeable, or what some may argue is a fluid identity along some spectrum (Denton and Massey 1989; Waters 1999). They often called themselves or others "island people," "immigrants," "Caribbean," "West Indian," or would simply state which country they identified with. For example they would nationally identify and say, "I am Trinidadian" or "I am Guyanese." This flexible ethnic identity was also found in Bonnett's research on West Indians who participated in the informal economy (1981). One commentator that Bonnett uses stated that there is a

[22] None of my participants came from Haiti, Belize, Panama, Cuba, or the Dominican Republic, which are all in the Caribbean Sea or verge on it, but whose primary spoken language is French as in the case of Haiti, English and Spanish in the case of Belize, and Spanish in the other three cases.

"…tendency of West Indians—new immigrants and descendants of the old—to refer to other West Indians as "one of us" or "one of them," although they may lack an accent or have never visited the West Indies (Bonnett 1981:74) and in addition, most black immigrants are "treated by Americans as monoliths—West Indians" (Bonnett 1981:67).

Jennie is a thirty-four year old childcare provider from Grenada. She usually wears her dreadlocks tied up with a scarf or in a bun and cares for two children, one boy who is six years old and in school during the weekdays and Sam, a two year old girl. She aspired to be a registered nurse back in Grenada, but because she needed more coursework, she worked instead at a daycare for a few months and then as a newspaper reporter in her homeland. She received a visitor's visa to come to the U.S. while still in her twenties and then stayed past her visa expiration. When I asked her why she came to New York, she stated that she had cousins, an uncle, and her sister living here and wanted a fresh start in life. It took her a year to find work as a babysitter.

Jennie said working as a babysitter is different in the U.S. than back in Grenada: "In the islands, you don't do this as a way of life, you may do it once in a while, but not everyday." Jennie, whose voice we read at the beginning of this chapter, left her homeland in pursuit of a better life and higher education. She started working with "older folks doing companion jobs as a live in job." She was paid $120 each weekend, but she didn't like living with families and stated, "We're not used to that in the islands, we're not used to these kinds of jobs. We're in another man's land, life is different, whatever certificates you have, nobody takes it."

Because she made this statement about the differences between Grenada and the U.S. and used the terms "we" consistently, I asked her to describe what it felt like being

in New York where there are large groups of people from the Caribbean and if that made her job transition any easier. She spoke candidly about her group identity and the benefits of "West Indianness" in this way,

> When you're here [in a white neighborhood] and you see someone [another black woman], you want to run outside, [and say]'I just know she is from the islands'…you feel more at home, because even if you don't know them or where they're from, you just know from a distance that 'hey, I know she's from the islands'…although they may be [African] American.

I asked Jennie if this was important to her and she said that it helps when sitters are out in public and see other sitters from West Indian background. She goes on to say that at the park "you just meet your own…even if you don't talk to every nanny you meet, you just feel comfortable, you're among your people, when you're at home [the employer's home], you know you're just working, you're not among your own people." Jennie felt that this comfort in being around other Caribbean women in parks and other public spaces translated into a tolerable life as a childcare provider, unlike working in the suburbs where sitters may not see others of their same ethnic group. I then asked if this West Indian group identity and the increasing diversity that Jennie noted when speaking of gentrified neighborhoods was enough to make her want to choose to live in a similar area as her employers (she currently lives near Flatbush Avenue, which is known among the childcare providers as a West Indian shopping street). She explained to me,

> It's a rich neighborhood, mainly white. Would I want to live here, no, because I'm not around my people. Even if I don't know them, I know they are from the islands and I know they are my people. I know they're from the islands and my food is there, I like my circle, that's where I feel comfortable. So even if I had a million dollars, I wouldn't live here.

Jennie knew that my husband (who is of Jamaican descent) and I lived across the street from her employer. So I was interested to understand her views of my West

Indianness as it would relate to childcare providers of the same ethnic background had I been an employer. She told me "working for you would be different than working for a white person…because you could relate in so many ways. In terms of culture, even if you're not from the islands, because you're black, I kind of expect that you would treat me better." Jennie is careful though to note that often black employers from Africa, the Caribbean, or America do not pay as much as white employers. She also alludes to black employers having to take on special obligations to "treat [her] better" due to a similarity in race.

Intergroup Dynamics

"West Indianness" in public places may appear to be held constant among babysitters according to "outsiders" such as other stay at home parents or sitters of European descent. Intergroup dynamics between sitters who "appear" the same, are not the same (Wrigley 1995). Not all black women in the public parks under study are of West Indian descent. In fact, there are a few that are African American. On occasion, they clash amongst each other in public places as described by Marga who works in one public park. Marga is a woman in her late fifties with a sixteen-year-old daughter. She has a full head of gray hair, deep wrinkles in her slender face that has faced the harshest sun, a cigarette that she only feels comfortable smoking behind the washroom area so the park children can't see her, and in her words is several generations "white American." She discussed with me an incident between an African American babysitter and a West Indian babysitter,

M: One time…an African American sitter who has been a sitter in the park for as long as I've been here…was jealous because these Caribbean sitters were coming in and watching kids full-time and she was always part-time, couldn't get a full-time. And I know one day she was giving one of the Caribbean sitters a hard time

because she said that the sitter wasn't taking care of the child properly…I finally had to ask her to leave.

TMB: The African American sitter?

M: Yeah, yeah, because I knew her better than the others, so I said just go because we don't need any fights here, you know. Somebody was saying they were going to call 911…It got heated…You know just yelling back and forth…Well some of the parents who were in the park you know, trying to break it up because you do not want your children to see two grown women fighting. Right?…So I just did the best I could to get there to get her out of the park.

TMB: And so have they confronted each other again?

M: I don't think so, I don't think so. I think she just kind of stays away from them [Caribbean sitters]. I know she sits around and talks about the Caribbean sitters all the time.

Carol, another West Indian childcare providers, also had a confrontation with an African American sitter in the public park once when Carol passed the other woman and by accident brushed against the woman's arm. The woman called out some derogatory phrase about 'immigrants…all you immigrants' and Carol immediately yelled back, "you're not in your freakin' bedroom…I said bitch…I pay Uncle Sam to stay here, I have plenty money…and furthermore don't talk to me because Uncle Sam gives you dental free, so go fix your mouth."

Carol was even more upset because the woman was "a black woman just like me…we [West Indian babysitters] always say these black Americans don't like us…from the time they hear we're from the Caribbean, they want to treat you like shit…from the time they hear you talk, they have a different attitude…but we don't come here and take nothing from them." The African American woman then said "all of all you come here and take all the jobs." Carol took this comment to heart and then exclaimed to me "…them don't like to work, they hate to work." She justified this outburst by saying that

when it came time for her to apply for her green card, her sponsor and then employer had to post the job for a certain amount of time in which no African Americans applied for the position[23].

The "Other" Small Island People

Tensions and stereotypes are not only found between African American and West Indian babysitters. There are also some stereotypes between babysitters who come from different islands in the Caribbean. Molly and Rachel expressed their stereotype of Jamaican babysitters, targeted as coming from a "bad island" whose women are seen as tough because of the well-publicized political controversies of the Rastafarian drug-related image. Molly says, "This Jamaican babysitter I know has to cook, clean, wash clothes, and take care of the children…she's one of the good Jamaicans…" Rachel remarked "'and she's Jamaican…they don't usually do that stuff.'"" In this same discussion, I asked Rachel, who is from St. Lucia and in her late twenties, how Trinidadians were viewed in the playground and as part of the babysitter community. She replied, "they walk around like they're better than us sometimes. It's not that they're bad or anything, it's just a feeling you get…" As soon as she said this, Janet pointed to me and said to Rachel, "you know she's from Trinidad, right?" Rachel, now looking slightly embarrassed said, "yes, but you know, she's different…she's more like one of us." Not understanding how I should take this because I know that Rachel has said before that she felt I was "a student, and a mother, and trying to get further just like one of us" I chuckled along with the other women at Rachel's comments and just left it alone.

---

[23] See Philip Kasinitz's book *Caribbean New York* (1992) for a detailed analysis of African American and West Indian employment opportunities.

It appeared that Rachel made a distinction between me as the researcher, me as a part of the West Indian babysitter community in the neighborhood, and me as the "other."

Most of the West Indian babysitters appreciated each other's work and their relationships with one another. One warm afternoon, Rachel told me a story of how she is sometimes surprised at the things Molly says to her about taking care of children and their interactions. "Don't let the child touch that dog, it's dirty…they shouldn't be touching those things…they are meant for the yard…" Rachel said imitating Molly's warnings. Rachel went on and explained her relationship with Molly as a mother figure, "Molly is older than me and she's like my mom in a sense. She gives me advice and talks to me and says you can't do this forever, you are young, you need to go to college and get yourself a degree…but sometimes Molly says some things…she doesn't understand how things work today." This generational difference, while creating some differences of opinion, is also accepted because some of the younger babysitters who are separated from their own mothers living in the islands feel as though there is a mother figure who is looking out for their best interests and wants them to do something with their lives.

The "Other" Sitters

The talk of other "ethnic" sitters in public places and spaces of gentrifying neighborhoods in Brooklyn occurs from time to time. I observed a good example of how such a conversation would take place between two West Indian sitters in November of 2004. Evelyn, who is from Grenada said hello to Carol, another babysitter from Trinidad. They began speaking for a short spell, and not wanting to intrude on their conversation, I sat silently, watching all of the kids play in the park. Carol asked if Evelyn saw the news

in the morning where a New Jersey babysitter was caught abusing a child. Carol goes on describing the horror of how the woman beat the child and even pulled out some of the child's hair. Evelyn was in shock and stated that "no child could ever make me get to that point. What could that child have been doing?" Both Carol and Evelyn shake their heads in disbelief while kissing their teeth[24], which is the ultimate West Indian sound of disapproval. Evelyn then stated that "this is what happens when they don't get paid well." This dialogue followed:

E: "What was she?" Attempting to determine the babysitter's nationality.

C: Some Spanish girl.

E: Yes, it is they who don't get paid well and then lash out on the children.

TMB: Are some sitters not as nice as others? I finally added to the conversation.

E: Yes, it is those Latino and Filipino ladies who don't get paid well and then do things like that.

The stereotypes that Evelyn expressed against Latino and Filipino babysitters almost appeared an attempt to deflect the negative stereotypes that are sometimes held against West Indian babysitters. Evelyn concluded that behavior towards children was a direct result of structural pay rates, not race or culture as emphasized in her request to find out what ethnic group the woman being accused came from. One would imagine solidarity among all babysitters who claim they require national labor rights under the domestic worker rubric. Yet, there are instances where one group, in this case West

[24] Kissing teeth or what can be termed "Chupse" or "Suck Teeth" is a Caribbean oral gesture coming from West African origins that demonstrates a form of possible impatience, scorn, or disapproval. According to Figueroa and Patrick (2001), this oral gesture marks both internal and external evaluation and can express both negative affect, disgust, and disrespect. They further explain how air is sucked in with the tongue placed against the upper or lower teeth with lips flat and slightly opened with tension.

Indian babysitters, fosters a ranking system that works to their advantage, allowing them to be viewed as "the better group" of babysitters.

Perceptions of West Indian Childcare Providers Today

Throughout my research, the following question came up time and time again: how are West Indian childcare providers viewed in general by employers and by residents of the neighborhood in which they work? I was finally able to answer this question through research, contradictory fieldnotes, and interviews.

> *"That's Little Trinidad. The nanny hangout. The mothers usually sit on this side…"* ---Momzillas by Jill Kargman (2007:24)

The quote used above, while drawn from a fictional story about a mother's interaction with other mothers and childcare providers in Manhattan, New York, illustrates clearly how I observed West Indian women being judged in Brooklyn Parks. The "nanny hangout" was something I often overheard from local parents and workers in the park who sat on the periphery of the "Little Trinidad." They used it to mention the phenomenon and, at the same time, to criticize it as problematic. The perception is that these "others" are making themselves comfortable at the expense of the neighborhood and its culture.

The childcare providers I've interviewed and observed made it clear that they understood this stereotype being placed on them and defended themselves when they exclaimed during their recollections of immigration to the U.S. "I didn't come here on the boat!" (two providers made this exact comment during their formal interviews). It is as if they wanted to make it known that the West Indian childcare providers are different from other immigrants (e.g. from the Philippines where some immigrants come over by boat) now entering the United States who may not be as savvy as they are. The childcare

providers also made it clear that they either have their working papers and are legally residing in the U.S. or differentiate themselves from other immigrant groups who have come to the U.S. by means other than a plane.

My fieldnotes often addressed this question of how West Indian childcare providers are viewed by others. For example, the providers' observations of employer abuses such as lack of timely payment (as if providers do not need the money they are owed on the day when it is due) reflect an attitude of superiors taking their employees for granted. Also, childcare providers were deemed unfit by some park workers and stay-at-home parents because they were negligent or reprimanded a child in a loud tone in public places. On the other hand, fieldnotes also revealed how mothers were grateful to and trusting of their childcare providers and how this was reciprocated by the providers in the care they gave to the children and in the way they spoke about their employers.

Interviews often brought out the more emotional side of the employer-employee relationship. Some employers were bothered by the "laziness" of their childcare providers who wouldn't pick up the crumbs that fell underneath the highchair of their charges after a meal was served. Employers saw this as a direct insult because they worked away from home all day only to return to a mess that they had to clean up themselves. However, many interviews with employers demonstrated a compassionate relationship between employer and employee where employers made it clear that they cared about the welfare of their childcare provider and sometimes (most often reluctantly) gave them time off to visit family in their homelands[25].

[25] Childcare providers would sometimes use this time to find other jobs or to get away for a couple of weeks without losing their current jobs.

Chapter II: Public and Private Places and Spaces

I began this dissertation with the intention of describing the inherent isolation among West Indian childcare providers, along with the transnational motherhood so frequently mentioned as part of the plight of immigrant female domestic workers employed in private households. Researchers have called this isolation the one factor that uniquely distinguishes domestic childcare from other forms of paid childcare and work in general with female employer-employee relations dominating the discussion. Rollins' study on domestic work by African-American home cleaners for white female employers in Boston reported that the employer-employee relationship was marked by forms of subservience and "maternalism" from the employer side and spatial deference on the domestic worker side that followed limitations on the use of household space (1985). She described this relationship of domination as having a long history in the patriarchal household dating back at least to the 1600's, when men earned the primary household income, which translated almost seamlessly to the 1850's patriarchal relationship that remains in present times between the female employer and employee in dual income households (Rollins 1985).

What is a "Real Mother?"

Similar to the patriarchal relationship that Rollins (1995) speaks of between female employer and employee in the private household, where the "biological mother" of the children being cared for takes on the role of traditional father figure, Dill expresses that it is this relationship between the two women that makes the employer-employee relationship unique and the work less valued as middle-class white women choose not to do household work themselves (1994). Dill (1994) states that stemming from the days of

enslavement, employees tended mother their employers because they were often young and inexperienced thus creating an image of domestic workers as the all-knowing matriarch while the employer was seen as childlike and in need of care. With the private household dynamics between the two women positioned in this way, the domestic worker can justify her often subordinate position even as the employer takes advantage of the worker by requesting more "women's work" from her and while giving the employee a false sense of empowerment.

The low wages and lack of appreciation for childcare providers in general lead to the conclusion that having private childcare involves both racial and class oppression (Wrigley 1995). Middle-class families benefit from this social inequality and find themselves with ample options among the poorer women of color who are frequently first generation immigrants. These childcare providers become the objects of conspicuous consumption for the families who hire them as part of "one big happy family," while at the same time they are marked by their class and race. Wrigley adds that these women become subject to the humiliating experience of being constantly supervised (1995) and, as this study shows, even when the childcare provider is not in the private spaces of the employer's home.

Rollins (1985;1989) also posited that work in the private space of the employer household equates to isolation for domestics in general. Shellee Colen stated that exploitation in the employer-employee relationship is expressed through forms of "abysmal pay and long hours" and "isolation from kin, friends, community, and anyone outside the work environment" (1989:174). If sociologists take what Simmel described as isolation to be true, perhaps we could understand what then becomes a common theme

in domestic work literature. According to Simmel, "Isolation is a relation which is lodged within an individual but which exists between him and a certain group or group life in general" (1964:119). If this is the case, we can see how isolation can occur while simultaneously encountering employers or taking care of children in the private sphere of the home. Almost all authors on domestic work discussed how varied ethnic groups have feelings of isolation in this type of exploitative low-wage work, especially when doing live-in work[26] (living as a domestic worker in the home of the employer). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) spoke of the loneliness felt among Latina domestics when they encounter mandatory separation from their family and friends by employers. Phyllis Palmer detailed the ways capitalism forces employers and employees alike to choose between home life and employment (1989). Romero traced the isolation of the maid and mistress in middle-class homes (1992), while social isolation among domestics resulting from the structure of domestic work itself and from employer mandates dominated the work of Wrigley (1991;1995).

To combat this isolation, we see a transition in domestic work structure. In earlier work, Romero (1988) talked about employees finding cleavages in the structure of domestic work to allow for improvement of work conditions by shifting to live-out day work and pay-per-job wages versus hourly pay, thereby creating a business relationship in place of private space dominance (having employers decide what jobs get done in a given hour). Hondagneu-Sotelo echoed these shifts in domestic work when she discusses how Mexican immigrant women seek live-out jobs in order to work fewer hours and to live with their own families (2001). Dill (1994) discussed this shift showing how live-out

[26] Live-in work is common among recent immigrants as a strategy for economic incorporation

workers do not become closely linked to their employers. This dissertation focuses on the dialogue between women who live out of their employers' homes.

As Chin put it succinctly,

> According to the schema of the public-private dichotomy, the reach of the state apparatus does not and cannot extend to the innermost sanctum of society, i.e., the family. Unlike this picture drawn by classical philosophers of the family as an entity located in the private emotive realm secluded from activities in public space, the institution of the family has and continues to be an intricate component in the processes of state formation, maintenance, and/or disintegration (1998:13).

It is because of this overlap between private and public activities that we cannot simply assume isolation among all domestic workers. Especially if we are discussing childcare providers who only work days in an urban center such as Brooklyn, where there are ample opportunities to use public spaces during working hours. However, it should be noted that these public spaces were not always used willingly by the employees. Some employers mandated the use of public spaces, especially those employers who worked from home during the weekdays as part of the creative class.

Once in the field, I quickly began to notice that isolation was not a theme by which the group of West Indian childcare providers I was observing defined themselves in their daily routines. In fact, the opposite appeared to be true. I was surprised to find that this group of women formed a community among themselves along West Indian cultural lines in public places, thereby building a foundation for social space creation. Because of the frequency and duration of this cultural community formation in public places, the focus of this study became more clearly an ethnographic study of cultural preservation through the use of public places and spaces by West Indian childcare providers. Not only was cultural preservation observed through the invoking of language, race, and immigration status as well noted in previous studies on West Indian

childcare providers, but also the nuanced observations of participation in food sharing, cellular phone use, informal economic systems, and even labor organizing. By becoming a participant observer, I was able to trace the movements of West Indian childcare providers from the public spheres to the private spheres of their employers. Public spheres included public parks, sidewalks, commercial establishments on public shopping streets with the addition of child lesson facilities, and public libraries. The use of "extended place methods" in the ethnographic research process allowed for continuous observation of meaning making[27] as it occurs from place to place, and offered the opportunity to determine the methods by which these women do indeed preserve their cultural traditions and identities.

Public Places and Social Spaces

"And avoid the Islands," added Bee. "I had this one woman from Trinidad. So much 'tude. And lazy! She moved like a glacier, and was the size of one, too. I'd have to point out everything. Like, hello? This silver picture frame could not be more tarnished! And the South American nannies, they're all busy gossiping and speaking Spanish and meanwhile the kids are dangling from the highest rung on the jungle gym." --Excerpt from Momzillas by Kargman (2007:48)

While this excerpt is from a book of fiction, it reflects my observations about how quickly perceptions of childcare provider behavior moved from the private to public sphere. It is useful to look at public places and spaces and to understand childcare providers in this context to move beyond what has been already written about extensively—the isolation in the private household where employment is gendered and exploitative, although this is also still relevant. What follows is a description of a private social world that unfolds in public places and spaces. For this study, public place and

[27] Duneier (1999) explains meaning making as how the participants interpreted the events they participated in. See Becker 1989; Charmaz 2001; Emerson 2001 for more on meaning making in the field.

parks are defined as a geographic area that is an expression of the built environment, thus "providing the physical milieu for the reproduction of social meaning and ideology" (Momsen 1993:60). In other words, the social values and systems for understanding a social world can be expressed and passed on in public parks. Public places and spaces[28] foster "physical connections…based on the degree to which the location, design, resources, and arrangement of a place are reflective of the surrounding areas" (Carr et al. 1992:190). The social networks that develop and are maintained in public places are both influenced by the aesthetics of public places as expressions of the neighborhoods that they are situated in. Personal identities are formed through these places as they include "meanings…created by positive connections to people, connections that create a sense of belonging, of safety, a feeling that personal rights will be protected" (Carr et al. 1992:190). The daily uses of the physical public place allow for the social construction of space (Lebebvre 1991; Low 1999; Low and Smith 2006). This social construction of space transforms physical use of public places/spaces (i.e. public parks) into symbolic meanings that stem from social exchanges (Park and Burgess 1984[1925]; Low 1999; Low and Smith 2006; Carr et al. 1992; Harvey 1973).

Lofland talks about the "unpersonal/bounded relationships" where "persons may share little intimate information i.e. names, but at the same time the relationship is experienced as 'friendly' or 'sociable'" (1998:468-469). Relationships are bounded to public space. I saw this often in the field where sitters would recognize each other or even have encountered one another for years at public parks, yet not know each other's names. Lofland also argues that "life in the public realm is thoroughly social" (1989:457)

[28] I use the terms public places and public spaces interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

and is a "distinct area or arena of human activity" (1989:459) In this public realm, then, "interactions are rule-patterned but the human inhabitants of the realm relate to one another" (1989:466). But what Lofland claims about the "sense of freedom from judgment which many people report as a major pleasure of being 'out in public' " (1989:464) and possibly even eliminating the judgment of race, accent, and hair texture appears naïve when speaking of West Indian childcare providers. West Indian childcare providers do discuss the very fact that they are judged because of their skin color when in public places. It is in this public realm that public park participants decipher cues that are symbolically helping them to monitor their own behaviors and the spaces they use (Lofland 1989).

These cues that create invisible boundaries within public places are what sociologists have called "social space." According to Harvey, social space is "made up of a complex of individual feelings and images about and reactions towards the spatial symbolism which surrounds that individual" (1973:24). Social space, then, is different from the physical space in that it is "variable from individual to individual and from group to group; it is also variable over time" (Harvey 1973:34). One goal of this study is to determine how social spaces are constructed over time by West Indian childcare providers in Brooklyn public parks. Another goal is to determine how a social space is reconstituted when they leave the public sphere of the park and enter other public locations and how this differs from the private spheres of their employers. These private spheres are places where primary relationships between family and friends or acquaintances are fostered in shared cultures and histories (Lofland 1989). This sphere is where I argue West Indian babysitters encounter the private spaces of employers. This

research will also consider how other users of public places (i.e. employers, neighborhood residents, park workers, and other workers) exhibit competing social space formation.

Public Parks in Brooklyn

Many Brooklyn Parks were initially designated as private community gardens in the 1840's, but by the mid-1800's the City of Brooklyn had acquired much of this land for use as public parks (Parks and Recreation literature, 2007). Within two decades, these parks included Olmsted-inspired playgrounds[29] and incorporated public space designs. By the early 1990's, several of these public parks had been redesigned and reconstructed and are now maintained by community volunteers and the City of New York Parks and Recreation Department who receive both public and private funds for improvements. The park is promoted through leaflets as a place to share the joys and challenges of childrearing while friends and neighbors enjoy sitting on park benches under the shade of trees. All of the parks used in this research anchor Brooklyn communities that have undergone recent gentrification. The population change over the past decade has benefited public parks. Newer residents volunteer to conduct maintenance in the parks as older residents are physically less able to do so. In addition, newer residents and their businesses, which are sometimes located in the neighborhoods where they live can offer private funding for public parks. However, some park

[29] Fredrick Law Olmsted was the founder of landscape architecture and aimed to design New York public parks as democratic, open urban spaces for the average citizen. His goal in this design ethic was to bring people of all socio-economic levels together while providing an organized structure to the city. See Palmer (2001) for more discussion of Olmsted's work.

employees I have interviewed find the change somewhat less family-oriented and have noticed that more babysitters are now occupying this public space.

It was in order to fully understand how neighborhood gentrification has affected public parks that I decided to interview a sample of the City Parks employees. The annual workers, most of whom I later found out were African American and welfare-to-work[30] employees, shied away from formal interviewing. So, I asked one of the Playground Associates who wore a green City Parks t-shirt instead of the blue ones the other workers were wearing, thinking there might be a difference in employment rank. I had seen this employee over the past two years walking with children following behind in one of Brooklyn's oldest parks. It was only once I approached her that I realized she was in charge of children's activities at this public park. Marga, as mentioned before, is an older white single mother. As a Playground Associate over the past twelve years, Marga is responsible for playing games with the kids in the playground area of the park and providing them with toys, "mostly arts and crafts" she says, "That's what this park is, an arts and crafts park…" She works six months of the year beginning in April and works five days a week in this role. Because Marga is a regular worker in the park during the months that West Indian babysitters use the public space the most, I observed and then interviewed her to gain her perspective on public park uses.

When I asked Marga if there had been any changes over the years at this Brooklyn Park, she replied,

---

[30] The Welfare to Work is a grants program under the Balanced Budget Act that was created in 1997 to provide job opportunities, employment preparation, and job retention services for welfare recipients who are the hardest to employ. In Brooklyn, the WTW program operates under the Park Career Training Initiative (PACT) that assists workers in developing resumes, interview skills, and other coping strategies through clerical, custodial, horticultural, and security work.

"In the time that I've been here, there's been a major change in the people in the park. It used to be when I first came here it was mostly Italian families, very few babysitters. I mean there were occasional babysitters here and there, but now it just seems to be a lot of nannies..." [31]

I asked Marga why she thought there were more families and whether there were more parents here with their children than there were nannies during the day.

"Yes" she said plainly and then continued,

> The people who lived here sold because they're getting such good prices for their homes, and have moved on. It's better-educated people now. You know, back in the day, mom never went to college, you know. She stayed home and raised the family. Now, you know, when you have a family, two people need to be working… So I think that's what the difference is, you know? The two-family income.

I wanted to find out who exactly Marga was speaking of when she mentioned dual income earners and asked her if she felt these new families could now afford a childcare provider. Marga responded,

"Yeah, because there's a lot of professionals in the neighborhood now. Most of the women are professionals, I've met a lot of attorneys and a lot of artists."

I then asked: "How has your relationship with them changed from maybe back when there were a lot of Italian parents here?"

"When I first came, the Italian mothers would always send me lunch…It would be the leftovers from dinner the night before, they'd give them to me for lunch…so I never really had to buy lunch…They were always appreciative of what I did", she said.

---

[31] My sense was that Marga used the term babysitter as a temporary status since Italian families often had the mother at home with the children whereas using the term "nannies" refers to hired help in a more permanent role during the day. It also seemed that nanny was synonymous with being a person of color.

I wondered if Marga felt that the "gentrifying" parents in the neighborhood were less appreciative of her efforts to organize children's events throughout the weekdays. Perhaps this offering of food had demonstrated appreciation in a way that is no longer commonplace among the newer residents of the area. In speaking with parents in this neighborhood, everyone seemed quite happy with the fact that there was someone designated to organize events at the public park, but it appeared in speaking with Marga that she was looking for more than a simple "thank you." The symbolic meaning of food sharing was a stronger link to gratitude than a verbal appreciation (food sharing will be taken up in more detail chapter three) for Marga.

Marga's acute awareness of public park patronage led to extended conversations about how she viewed the new "nanny-centered" park makeup. As she worked throughout the day with the children in the park, she ultimately came into contact with parents and childcare providers along with grandparents and others in the park. I began to realize that she not only was a park worker, but she was indeed part of the surveillance that is placed (not with the necessary intention of surveillance) by her employers within public spaces.

Public Park Surveillance

Surveillance in Brooklyn Public Parks is a form of control that can sometimes be blatant as the signs that read "Adult with child only," "No dogs allowed in play area," and "Park will be closed at 10pm," to the handful of police that stand in the public parks to monitor older (sometimes mischievous) middle-school children after 4pm through the evening hours. As Jane Jacobs reminds us, not all "eyes on the street" have a negative outcome (1961). Many gain a sense of safety in crowded public places because someone

is always watching (although this has been statistically contested[32]). However, it is the hidden surveillance of parents, their use of the internet, childcare providers, and public park workers that enable the enforcement of these rules and regulations in a way that gives the perception of maintaining public park safety. For example, a friend recently sent me a link to a website called *I Saw Your Nanny.*[33] The title alone piqued my curiosity. The blog that was posted came from someone who lived near one of the main parks that I observed and began telling the story of a man who was accused of luring a child away with him and his dog while the mother (and then later claimed to be the babysitter) was not paying attention. A string of replies to this blog began asking if the original author meant that the "babysitter" wasn't paying attention, but the author clarified in a later blog by stating no, it was the mother. The man was brought in for questioning at the precinct and as it turned out he was the father of the child and the mother had overreacted in the park, this coming after the blogs had already been uploaded to the internet surveillance site. Apparently this man is now being viewed in the neighborhood as a predator and criminal. While this story did not turn out to be about an actual babysitter, it is important to be critical of such avenues of surveillance because parents with good intentions can also become the bearers of misinformation, potentially costing people their jobs and their dignity. Irene, a Trinidadian babysitter and mother of four herself, details this unwarranted surveillance when she was disciplining a child with her voice in a loud tone. She explains,

> …Some people see you in public and they see you talking to a child, they don't know the circumstances around it and they're like 'I saw this babysitter yelling at a child or something.' You don't know what happened. Like one time I told this

[32] See Duneier's book *Sidewalk*, 1999.
[33] http://isawyournanny.blogspot.com (2007)

> person 'mind your business' I'm not talking to you, you know I'm dealing with it...I'm not hitting her, I'm not doing her anything out of the way...I'm talking to her and she's crying. You don't know what happened, but that's none of your business.

Irene acknowledges that some babysitters are not always good with the children they care for, but like Marga, Irene feels that the good babysitters are not appreciated in the way they should be,

"I know there are some really mean babysitters, I'm not saying that we're all good, but when you see you have a babysitter and you see progress in your kids, and you're seeing your kids are happy and healthy, you come home, you can't get complaints from them and you're seeing stuff…show appreciation."

Irene, like many of the women I've observed and spoken with, indicates that a good childcare provider is someone who ensures your child's happiness and keeps them fed. Many feel that it goes beyond this. If a child wants to be with the provider even when the employer is back home, this too is an indication that you are a good childcare provider. A bad provider would be considered by many to be someone who is speak too loudly in public places, such as the park, or someone who "bad talks" other providers to those in the parks. Forms of discipline vary in terms of acceptability among the providers, although many agree that you shouldn't hit a child because that would most certainly get you fired, especially if done in a public place.

Babysitters are essentially "open persons" who become "vulnerable targets for harassment that violates the rules of public courtesy" (Gardner 1980, 1988; Feagin 1998). By occupying public places and spaces, babysitters, especially West Indians that can be picked out among other Latin American babysitters because of their darker skin color, are particularly vulnerable to surveillance both formal and informal. Marga discussed with

me some of the ways in which she acts as a monitor of the public parks. Because she knows "ninety-five percent of the children by name" she also knows which parents the children belong to because she sees them together in the park either after work hours or sometimes on the weekend if she is working. In asking Marga how she determines whether a babysitter is indeed a babysitter and how this differs from Grandmothers in the park (since sometimes the mothers of children or the caregivers/sitters in the park are older and could be mistaken as grandparents themselves), she said,

M: Grandmothers are good. Grandmothers are on top of their kids…Grandmothers know that they're not going to go home and say 'uh oh, you know something happened in the park.'

TMB: What about all the other ethnic groups that you see here?

M: Most of them here are the Caribbean sitters, you know, so that's what I notice more. But I've had a couple of Latino sitters that I've dealt with. They take their job very seriously…it's the same though with the Caribbean sitters...they're either great or they're not. But it's more the Latinos that I think that are with their own kids…than I think with the Caribbeans.

TMB: Well, how do you know they are their own kids?

I asked with interest, knowing that there are a few black women (all African American) in the parks with their "own" white-looking children through marriage.

M: Well, I...I...no, they're usually babysitting, but I think that they're with their own kids until I get talking with them [Latinos], I chat with them and I find out that they're sitters. That's how you know you have a good one…when people observing you think you have your own child with you…And there are a lot of them [Latinos] in this park that, that I mistakenly thought had their own child with them.

Curious about the way Marga uses race to categorize babysitters versus mothers, I probed further,

"Now do you think maybe it's easier to know that a child is not the babysitter's...because I mean obviously Caribbean babysitters are black and the children

are white...so with Latino babysitters, maybe it's harder to tell because their shading might be similar..?"

M: "Well, no because the children in the park are pretty white and I think it would be hard to get that kind of…" as she paused and knowing what the words coming next were I asked 'mixed up?" and Marga replied with the apparent relief that I said it first "yeah, yeah."

While perhaps the surveillance of Caribbean-born babysitters is constructed through racial categories in public parks as evidenced by Marga's statements, it is troubling to think that these are the circumstances most babysitters of color in general endure once people know they are sitters. They essentially become easy targets where people like Marga then feel obligated to work on behalf of the displaced anxiety of the employers. Although I have observed babysitters being pointed out by West Indian domestic workers who are doing outreach in public parks for Domestic Workers United as "not the parent, she's Irish." I suppose Irish women can "only" be babysitters as well, it just depends on who is doing the surveillance.

One West Indian sitter that I met named Ava who was born and raised in St. Lucia explained after seeing my daughter trip on the jungle gym at one Brooklyn park, "Henry fell really badly the other day and then said how I threw him down…I asked him why would you say that? Did I throw you down Henry? He said 'no'. I asked him who threw you down? He said 'I threw myself down'. I said, then don't say that I threw you down." She then said in a low voice, in which I had her repeat herself, "He said I threw him down in front of all the white people in the park." It became clear to me at this very moment how some West Indian women may think about race and their position within this community as subordinate to the "white people" who could potentially tell the employer what they overheard in the park.

Molly echoed this fear of children and the mere mention of an accident at the park. I explained how one weekend two employers who were watching their four nieces had a scare when one of the girls fell off of the top of the jungle gym. Molly immediately said that if you're a sitter, "you always have to have your eye on them [kids] because if anything were to happen, that's it, you're fired…you have to be very careful."

Babysitters are constantly being judged and observed by others in public places. It is because of this surveillance and ultimately, control, that West Indian babysitters find themselves on guard as black women in "white people" parks. Surveillance of West Indian babysitters by park employees does play an even greater role than conducting arts and crafts sessions in public parks in the lives of both the parents who employ them and the sitters themselves.

Off the Bench

Rose, a German woman who stands solidly at five-foot-nine with long blonde hair just reaching the middle of the back, employed a Grenadian babysitter, Ingrid, part-time for two years. Rose began asking me one day at the stairs in front of her condo about my babysitter's hours, because she was unhappy with Ingrid. Her husband Dave had even mentioned a few days earlier that they stopped saying Ingrid's name around Lola so that she wouldn't ask for her since they've become close over the years. They had been troubled by Ingrid's behavior on a few occasions. Ingrid would call or have someone call on her behalf (usually her son) to say that she was feeling sick and could not make it to work around ten minutes before she is due to arrive to care for Lola (a common tactic that providers use along with having to go back to their homeland because of a family

member's death when they are not happy with working conditions)[34]. Soon after Rose and I began to discuss Sharon's (my babysitter's) hours for the coming months, Dave showed up at the base of the stairs. The two started discussing the fact that they've had enough of this last minute cancellation and Dave said the next time she calls, he'll have to tell her that "enough is enough", meaning she will be fired.

Rose said that she had a recommended sitter coming for an interview on Saturday. I told her that I knew of a couple of sitters who may become available in February since the children they cared for were starting school, although by this point I was afraid to recommend anyone to her because of her coldness when speaking of Ingrid and the potential that Rose was a "bad employer" as the sitters say. Soon after I mentioned the other potential sitters, Rose said to me, "I don't want a bench sitter though." She motioned to me while saying "someone who sits in the park and talks all day." I found this surprising since I often see both Dave and Rose sitting on the benches with their coffees in hand at the park chatting with neighbors while Lola is playing on an apparatus by herself. It's interesting, however, that Rose thinks that sitters just sit all day on the bench without keeping a close eye on the children or interacting with them. My participant observations over the past three years did not corroborate this sentiment, nor the regularity of this inattention, although on occasion I have seen both parents and babysitters "lose" a child temporarily when the parks become overcrowded on summer days. For example, on any given day in my observations, parents of children at the park

[34] This is not always the case and some providers feel that they are treated unfairly when there is indeed an emergency to attend. For example, Grace's employment as a childcare provider was terminated when she had to go back to the islands for the funeral of her daughter and then came back to the New York only to find herself in an accident that left her unable to work for weeks.

can often be seen sitting on the benches watching their kids from afar, while grandparents almost always tend to sit on benches, perhaps because their bodies are not as flexible and they find it more difficult to play at a child's level or to stand for long periods. I have had lengthy conversations with grandparents of children at the park while they had their newspapers right in front of their noses blocking any possible visual contact with their toddler grandchild. Marga, however, who works in the public parks every day during those same overcrowded summer days, had a different experience. She tells a different story when she speaks of one particular West Indian babysitter,

> The other day I had an experience with one of them [meaning a West Indian babysitter]. She was taking care of a three-year old and the other one I know is just months old. She left the three-year-old sitting at my art table, and I didn't realize that he was there because there were so many other people around. I thought he was with somebody else. When I'm cleaning up, he's just looking at me. I said, "Who are you with?" and he pointed at the babysitter who's in the other area, with the kid in the stroller, and she's talking on the cell phone. I brought the child over. Apparently, you know, because she was looking for him at my table, she didn't notice I'm right there in front of her. You could see the look of shock on her face because he's gone.[35]

Marga informed the sitter that you cannot simply leave a three-year-old child sitting at the art table while sitting in a different area of the park. Marga said that she experiences this quite a bit. She told me in this same conversation that the babysitters cannot always locate the child that they are caring for in the park, but sees this simply as a result of neglect. Angrily, Marga states,

> No, where they [West Indian babysitters] are in one part of the park and the child is someplace else. The child might be crying and I've got to find the sitter and then,[imitating a babysitter], 'Oh, I was watching'…No…You're not watching, not if you're that far away from the child. You're not watching them. You're

[35] The use of the phrase 'one of them' was used to group or isolate West Indian providers from other groups using the parks i.e. grandparents, Latina providers, African Americans, or other ethnic groups.

> glancing at them once in a while to make sure they're still there…If that were my child, I wouldn't want that.

I wondered if Marga, who is a mother of one child, knew that some of these sitters are hired to care for two or three children at once, and many times these children are under the age of three and cannot understand the consequences of leaving the park without their designated childcare provider. But then again, maybe this didn't matter since the sitters are paid to be the watchful eye. I asked Marga if she ever had the opportunity to express the feelings she had about the West Indian sitters that she observed neglecting the children at the park. She told me that she did, but had differing responses from parents. She said, "Yes, and some parents are grateful for it and other parents are totally, 'Aw, just stay out of it.'" Marga then offered two examples of when two different babysitters left the children they cared for to fend for themselves in the public park. One sitter was caring for a four year old boy, a pre-schooler, and he came over to Marga because he needed to go to the bathroom. After she asked him to find his sitter, he stated "I don't know where she is." Marga saw that he desperately needed to use the facilities and took him into the bathroom where he stayed for half an hour because he had to go so badly and the sitter "didn't miss him at all." Marga recalls,

> I had someone go over and ask for the child's babysitter, and nobody answered. So when he came out, I went over and I said, 'Who's taking care of him today?' She said, 'I am.' I explained to her what happened, you know, 'For half an hour he's been inside with me. I don't want to have these kids in that situation…What I'm afraid of, too is they're gonna turn around and say, 'Oh, you're abusing the child,' you know, because people call that out a lot…So I don't like to be in a situation where I'm alone with them.

When I asked how the babysitter responded to her, she said the babysitter told her that the boy could come over and that Marga would watch him.[36] With disbelief and knowing who the parents of this boy were Marga said, "when I see the parents…I'll figure that one out…" Marga did indeed speak to the parents about the incident and stated that they were glad and had spoken to the babysitter about it. It was also the last time that she saw this babysitter sitting in a different location than the child (the sitter was not fired due to this incident). The babysitter confronted Marga afterwards saying that she shouldn't have said anything, but Marga expressed to her that it is not her job to take care of the kids while the childcare provider is sitting.

Because Marga had a relationship with parents living in the neighborhood, whereby she could enforce the rules of the public park spaces, she succeeded in her attempt to control the babysitters' future behavior in that same public space. The second situation with a West Indian babysitter stemmed from an incident where Marga stopped a two and a half-year-old from walking out of the playground while chasing after a ball. The sitter was sleeping for an hour and a half in a corner in the park and when she told the parents, they said it was none of her business, "it's hard to find a good sitter", and she should "just not tell anybody when these things happen…" This made Marga "sad and angry," and she reflected for a moment, then said, "How can you not care about your child? You know, I mean if I had not stopped this kid he could have gone out and gotten in a guy's car…" She spoke negatively about the newer residents whom she describes as white and middle-class, saying, "The ones who don't care, I wonder why do you have children? You know, why did you bother."

---

[36] Here that this might be more acceptable in societies where all adults are able to watch out for all kids.

She does not always tell the parents what is going on in the parks and how West Indian babysitters are treating the children they care for, however. For example, she claims to see West Indian babysitters that she "wouldn't want taking care of [her] cats" because they are so negligent. She also states that she notices that a lot of them don't let the kids out of the strollers. "They're in the strollers all day long, just sitting." Marga told of one story about a babysitter eating the child's lunch,

> I had an experience with one of them about two years ago. A bunch of us had put in our money and bought lunch. We were sitting inside eating. This sitter sat out on the bench and ate the little girl's – the one she was taking care of – ate her lunch and then sent her in to me for food…I said no. I mean if there's any left over, she's welcome to it. She gave me a hard time because I would not feed her child. It's not my job, especially when I see you sitting there eating her lunch.

I asked if she felt that because the hours are long that maybe the sitters are tired by the time they get to the park,

> I imagine they're all very tired because a lot of them tell me that no matter what the weather is, the parents insist they be outside with the kids. That has to be very, very tiring to be out chasing a child all day long…And rain or snow you're outside, you know? So I don't know if it's real tired or just boredom, just had enough of doing this...But they need the money. Like everyone else, they need to have a job.

Marga does sympathize to some degree with the sitters in the park, but she emphasizes that sitters still need to do their jobs to care for the children, even when the children walk away from the bench.

And while Rose would just as quickly, coffee in hand, sit with me and chat while our kids play in the playground, perhaps because of a class and racial difference, Rose feels it is acceptable for her to talk with people of her status and be a "bench mom," while those who are being paid to care for children are not allowed to participate in this same form of socialization. We see then that because childcare providers are "symbols of

middle-class status," this does not necessarily "provide some protection against discrimination in public places" (Feagin 2007:220). The sitters are demonized by those outside their social network for transforming these public parks from ultimately public domain to a relatively private sphere, which constitutes one form of producing or 'creating' social space.

Get Out!!

Formal interviews with West Indian babysitters indicated exactly what Marga was observing, that sitters were required to take the children they care for to the parks during the day, especially if the parent worked from home as a freelancer. Arlene, who is from Guyana, knows this scenario all too well and told me of her struggle with having to be out of the house all day long. We met up in a local coffee shop to find shelter from the rain and she began telling me about her day. As soon as Arlene came to work, the employers wanted her out of the house with Josie, the three year old she cares for. Especially when the husband is at home with the son (he works as a firefighter and therefore has some weekdays off), they want her to be out of the house all day long. They wanted Arlene to take the daughter to the bookstore, to the public play spaces in the area, or to the parks. She has to find somewhere to go all day everyday, even when she's sick. She claims the father is home all day with the son and wonders "why doesn't he take the boy out during the day, so that I can stay home with Josie since I'm sick." Not only was Arlene sick, it was raining and the employers still insisted that she stay out all day with her charge.

Darlene is a West Indian provider, standing five feet tall, stocky, with short dreadlocks draping the side of her face. She is from Barbados and works as a "nanny" (a

term she used) forty hours a week, finishing each day at 4:30pm and then volunteering her time to Domestic Worker's United outside of those hours. I was surprised to hear that she was a nanny as well as a volunteer given the amount of hours she works. I asked her if she was raised in England after noticing that her accent was vaguely familiar (my mother-in law is from England as well). She told me that yes, she was born in Barbados, but raised in Reading, England. But when asked where she is from, she says Barbados and identifies as a West Indian.

In an interview, Darlene blames the advent of technology for the demands that providers go out,

> Modern technology is wonderful and everything, but it's got its drawbacks. In this age everything is computers and back in the old days, people had to go to the office to work, but now they have this technology in people's homes. So now what's happening is you've got these buggers [the employers] they're not going out to the office, so now they're working from the house. So some of these people, they're saying to you…when you're going in the morning…some nannies will say to you that the stroller is packed and they have to go out with the child, regardless of what the weather is like, they have to go out.

Denyse, a fifty-four year old provider from Trinidad, wears dark sun glasses and a baseball style hat while we sit on a park bench to discuss the matter of having to go out with children. She says that she has no problem with the stroller already being packed for going out all day since that is where she'd rather be than inside where the parents may be working. She would spend all of her days at the park, but stated that when her employers "tell me that I have to go out with the child, I have a problem with that…because if it's cold and I don't want to go out or if I'm not feeling well, because I might come to work, I may not feel well to go out, but at least I can work, so I could stay in the house with the child, but you telling me I have to go out, I have a problem with that." I think what Denyse may be missing though is the implication of "having to go

out" by the mere fact that the stroller is packed for the day. In this case, as long as the employers are not stating it explicitly, Denyse found this preparation acceptable.

Placing these unrealistic regulations on babysitters created more than simple anger among the babysitters, it created conflict between the employer and employee that later strained the relationship. Parents unrealistically expected their employees to be out all day with the children and stay "off the bench" for an eight to twelve hour day.

Structuring Sitters' Time

Victoria is a former nanny who is fifth-generation American with European ancestry and owns the movement arts studio which will be discussed at length later in this chapter. She talks explicitly about the conflict between herself and her employers when the time came to determine how the days would be spent. Victoria describes further,

> She wanted me to stroll the children during their naptime, always, and I told her no way, which I ended up winning that battle. I explained to her that from my perspective there were lots of reasons not to do that, the first being that the child doesn't get the best rest, and sleeping in their crib is really – you know, that's what I was taught is the best way for the child to sleep. I also explained that I need some downtime because I'm with these kids ten hours straight. It's a very intense job. It's a very emotionally intense job. And pushing around kids for three hours in all kinds of weather is more than I feel comfortable doing. But mostly because it's not in the best interest of the child.

I asked how this changed during the winter months and if they still required her to go outside. Victoria answered,

> Oh yeah, because that's how they did it. I mean she did the stroller naps and putting the kid in the car seat and driving the kid around as her naptime. But with me, the kids always slept in their cribs…I would tell them twenty minutes before nap, you know, 'It's gonna be naptime soon.' We read books or did some sort of quiet puzzles, or watch a little bit of Baby Einstein and then they'd go down for their nap…I definitely didn't feel that I was doing something detrimental…I mean we did resolve it, and she did know that this was what I was doing. So, you know, we spoke about it. I didn't just go against her wishes.

Arlene and Victoria differed in their experiences with employers who wanted them to be out of the house with the children. While both lived in the United States legally, Arlene chose to remain silent about the troubling situation of being forced out of the house on a daily basis, regardless of the weather, whereas Victoria chose to confront her employers and defend her rights as an employee who could make judgment calls about how to spend the days with the children. The differences here may be generational since Arlene is from an older generation where you are socialized not to speak up against your employer, especially in their private residential spaces and Victoria, at the time, was a college student who felt empowered knowing that unfair employment treatment could be fought legally. At the same time, as I observed, the differences could have more to do with immigration status and the perceptions of inferiority that sometimes plague first-generation immigrant West Indian women who believe that you should not go against someone who is providing you subsistence level wages. Race also plays a role: Arlene feels less comfortable than Victoria who feels more equal to her employers because she is white like them. Arlene's discomfort in expressing her true feelings about her treatment could be a direct result of her not wanting to confront the racial "other", while Victoria may view herself as having equal racial and class status to her employers and therefore feel justified in confronting them about her employment duties.

From a park employee's standpoint, I think Marga's assessment of some West Indian babysitters and perhaps babysitters in general is correct—they are tired of using public places and spaces to care for the children they are responsible for. Most sitters that I have observed will keep an eye on the child and on other children while socializing on the benches. If a situation arises that requires the sitter's attention, the sitter usually

jumps to her feet to attend to the child. This socialization is part of what maintains the environment that the sitters and the children occupy. I asked Marga to tell me about her experiences while working in the public park and raising her daughter. According to Marga, her daughter was always with her at the park,

"We weren't supposed to bring our kids to work with us, but when she was that young and it was more of a family neighborhood I mean…she'd be here playing. We had rules. You know if you're going from one area to another, you need to at least come over and tap me if I'm busy so I can look and see what you're doing…Um, but I'd be looking for her and all the mothers would be pointing at her to let me know where she is."

TMB: …You talked about there being more families in the beginning [of your work in the park], so you could probably leave your younger child out because all the parents were watching?

M: "Yep" as she nodded her head.

TMB: Do you think that that exists with the West Indian babysitters…they're all looking after each other's kids?

M: If they know each other, you know they're friends, then they'll watch out for each other's kids, but if you're not friends with them, they don't know who the child is.

TMB: So do you see communities of sitters?"

M: Yep, yeah.

In the three years that I participated in the community of sitters that Marga speaks of, I often saw West Indian sitters asking other West Indian sitters to watch their charges while they got something from the local bakery or ran back to the employer's house for something that they forgot. There are several communities of sitters and the communities often change throughout the day depending on the age of the children under care and the daily routine of the sitters. For example, in the morning hours, I would see Rachel

heading over to Molly's employer's home where they would get ready for their day's activities. As they exit the home, they would meet up with Janet on the street as she strolls up with Cameron. The three women would then go to the home where Debbie works, since Debbie now cares for twin babies, and help her down the stairs with the double stroller. They would all head over to the park or run errands in the nearby stores. After lunch when most sitters have gone indoors for their charges to take a nap, Molly may take another walk to visit with Lyla (a sitter from Jamaica) or to drop off some food for other sitters either at the park or at their employer's home. Rachel, who often stays away from the employer's home during the day because they live a little further away, would go to a variety of parks throughout the afternoon (sometimes up to three) and spend a couple of hours at each with different sitters.

The communities of sitters indeed exist and move across social spaces throughout the day. Because of this, they are publicly exposed and perceptions about them become more obvious to residents and park workers alike.

My Time, My Money

Requests from employers for sitters to stay late, employers' sudden urges to "want to go out," or what are perceived as excuses to explain why they will not be home on time are not isolated events. During one of the playdates held at my home with five West Indian babysitters, one sitter named Janet began discussing how she doesn't like it when the employers come home late and blame it on the subways being "messed up." Molly reiterated this viewpoint by saying "they does all say that…it's the subway." All of the ladies (the term West Indian childcare providers use to reference one another) shook their heads in agreement about this "excuse-making" by employers. Janet, the

sitter from St. Vincent, made it explicit that "the point here is that if the sitter is required to be at work on time (and could be at risk of being fired because they show up late), then the employer should respect these same rules and come home on time regardless of what the subways are doing." In the babysitters' minds, employers should not use public transit delays, regardless of whether or not they are telling the truth, as an excuse since this tolerance would not be acceptable if it were the employee who used these excuses. Not only that, but it is often seen as having no regard for the sitter's time which is being taken away from their families or their private pursuits.

While at another Brooklyn park in the early evening, around 5:30pm, I went over to the swingset by the infant playground and spoke with a sitter from Jamaica named Monica who stood two swings from me. I asked her until what time she was working, and she said "I don't know." I asked, "Don't you have set hours?" She replied, "No, the parents come whenever…they come at different times because they "work in executive jobs in Manhattan, in the city…They come home at any time of the night usually between 6:30 or 7:30pm and I work until somebody comes home." I asked if that's difficult for her and she said yes. Monica has been babysitting for a fourteen month old boy since he was three weeks old and claims that she doesn't mind working those long hours because he is so good although she told the employers that "the way it works is that I'm supposed to have a set time," but they never gave her a set time, so she just works until the first person comes home.

Arlene, from Guyana, told me one day in a coffee shop where she brought Josie to play, as she often does because she is required to leave the house when she works, that she too has unstructured work hours. Originally in her verbal contract Arlene was

supposed to work only two days a week at a rate of $250. She said to the employer, "You know what, pay me an extra $50 and I'll come a third day to do some cleaning. I'll take care of the girl and I'll do some cleaning for $300." Basically, Arlene was now earning $100 each day for an eight hour day. The employers had a second child and by the time he came, they had her coming in on Mondays in addition to the other three days, but they only pay an extra $40 for that whole day, but now she cares for both kids. By offering an additional forty dollars for the Mondays, they avoided the hourly rate. If she has to work overtime, she doesn't get paid more because they do not pay her per hour, they pay her a flat rate.

There is no amount attached to the worth of each hour's work. She said, "they're using me like a donkey." They don't preset days for her, they just call her up on the days she's supposed to work. She works random days and sometimes cannot afford her rent. For example, this Monday she can't afford the rent, so her sister has to help her out and the employers know this, but they still don't pay her more for her hours worked. The frustration here, though, has more to do with the discomfort that Arlene has in fighting for her rights as a worker and demanding a higher pay. But Arlene is part of this vulnerable group of childcare workers who desperately need the employment in order to survive. Arlene could potentially find other work since she is a documented immigrant, but because she is in her fifties now and has not upgraded her education, she remains positioned as an "unskilled worker" and has only been able to find work as a childcare provider.

Victoria, who later became the owner of the movement studio, found tension between herself and her employers because she was not prepared for the long hours that would be unexpectedly extended at a moment's notice when she worked as a nanny,

> Usually it was like, 'I'm not gonna be home on time,' an hour before [the workday ends]. You know, 'I'll be home an hour late.' Sometimes they would even call fifteen minutes before, saying they were a half hour late…I mean there was also days that I was asked, 'Would you stay late tonight? I want to go out.' So there would be days that I'd be there from 8:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night…I would say there was a general lack of respect for my time throughout the whole time…Absolutely. You know, just the coming home late on a regular basis, calling and assuming that I was available to stay late. You know, I will admit that there were often mornings where I was ten or fifteen minutes late for sure, so it's not all on one side.

The West Indian childcare providers with whom I spoke were not the only ones faced with such abuse of their time by employers who made excuses for being late or otherwise extended their work hours without adequate compensation. Victoria's interactions with her employers were stressful and not always positive as, "There were a lot of issues with getting paid on time." She explained,

> I mean I'm pretty up front, so I'd say, 'Where's my money?' on Friday afternoon. 'Oh, I forgot it' the employer would say. So actually, by the time I left, she would leave her ATM card for me and I would go take out my money myself and leave her a receipt…Because, you know, she'd say, 'Can I pay you next Monday?' and I'd be like, 'I need the money today.' You know, I was a student and I was making between probably $450.00 and $600.00 a week, and I needed it.

As with Arlene and Victoria, salary came up routinely in my fieldwork among other West Indian babysitters. One day Irene commented that babysitters ought to get a cost of living increase every year for either part-time or full-time work. Irene explains,

> If you think of it this way, if you leave your babysitter's salary one way whether they're full-time or part-time every year, remember every year stuff goes up. Rent goes up, electricity goes up…everything goes up and I'm sure where you work your salary goes up and…some people get upset for that…if you're getting an increase because stuff is getting more expensive for you, my stuff is not staying the same price, my stuff is increasing too...most West Indian people are

> not really [asking for] seven hundred dollars, or 'I want a thousand dollars' but the thing that people have to realize is that we appreciate the little things…and we appreciate when we see that you appreciate what we're doing—that we feel better, that we do our jobs better because we see that they really appreciate our effort. But if you're mean…it makes us feel uncomfortable because remember, we're with your kids most of the time and you know, we'll end up loving those kids just like they're our own.

Economic and social relations are mixed entities that determine how babysitters value their worth as an employee as well as the job that they do for their employers. An increase in salary is often expressed by West Indian babysitters as one of the best ways for employers to show that they value the work that childcare providers do.

Cultural Clash in Perceptions of Childrearing

The public display of childcare allows for those occupying public spaces to view childcare providers with acute vision, especially when the sitters are West Indian. Marga spoke to this display several times throughout our conversations. Her perceptions about West Indian childcare providers were clear:

"Mostly all I see is just the sitters sitting and not interacting with the kids. I've never seen them abuse them. I never saw them really engaged with them either, you know?"

"So you see them sitting mostly during the day?" I asked.

"Yeah, mostly sitting. Sitting and talking with each other."

Marga acknowledges that there are communities of West Indian babysitters who look out for each other's children, but she still maintains that some of the sitters she encounters need to "get off the bench" and "onto the floor."[37] At this point, I think it is important to note how I observed babysitters using bench spaces within the parks. They

[37] West Indian childcare providers tend to not play on the floor with children, especially as the providers become older (Colen 1995:391).

occupied the benches for a variety of reasons. One reason is to claim a space that can later be used to feed the child by placing their diaper bags on the bench beside them instead of having to run after the child in the playground. Another reason is that since all of the West Indian babysitters come from warmer climates in their homelands, they used to seek refuge from the heat under the shady trees that these parks boast about in their printed literature. Molly and Debbie tell me on some of the hotter days that they are sitting in the shade to keep themselves "cool from the sun." The other reason, reflecting more their ideas of correct parenting, is that unlike the "helicopter mom" (a mother who hovers over her child every second of the time at the park), West Indian sitters allow the children in their care to explore independently. They have no added expectations of developing relationships with other parents by interacting constantly with the child to demonstrate how they fit in the community as a "good parent."

West Indian childcare providers also stay on the bench because they do not want to go "on the floor" to interact with the children they care for. They claim that their employers are "dirty", "filthy", and "disgusting". Carol once told me that her new employer had her baby on the rug when Carol first came indoors, so Carol went to take her shoes off, but the employer told her not to bother. Carol said the father then walked over and put his street shoes on the same rug that the baby was lying on and that same rug was covered in dog hair. She said they were "nasty" people and didn't want anything to do with that rug and then picked the baby up. Similarly, Molly has made several comments, as other West Indian babysitters have, about the dogs that they have seen inside the homes of employers. Molly explained that back in the West Indies people keep dogs outdoors and they eat the food that is left over from the family meal. She doesn't

understand how families in the U.S. can have dogs indoors, especially when there are children around.

Judgments like these and the values they represent show up in other opinions. There is the sense that employers don't enjoy spending time with their kids (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) a common sentiment among West Indian childcare providers who also believed that white middle-class working women simply "had children in order to say that they had children" as one participant told me. Carla restates this sentiment when speaking of her employer: "She just does not like to be alone with the children," which is why she works so many hours, even on the weekends. Carla's definition of what good motherhood means stems from her background as a black woman from Grenada,

> As a mom myself… sitting down and looking at people, I don't want to seem biased because I am black…but I don't know I think there is something about black women that they seem to be very connected to their children…not that there aren't bad black mamas…but they seem to be very in tune, very patient, I see parents who go off, but you know I'm a parent too and I go off on my daughter…if it's a parent I know then I say, maybe you should try this…and the baby settle down…I think they're very in tune…especially in my country [Grenada] we have been taking care of kids since we were you know because once you're twelve…eleven…you take care of your younger brothers and sisters, you change pampers, you climb up on the stove to warm bottles, so it's something that's really in us and in the Caribbean, women, girls, are trained at a very young age almost from the time they pop out, to be mothers. To be the nurturing…you know, that's part of our culture, you train your daughter to be a good wife…so I think it's something in our culture.

Carla strongly believes that there is a cultural difference in how a woman is trained to mother her child based on her experience in taking care of younger siblings. She seems unaware of the fact, though, that it is not only West Indian families who have older siblings take care of younger siblings. This leads one to believe that Carla

embraces the stereotype that West Indian women are better nurturers than white women (Blum 1999).

Irene broke down the differences in the mothering role of the employer and employee, saying,

> You know what. Everyone has in their mind, every culture is different. Let me tell you about how it is in West Indian countries. We know you are a mother, you have to cook, you have clean, you have to wash, but some mothers don't have the opportunity to do that. That doesn't make them a bad mother. If they have to go out and work to take care of their kids, that doesn't make them a bad mother, because we're doing the same thing. Well, not the same thing...but almost the same thing. The difference with West Indian parents is that although we're babysitters for other people, when we come home we still have to do everything we did for your kids for our kids. Half the time we don't have anybody to do it. We have to do it. So we're doing the same thing twice.

What Irene is speaking about here is women's "Double Days" or the "Second Shift" as Hochschild (1989) terms it—when women's work and family responsibilities or arrangements intersect. As Hochschild (1989) and others point out, the division of labor in the household for dual-earning families tends to fall more heavily on women (Wharton 1994; Perkins and DeMeis 1996), which Irene acknowledges when she talks about working during the day for her employer's family and then going back to her house to work the "second shift" doing the same work over again for her own family.

> And it depends on how they were brought up. Some people were brought up always having somebody to do something for them, so if they were brought up like that, they don't see that as bad when they do it. When they come home, they try to spend time with their kids, you know they do stuff with their kids and that's how they view being a good mother. You can't be upset with them for that. Not because you think cooking, cleaning, washing as a mother, does not mean that they view it as that.
>
> "So you think it's a difference in culture?" I asked.

"Yeah, it is. And you know what, the kids love them the same way. They might be mad at them for being away, but they love them...the same way!! Because it's their mom!"

"What makes an employer a bad mother then as so many West Indian babysitters have claimed?" I wondered aloud. Irene openly admits that there are some bad mothers and offers her definition of one,

> A bad mother to me is if you neglect your kids and not do anything at all, not financially, not physically, nothing. You abuse them and you leave them and go and you don't come back, that's a bad mother. But if you have to go out there and work to take care of your kids and you make that effort on the weekends or when you come home at night to do something with them, spend at least an hour with them, then I don't see anything wrong with that…We all do what we have to do. Because if you don't have the money for them to survive, you're going to be a bad mother…

Differences between the employer and employee are cultural as evidenced in the way babysitters discipline the children under care. Evelyn explains as we look at the children she cares for in the park,

"These kids can't get under my skin...I leave them to sit and cry and pay them no mind when they want to act up. The parents [are] the ones who go to them everytime when they act up. Not me. I just leave them to settle down."

Evelyn points out the little girl that she cares for and how she is sulking over on the jungle gym. She says to me, "You see that. She wants me to go over to her, but I won't. I will just leave her there until she really needs me." The girl was simply looking for attention while her twin was running around and eating some snacks in between. Evelyn continues to explain how the parents told her that the girl sat down in the middle of the crosswalk one day pouting. She was laughing while telling the story and saying that the parents just let her sit down in the middle of the street until they had to finally

pick her up. Evelyn said she didn't understand parents today with their permissive disciplinary ways. The children respected Evelyn more than the mother when it came to discipline.

Victoria had similar experiences with her employer as well. She talked of an incident where the older boy she cared for spit on her in front of the employer. Victoria explained,

"…I was waiting for her to say something and she didn't say anything. I actually said to him, 'Please never do that to me again. That is very mean. You never spit on someone, especially somebody who cares for you.' I just turned to her and said, 'I have to leave for the rest of the day.'"

Victoria left forty five minutes earlier than usual, upset and distraught,

"I left and I called her that night and I said, 'Look, if I'm ever put in that position again, I can't work for you anymore.' Because he's four years old, you know…So definitely I would say from my experience, my sort of discipline style is much more similar to other caregivers than parents that I've encountered."

Having every right to be upset at the employer for allowing her child to go without discipline for spitting on her, Victoria was able to use communication and possibly her empowerment as another white woman to be frank with her employer regardless of the possible repercussions.

Language Usage

Language and accents are used in different ways among West Indian babysitters. West Indian sitters are mediating strangeness with closeness by socializing among each other in public places such as parks, and they intensify or lessen spoken patois to siphon

off space from others in the park. For example, when I first entered this social world, the West Indian babysitters would speak slowly and in what most would consider "standard English." However, it only took a few phrases on my part to indicate that I came from a West Indian background and soon after these same babysitters would speak faster using colloquial language[38] to include me in their conversations. I also observed over the years on several occasions how babysitters on the bench would use patois to talk about their employers while their potential neighbors are sitting close to them. Once the sitters broke out into their native tongues, others who were not considered "part of the group" would get up and leave the bench area that these women occupied. In other words, closeness is used to close the gap felt by migration and mediates the potential isolation that is written about when discussing domestic workers in general. In addition, it is the socialization among West Indian babysitters in public places that creates a social space that supports the work these West Indian women do, as will be detailed in later chapters.

Organizing Public Park Events

Public Park events in Brooklyn are often organized by the City Parks and Recreation staff or are sponsored and organized by outside corporations. But through my fieldwork among groups of West Indian providers, I noticed that these women also plan elaborate events for themselves and for the children in their care. In May of 2006, I was invited by Molly to attend an event that she was planning for the child in her care. It was Michelle's second birthday party and it would be held at one of the smaller public parks in Brooklyn. I received a verbal invitation to join Molly, Debbie, Hazel, and some of the other babysitters that Molly knows from the parks. I wondered why she was throwing a

[38] This colloquial language, also known as patois or creole, is rooted in English with some African roots, but is typically difficult for non-Caribbeans to decipher.

birthday party for the child she cared for when I had already received a formal invitation from Michelle's parents through Molly for another party a few days later. She explained to me that she just wanted to do something special for Michelle and she wanted to have everyone together (meaning the childcare providers).

On the day of the birthday party, I brought my children with me and entered the iron gates that led to a picnic area in the park. I noticed a group of West Indian babysitters congregated around five large aluminum foil containers holding large amounts of prepared food. I headed toward them and I found Molly organizing plates, cups, and spoons. Molly introduced me to the rest of the group as "a mother whose parents are West Indian" that she invited to join the party. After having my position as a guest justified to the other women, I sent my kids to play with the other children in the park. After Molly had spent ten minutes preparing to have all the food served, she asked everyone to gather around the picnic table area. She asked one of the sitters to say grace while all ten adults held hands in a circle with the children under care (although some of the smaller babies were in strollers). The woman began to say the blessing,

"Oh God, please bless the food we are about to share, Oh God, please bless us as babysitters and as mothers to care for these children that we love, Oh God, bless these children and all of us who have children at home and give us strength and peace, Oh God in your name we pray…Amen."

After this prayer, Molly continued,

"God, bless these children and these women who care for these children each and every day and bless their parents and our families to have healthy lives. God give us the strength to do our jobs and to love one another...Amen."

Religion was an integral part of the providers' lives. Most of the women I observed and interviewed belonged to United churches that brought together many Caribbean people from a variety of religions including Catholicism, Prebyterian, and Anglican. Some women were self-proclaimed Seventh Day Adventists and some Baptists. While religion did not come up often throughout my participation with providers because it would be considered rude to impose one's beliefs on others, it was spoken about in context of how other providers should act towards the children under their care. I would often hear that sitters should be firm, but kind. Other sitters used religion to correct the behavior of other sitters they befriended in public venues by jokingly stating "God wouldn't like what you just said to me." Great laughter in the immediate park areas would follow statements like these. The providers would banter with one another about who is closer to following God's will. But it was the Seventh Day Adventists that made an impression on employers specifically. In my interviews with two particular employers, I discovered that Seventh Day Adventists were seen as the most withdrawn in terms of sociability.

One male employer, who is a freelance journalist during the weekdays employs a West Indian sitter from St. Lucia for his two year old son Luca. In our interview, he discussed the fact that his sitter does not frequently socialize as he sees other sitters do in the neighborhood. His assessment of this was that because she is a Seventh Day Adventist, she stays to herself mostly and focuses more on how to follow the calling of her religion through restraint and kindness. His sitter was seen as "not social" by the employer, yet this is the same woman I have seen congregating with several sitters in the parks and walking on the sidewalks with other sitters and the children under their care.

She participates socially among other childcare providers, but is admittedly more reserved than others in the way that she prompts conversation (or does not prompt).

In another conversation with Erynn Esposito, the community organizer and employer of a Trinidadian provider and two Puerto Rican providers, she discusses her frustration with the "degree to which religion plays a part in the way West Indian sitters deal with adversity". She claims that they [West Indian women] say "trust in God and it will be okay." She goes on, "Debbie [another West Indian sitter who helped to organized sitters] said that she would stop working on the organizing [of domestic workers on behalf of employers] because it conflicted with her religion as a Seventh Day Adventist that states that she is supposed to suffer. Erynn stated firmly that her impression is that "religion silences them."

It is possible that Erynn and Luca's father simply do not understand how religion becomes a means of uniting those from Caribbean islands. In general, providers tended to be more religiously identified than employers, although this was not always the case. In fact, Molly found her current employers through her church and others met their prospective employers through similar religious settings. Conflicts about religion were rarely observed, but that may have more to do with the fact that employers needed a childcare provider regardless of any slight strain religion may bring into the fray. For West Indian childcare providers religion was used as a cultural identifier in addition they use religion as a domain through which they can find solidarity as immigrants to the U.S. (Khan, 2004; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). I was even invited to join Janet and her family in church because she felt that I "would enjoy taking my kids there." Although I did not attend, I felt that Janet was trying to reach out to me as someone who might be a willing

participant in this type of outing because of my West Indian background. It is through religion and other cultural markers that West Indian providers found a common appreciation for each other and the work they do.

After the prayers, Molly indicated that we should all dig in. The spread, a mixture of West Indian and American foods, included noodles, salad, baked chicken, a rice and beans mixture, and little frosted cupcakes for the kids to eat. We all ate and laughed while the kids smothered their faces with frosting from the cupcakes. We then posed for pictures with the kids—even the ones in the strollers were included in the photos. While celebrating with the babysitters, I encountered one of the parents who lives in the area and has a West Indian babysitter. She asked me what I was doing and I told her that one of the sitters was having a birthday party for the child she cares for. The parent left shortly afterwards after talking about the weather for a few seconds and realizing that she was not going to be invited to join in the festivities. I noticed some of the childcare providers looking at me after this interaction with a white parent and immediately felt uncomfortable although I had just said prayers and ate food with the providers. Was I breaking some rule or code here? I carried on speaking mostly with those providers that I knew already and after singing a West Indian baby song to some of the crying babies in the strollers, I noticed those same providers who were looking at me strangely at first, smiling and nodding their heads with approval that I truly was of West Indian background. Having to justify my position within this group seemed to be ongoing as I encountered new providers.

All in all, the birthday event for Michelle was a success. Molly was able to cook for the other sitters, which she always enjoyed doing, and she demonstrated her care for

the child she looks after by organizing a birthday party. I later asked Molly in a quiet place at the birthday party that her employers held at another public park (offering bagels, some fruit, and coffee) why she threw a different party and she simply replied that she wanted to share the birthday with the "other ladies and children." There was a sense of pride which Molly claimed from being able to cook hot foods for a party and from the fact that she had a special relationship with the child she cares for.

Social Capital and Social Networks

Although I only occasionally see other babysitters holding birthday parties for the children in their care, I did notice that babysitters were integrated into the process of coming up with the guest list for the parties their employers organized for their children and handed out invitations on their behalf to other babysitters and children in the parks. Often, the employers themselves do not know who will be attending the parties since they are not always aware of who are their children's friends at the public parks that they frequent with their childcare providers. I only met Michelle's parents for the first time at the birthday party to which they invited me through Molly. West Indian babysitters act as social network agents on behalf of the parents in this sense and in some ways are increasing their employer's social capital[39] by helping them connect with other parents in the neighborhood who hold similar class status.

West Indian babysitters do not only act as social agents for parents, however, and they celebrate their social networks among other West Indian babysitters. During my research in the field I attended an annual event held by West Indian babysitters for West

[39] Portes (1998) and Bourdieu (1986) define the meaning of social capital as involvement and participation in groups that have positive consequences, but it should be noted that social capital can have negative consequences because it is exclusionary (Portes1998).

Indian babysitters in one of the larger public parks. I was invited by Molly to attend and to make a small donation for the food that would be supplied. I showed up on the day of the event and noticed a sea of red t-shirts (which indicated that a monetary donation was made to receive food) with little bears stamped on the chest that literally territorialized the larger open space of the park. There were large tables organized along the bocce ball alley fence to accommodate the food being served and balloons decorating various parts of the open space (see chapter three for more about this event). It was funny to observe one half of the park all in red and the other half regular patrons of the park who didn't dare cross the "red line." While several of the women were enjoying traditional West Indian foods, other babysitters set up relay races among themselves near the basketball courts. I overheard one of the children exclaim "that's the quickest I've ever seen Debbie move in my life" as she took part in one of the races. Once all of the races were completed, ribbons for first, second, and third place were distributed. There was laughter, food, camaraderie, and ongoing debate over who won the races as I took pictures to capture the event on their behalf. The only disagreement all day was about food, which is discussed in chapter three.

I did see Marga, the park employee, walking around with her City Parks and Recreation designated green t-shirt among the red t-shirts worn by the West Indian providers. Later, I asked Marga how she became involved in this event:

"You know, they asked me if they could have it. Every summer they have this potluck lunch. They were asking me if it would be okay to do it. I was planning on doing my end-of-the-year party that day anyway so I said, 'We'll do it together. In the

morning, I'll do my games and give out prizes. In the afternoon, we'll do your races and you do what you want to do... but basically all they told me I had to do was eat.'"

While Marga distributed toys and prizes in the morning for her part of the day's events, she said that most of the babysitters were helping with the races and she didn't have to do anything but eat for two hours. This was a different experience for Marga. She said, "They were involved in them [the races] and that was the busiest I've seen most of them…it was a very fun day…because then they all come together and they're actually doing something with the kids rather than just sitting with them."

It is no surprise that Marga passed judgment on the West Indian babysitters whom she saw during the workweek at the park, but I felt it unjust to determine that these women "only" sit with the children they care for throughout the day. While this was Marga's perception, I observed West Indian babysitters who had hectic days that sometimes began at 5:30 am and ended at 7:00 pm. Throughout the day, not necessarily at the park, they were physically involved with the children's daily routines—spending time packing their diaper bags, bathing them, feeding them often three meals a day, and putting them down to sleep for naps or for the night. Moreover, many were responsible for taking the children to storytime at the library, doctor's appointments, taking them to school and picking them up, and taking them to a variety of lessons. All of this is done in the time that was not designated for public park play. These women were constantly moving from place to place and, given the larger rhythm of their day, it was no surprise that they decided to take moments out to sit down in the park once they arrived there. Also, the age of these babysitters ranged from the early twenties to the early sixties. I noticed this is not taken into account when I spoke with employers about the physical

demands of childcare work. I was often surprised at the amount of physical labor involved in this "labor of love." So how do other workers in public play spaces perceive West Indian babysitters and their use of the space? I now focus my attention on one particular play space where many West Indian babysitters take the children they care for to lessons throughout the day and for open play time.

Public Play Spaces: Lessons of Love

In taking my children to toddler activities in Brooklyn and following the daily lives of West Indian babysitters in one gentrified neighborhood, I discovered that open-to-the-public lessons that were meant for, as stated in the title, "Mommy and Me", were actually being held for and thus should be appropriately titled, "Sitters and Me." These lessons, while open to the general public, are privately paid for by parents of the children who attend. Enrolling my daughter in a children's tumbling class seemed like the socially appropriate thing to do since everyone else with a child under the age of three was doing it, although this emphasis on structured class settings for a one-and-a-half year old could also be seen as a desperate attempt by me as a parent to gain some form of cultural capital.[40] And well, if you love your child enough to pay for the lessons (ranging up to $250 for a twelve week session, 45 minutes per week), you were seen in the neighborhood as a "good mother." From the photographs used to promote these classes showing mother and baby nose to nose, smiling at one another, the love experience was sure to bond mother to child.

[40] Some research suggests that participation in organized children's activities are a result of external parental pressures and not intrinsically enjoyed by the child. Mahoney, Harris, and Eccles (2006) report that it is a fallacy to believe that such over-scheduling or organized activity may undermine family functioning and well-being.

The mélange of adults participating in the tumbling class that at first sounded like a setting for parents (mothers more specifically) and their toddlers was in fact made up of both mothers and babysitters, most of whom were first generation West Indian women. All of the adults had to take direction from the instructors and were required to keep all of the children under control. What caught my attention was that the adults were required to participate physically in all of the events, meaning they had to sit on the floor for stretching exercises, walk around the tumbling course while holding onto the child, sing songs, and direct the children in all activities. Some days it seemed that the adults were doing more work than the children.

While observing some West Indian babysitters, I noticed that they were not as physically motivated to participate as some of the parents in the classes. Several mentioned that this type of physical activity is not what they were paid to do, although some also talked about being grateful to have something different to do that is outside of the house. As Marga, the public park worker, had suggested earlier, some of the West Indian sitters may experience boredom when they are relegated to the same routine. Breaking up the workweek with a lesson or two in a confined space that protects you from the sun or rain was a relief for many sitters and parents alike. However, some sitters I spoke with felt it was an imposition on their time and demanded too much physical exertion.

After several months in Spring 2006, I began noticing that the majority of participants in these types of lessons which included tumbling, dance, music, language, and even art, were now West Indian babysitters and their charges. Janet, a babysitter from St. Vincent, came up to me in one of the smaller parks in Brooklyn one day, telling

me that Cameron's parents had asked her to get a flyer and check out the classes available for Cameron during the workweek. Janet, a mother of two and an Early Childhood Education student at Borough of Manhattan Community College, was upset and couldn't understand why the parents themselves wouldn't obtain this information since it is for "their child." She said in her quiet tone, "I don't know why they are telling me to go get this flyer for them when they live right there. If they want their son to go to lessons, they should find out for themselves and see the place instead of telling me to do the research." There was a distinct conflict between what Janet felt were her responsibilities as a provider and what a good parent's responsibilities were. While some babysitters expressed this same concern over "doing the research" others were grateful for the diversion from their daily routine and quickly realized that this may make the job slightly more pleasant if they comply with the task.

I spoke with Victoria to determine what she thought of all the West Indian babysitters who attend classes with their charges considering the classes were promoted in the beginning as classes for the parents of these same children. Victoria co-owns the studio with a West Indian male from Barbados. Both of them have lived in surrounding gentrified neighborhoods for around five years and have owned the studio for the last two years. Victoria's responsibilities with the company are to oversee the administrative, financial, public relations, and marketing aspects, and to teaching half of the classes. Her partner teaches the other half of the classes. Ninety-nine percent of the studio's clients come from nearby gentrified neighborhoods and a few from Manhattan. Victoria describes her clientele (meaning the people who pay for the classes) as seventy- five percent "upper middle class Caucasian families" with some African American, Asian

families, and one or two exceptions like myself am from a West Indian background. My initial reason for wanting to speak with Victoria about her studio was that she comes into contact with many of the women that I had been observing and interviewing over the past two years. I later found out that to support her college career, she was also a nanny for four years in one of the gentrified neighborhoods under study in Brooklyn. I thought she would make an interesting comparison to the women with whom I have been in contact. I discuss this at the end of the section.

Interacting with West Indian Babysitters

West Indian childcare providers make up seventy percent of the people who use her studio according to Victoria. They participate in daytime classes with the children they care for or use the space for what is called "non-registered playtime" when parents and sitters can play for up to three hours at a time with unstructured activities. From my observations, most sitters do not actively participate in these activities and sit along the wall watching the children and socializing among themselves. Non-registered playtime is generally paid for by the employer at ten dollars per child or seventeen dollars for two, and is used mainly on days when it is too cold, hot, or rainy to use the public parks. The "Mommy or Caregiver and Me" classes, as Victoria called them, are held in the mornings, and Victoria says that she sees the sitters in a mothering role for that specific class time,

"I would say that they're in that role for the entire time that they're the caretaker of the child. I would say my experience with every caregiver that I know, that I would consider a good caregiver, definitely takes over that mothering role for the time that they're with the child."

Trying to get Victoria to pinpoint what she meant by "mothering role" I specifically asked how the children's behavior is different with the caregivers versus their parents. She had this to say,

> The caregivers are stricter and have higher expectations of the children than the parents do [in classes]…I can tell you this, it's all a result of the way that the caregiver or parent participates. The child's behavior is completely a result of the adult in a Parent or Caregiver and Me class…So if the caregiver or parent is active and participates and follows our instructions, the children do very well. If they don't, the child still might do well because they might be a focused child that's able to follow our verbal instructions anyway and is interested, and they might continue to do well. But there are many instances where they don't do well because the adult coming with them isn't doing their job.

While Victoria felt that there is an equal standard of "mothering" that depends entirely on participation level, there were some West Indian babysitters she noticed that "don't want to participate, and they don't want to stand up, and they don't want to sing songs." When I continued to ask if she thought this was acceptable, she quickly responded with,

> Personally no. Because to me, I always appreciated the people I worked for, for putting the kids in classes because it gave us something to do and I always felt that it was a positive thing. I was always very active and involved in it, which is how I ended up getting a job doing it because the people that owned the place [another studio that Victoria worked in before owning her own studio] saw me and they offered me a job because of how much I participated as a caregiver.

"Do you think that also has something to do with your age at that time…" I asked.

"I think it has to do with my dance background and just understanding the goal of the class. I think that sometimes it's an age thing. We definitely try and accommodate people who are not physically able to do what we ask. You know, maybe they can't sit on the floor. We bring them a piece of gymnastics equipment to sit on."

When asked if she found that West Indian sitters played on the floor with the kids Victoria said, "From my experience [as a nanny], the ones that won't, tell you up front

before they're hired…I definitely have encountered a lot of caregivers that say, 'I don't do this, this, this or this. I don't cook. I don't clean. I don't do this'…All the ones that I know that act that way are very clear about that."

I asked Victoria if she felt that was within the rights of the childcare providers to tell employers up front what they will or will not accept as their work duties and she replied,

> I think if the employer is comfortable with that and they communicate it, and the employer still wants to hire them, then yeah. I think that this is a very sort of – you know, there's no sort of requirements or specifics about doing this job. So I think that it really has to be decided between the employer and the employee, what the responsibilities are…I think that if you're dealing with a young child that yes, you should be on the floor interacting with them, personally.

She continues though with the caveat that if the caregivers do not want to be on the floor with the child then they should compensate for that in other ways by reading a lot of books and doing art activities. Again, then, we see this mantra of being "on the floor" as a key element to caring for children. Victoria has a more acute awareness than Marga, the park playground employee, of West Indian sitters who may not be physically able to get on the floor.

This awareness and sensitivity towards these women was unique among many of the people that I had interviewed and so I asked Victoria if her partnership with a West Indian benefited their studio in any way. She said that there are some positive outcomes from having two cultures present in the studio, especially with the number of West Indian women they encounter on a daily basis. Victoria explains,

> I think that there are people that feel more comfortable coming here because of that. I mean I've noticed that we have a lot of interracial families that come here now, and I think the fact that we are two different races encourages that, and I like that aspect of it. You know, I like that. I also like that there's kids that maybe would never interact with a black man that are getting to, and seeing that he's not

> scary and he's not bad, and he really is a great teacher…So I think it's been a positive thing for our business, and I think it's also definitely increased the number of people that want to come here. You know, nannies meet him on the street. They tell their employers about the studio. So I think it's definitely expanded our clientele for sure, having the two of us here and that we do come from different backgrounds.

She continues to speak of her business partner by saying,

> I think there [are] times that Derek knows how to deal with things much better than I do. The way that he would deal with it would be less offensive than the way I would deal with it, even though that would never be my intention. I mean we have conflicts because of our cultural differences, and it's just they're cultural differences. I think that, yeah, there's definitely times when he's said to me…deal with this in this way because the way that you're dealing with it might seem offensive to this group of people.

Through Victoria's work as an owner of a studio and as a nanny herself for four years, she hears several stories from West Indian babysitters that all sound only too familiar given my research. She said that most of her interactions as a nanny were with "West Indian" or "Hispanic" women,

> Even the people that I just hung out with on the playground, all West Indian, all older…Just based on my past experience, you know, I know the majority of the caregivers in Brooklyn are West Indian. I mean, almost all that I've come into contact with. Actually, I've come into contact now with a few college students that definitely have more of a similar background to me now. But I don't remember encountering any when I was a nanny.

And while she claims not to have felt any privilege as a white woman, she did recognize a difference in the way she was treated as a nanny and in her ability to set boundaries with employers,

> I definitely didn't feel it but some of the stories that I've heard from West Indian nannies, about just all kinds of horrible things like, 'Change your clothes when you get in the house because you're dirty,' and 'I don't want the clothes that you wear in your house in my house.'" Stuff like that. I mean I definitely never encountered anything like that. I would actually say in some ways I had a harder time. Because most people assumed that I was a young mom with these kids because they had light eyes, brown hair, white skin, that when moms found out that I was a nanny, they wanted nothing to do with me. When caregivers found

> out that I was a nanny, they were hesitant to socialize with me. But then I made three good [West Indian nanny] friends and then I had no issues at that point.

Besides having to find her "place" within the dominant group of West Indian childcare providers, Victoria felt that having as her friend at first and then as co-worker and now as business partner also helped, "You know, people know that you're spending time with someone from their country" and this made it easier to socialize among this group of West Indian babysitters.

Read Me a Book- The Public Library

Participant observation with West Indian babysitters took me to an unlikely public place that needs to be written about in detail, a place that I had not visited yet when I began my research—the Public Library. What could I possibly want with a public library when I have a good library at school? In the early Fall of 2004, Hazel invited me to "storytime" at the public library just a few blocks away from three of the public parks we would visit in the mornings. At least two mornings a week, a congregation of West Indian women (all babysitters) and other parents or childcare providers could be seen entering a tiny side door just off of the main street in one neighborhood. This tiny door led to an elevator that took people to the basement of the public library. Once you arrived at the basement level, a trail of strollers could be found going up a ramp with women talking and walking up to a room with low ceilings, tiled floors, an old-looking carpet located in the middle filled with toys, a television, and of course, books.

When Hazel and I arrived together the first time at the library for storytime, she immediately introduced me along with my daughter, who at the time was only a few months old, to several babysitters. A white young man (in his early thirties) came out of

another door that joined the room to the main library and began handing all of the adults white sheets of paper with the words and lyrics to children's rhymes and songs. He immediately broke out into a welcome song that signaled to all the adults that they sit in the chairs provided and to the children that they sit in a semi-circle around the man. We all followed along with standard rhymes such as "Itsie, Bitsie, Spider" and "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." After a few minutes of this, the man took out a book from his bag behind his back and began reading children's books in a slow, deliberate manner, reminiscent of some of my graduate classes, so that all of the children could follow along while many of the sitters sat around chatting with one another or, it seemed to me, staring into space from boredom.

Hazel and I, and soon after Debbie, Sharon, and Evelyn, would all get together twice a week at storytime for thirty minutes to take part in this ritual that offered a break from the park play which had become monotonous. Storytime generally ended with one last song, and on several mornings, a disbursement of brand new children's books from the children's librarian. It ran from September to May, with a break for the summer months to allow for program adjustments and development. By our second year of participation in the weekly storytime, the participants grew astronomically to a point where it was no longer possible for some of us to attend. It was as if the neighborhood had its own baby boom. The children's librarian had also changed to a Chinese woman in her fifties, whose accent was thick and sometimes difficult to understand, leading some children to stray from storytime altogether and play in the back of the room with the toys made available to them. The West Indian babysitters seemed to lack interest in this new librarian also as demonstrated by their increased socialization amongst each other while

stories were being told. The sitters would constantly complain about the fact that they couldn't understand what the woman was saying, "She's not as good as the other man," Debbie agreed, stating that she "preferred it last year with the other man." By this time, I was securely socialized into the storytime culture, feeling like I had done something good for my child even while scrambling at the end of sessions for a new book for my daughter.

The West Indian babysitters were competitive when it came to the end of storytime and books were being distributed—I would observe Molly, Rachel, and Janet stand up only to ensure that their charges received "good" books. Many would dive and grab two to three books, until one day the woman librarian began the distribution with the disclaimer "you can only take one book per child." I would overhear sitters telling each other that the "mother likes it when I can show them that I've done something." Also, adults were required to sign in on a sheet of paper with the child's name and some form of contact information for security reasons.

Surveillance of the public library had been established during the two years that I attended these storytime sessions. Parents could now potentially go to the library to see if in fact their child was in attendance (although the librarian did not reveal this to me) and would look every now and again for the evidence of such participation by the books they received. None of the parents I observed or interviewed ever commented on this fact, but the determination to get books to children as a sign that they were in attendance was clear once I was inside the library and observed the chaos at the book distribution.

Along with my participation at the public library storytime, I interviewed the children's librarian to talk about her interactions with the West Indian babysitters she encountered during the workweek.

The librarian is a first generation Chinese woman in her fifties who began working in the U.S. as a seamstress in a factory in New York. She then went back to school in order to obtain her aesthetician's license. Next she followed a period doing nails and other aesthetician's services. After some years, she went back to educate herself and took a position within the public library in Brooklyn where she moved up the ranks to children's librarian. During the period before she secured her position as a librarian, she had worked for just under one year as a domestic worker cleaning one man's home at what she called a decent salary for those days (in the 1980's) at ten dollars an hour. She worked weekends as a housecleaner while simultaneously working as an aesthetician during the weekdays. Similar to some of the West Indian babysitters, the librarian found her employer to be generous and decent since he was never at home when she worked. She said "I rarely saw him because I had a key and would come in, clean, and leave." It became too much for her to work everyday of the week, so she left that job.

The librarian always worked in Brooklyn and loves it here. She claims "this is my home." I asked her what she loved about Brooklyn and she said "if you work hard, you can do whatever you want to do…all my friends and family live here, so I would never leave Brooklyn." She was fulfilled by her job as a children's librarian at the public library because she enjoyed teaching. Her teaching was not only limited to the public library five to six days a week at full-time hours however, she was also committed to her

Chinese community in Brooklyn where she organized and taught CPR lessons, art and crafts, and language courses for both children and adults. This community participation grounded her in the Chinese culture that she wanted to maintain in Brooklyn.

As a first generation immigrant to New York City, she understood how difficult it is to become part of the neighborhood when you may not always feel you belong. Because of this, she stated that she tries to accommodate everyone at the library. As a mother herself, she knows how difficult it can be to keep children occupied. Winter months are the busiest for storytime since most babysitters want to be indoors. In her experiences with West Indian childcare providers, who make up around fifty percent of her adult participants, she noticed that they mostly seem to care for the children they bring into storytime or into the main library where there is a concentration of children's books with child sized tables and chairs. She mentioned to me that "the Caribbean babysitters are more strict than the parents I see with the children…they [the sitters] don't let the children scream and tend to make sure that the kids behave." She does not typically see the babysitters interacting with parents in the library or during storytime, something that I noticed as well throughout my observations. The tight quarters of the small branch public library would lend itself to the socialization between parents and babysitters, but in two years, I never saw that interaction occur.

In my conversation with the librarian, she mentioned that the West Indian babysitters do socialize amongst themselves within the public library and at times need to be told to keep it down, but rarely does she ever "have a problem with them." She said that she observed on several occasions how the West Indian babysitters sit and talk with one another, "exchanging recipes with one another or sharing food with one another" and

sometimes with her too. It is this socialization that makes the librarian's job easier when special events are planned at the public library. While she uses the public library website, the local public parks, and storytime to distribute printed event calendars for promotion purposes she said, "I use event calendars because not everyone goes online…they pass information on to each other, which is sometimes better than the paper." Through the sociability of West Indian babysitters, the librarian is able to obtain the participation necessary in order to maintain the public library's event schedule. If no one attends the events, the events would be cancelled. The community would be poorer for it and the librarian would be faced with the difficulty of finding new ways of serving the neighborhood's children and adults. In essence, West Indian babysitters are providing services to the parent community of the neighborhood by "passing on" information that parents can use themselves to interact with their children and the community on weekends, thus increasing once more the social capital of their employers.

Employers' social capital is reinforced by the movement of West Indian childcare providers in public spaces in all of the neighborhoods that I studied. Whether through activities that bring parents together outside of the workweek, through the friends that are established under the providers' care or structured lessons, employers are able to participate, to a certain degree, in the sociability maintained by their employees. By default, many employers are benefiting from the built-in networks of West Indian childcare providers and their ability to find spaces in which to disarm the isolation facet of domestic work. This, in turn, enables employers to reconstitute their positions in the social hierarchy.

The issue of surveillance is also of concern in public spaces as it places childcare providers under the scrutiny of public employees and other park users (many of whom are friends, parents, or relatives from the gentrified neighborhoods under study). Surveillance in this form controls the sociability among West Indian childcare providers and creates a subordination that may transfer into the private spaces of the employers' homes where the social hierarchy is further reinforced. While providers may feel manipulated in both public and private spaces by either strangers or their employers, they find ways of justifying their frustrations by commenting on their rights to regular hours or their ability to take care of children better than their employers whom they deem unfit or unclean. This inversion of who is "fit" and who is "unfit" is part of what is seen as combating isolation in the domestic sphere and it is cultural preservation that gives West Indian providers the voice or language to do so.

Chapter III: Creating A Social Food Space

Foodways, the practices and regulations that dictate the food experience in its sensory and social aspects and social context of communication, have long been of interest to many social scientists. But how we understand the "place" of foodways from a sociological standpoint has not been well and fully clarified. Until recently, the discussion of foodways has traditionally been steeped in anthropological and folkloric cultural analysis (Levi-Stauss 1983; Wilk 1999; Long 2004). From the standpoint of sociological analysis, the discussion of food practices has been limited, although not completely absent, thereby limiting dialogue on how social groups are reproduced and bounded by space (Ferguson and Zukin 1995; Massey 1984; McIntosh 1995; McIntosh 1996; Rozin 1999; Whit 1995). Further, only few have researched the relationship between food and care in the context of private and public places. (Pei-Chia Lan 2006, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Kaplan 2000). This relationship is a key element in not only understanding food as a symbol, but also in demonstrating how food sustains a shared understanding, and social life, as exercised through the rituals of offering and eating itself (DeVault 1991; Kaplan 2000), and how this produces a set of patterned meanings associated with *sociability*. If "food indicates who we are, where we came from, and what we want to be," (Belasco 2002) then it is imperative that social scientists move from the typical culinary setting of the kitchen (Fine 1996; Schroedl 1988) and explore public places (in a geographical or physical sense) as a social food space in order to "understand how the experience of complexity might be gained in the urban environment…" (Sennett 1992:132). It is partly through foodways that social differences culminate in meaning in an urban environment.

If a social space can be created by the relationships between people and activities within physical boundaries (Fainstein and Campbell 2002), a social food space can be explained as a physical location where food is consumed, shared, and discussed (but not necessarily prepared) as part of the social relationships constructed in everyday life. A social food space is created once symbolic cues of both complex individual and intergroup feelings, images, and reactions toward food are exercised within a physical place. Territorialization, with its invisible boundaries, develops through cultural codes that are enacted such as language or dialect (in the case of West Indian culture, colloquial dialect or patois) and through the physical demarcation of spaces through special events that are organized by babysitters for babysitters. In this sense, a public urban environment contains "…the primary level at which individuals now experience, live out, and react to the totality of social transformations and structures in the world around them" (Harvey 1985:251).

Looking at public parks in Brooklyn, New York, as a social food space can provide insights into the foodways of West Indian/Caribbean babysitters who primarily occupy this urban public place during the weekdays. This social food space provides unique insights as a result of the contradictions (i.e. park users who live in the neighborhood versus users who perform their work in the park but do not live in the neighborhood) inherent in public places (Lefebvre 2002). Social food spaces, then, differ from the more predictable private culinary space where a set of actions can be controlled and ordered such as food preparation with an established hierarchy of patterned events (Deutsch 2004). In this work, I look specifically at how parks are used as a representation of space and how this accommodates the spatial patterns of everyday life as it occurs

throughout the day. I also consider how movement between a public place and a private place (i.e. the employers' home or sitters' home) strains or alters West Indian foodways practices and thus cultural preservation.

West Indian food as expressed through the foodways of the nations' people is arguably one of the key components to understanding the experiences of transnationalism and globalization as it occurs between the U.S. and the West Indies (Wilk 2006; Houston 2005). Caribbean immigrants have a varied diet that differs culturally by territory (Sharma and Cruickshank 2001; Stowers 1992) and because of this, studies are indicating that sensitivity to these differences is imperative (Sharma and Cruickshank 2001). It is therefore necessary to probe the ongoing relationship between U.S. and West Indian foodways and the effects of this relationship on the nationals of the West Indian islands when they migrate to the U.S.

In this research, I uncover how these women negotiate their movement from a public place, where socialization is the key to cultural preservation, to private places, such as the homes of their employers. In both of these places, and similar to what Hondagneu-Sotelo found with Latina domestic workers on the West Coast, food traditions become indicators of social interaction among West Indian sitters and between the sitters and the children they care for (2001).

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the power of "food voice" (Hauck-Lawson 1992; Hauck-Lawson 2004) in the life of West Indian babysitters. Hauck-Lawson posits that food voice is "the voice of people as food makers and food consumers" (1992) that conveys the meanings of "food-related activities" (2004). Using Jonathan Deutsch's (2004) work on communal food preparation in firehouse cooking

among the men who worked there as a model, I was able to capture food voices as an expression of sociability and gender roles among childcare providers. While there are other indicators of communication and socialization among these sitters (through the use of cellular phones, the public library story time for children, and informal credit systems), their food voice claims a prominent position in the everyday experiences of their lives. By looking at West Indian babysitters in public places we can better see how food voices are another means of maintaining the social relationships based on shared cultures that counteract the isolation which has plagued this group of working class women.

This chapter uses ethnographic methods to capture the food voices of West Indian babysitters and the meanings they create through their everyday interactions (Emerson 2001). As a participant observer in Brooklyn public parks, I listened to the many conversations sitters would engage in while they worked. I also watched how they participated in personal food consumption as well as the food consumption patterns of the children they care for. I approached some participants while I played with my own children at the parks and asked general questions about food in the neighborhood that led to more detailed conversations about West Indian food. We discussed shopping for ingredients and spices, the differences of national foods between islands, the personal encounter of cooking (the sitters' personal experiences in the kitchen), the cultural meaning of food preparation and sharing, and the interaction between sitter and child. By conducting both participant observations and interviews, specific themes emerged and I was able to compare foodways as practiced across a variety of islands.

The Place of Food

"*You have to listen to the Woman with the Pepper Sauce because she is Boss!*"

This is the first thing I hear as I enter one Brooklyn park through the black iron gates leading to an infant playground. The woman making this statement is a sitter from St. Vincent in her mid-sixties with long cascading braids tied toward the back of her head with a blue and white patterned headscarf and eyeglasses well balanced on her nose. She is directing her statement to four other West Indian sitters who are comfortably situated at one of the park benches directly in front of the swing set where they can observe the children they care for during the weekdays. The park is a public place that brings these West Indian sitters together in a social setting that offers exchange of a social and cultural nature.

Discussions of traditional medical remedies, what to do with a child who is "acting up," and most importantly food, prevail. Food culture, its symbolic meaning and practices, are prominent at the park since many children and sitters eat snacks and, on occasion, have lunch throughout their stay in this public place. Sitters who care for newborn infants bottle feed every few hours while participating in the social networking that goes on at the park. Therefore, frequency of food activity (Deutsch 2004; Lupton 1996) as exercised by and for West Indian sitters is an aspect of social food space that makes food culture worth analyzing. Because the children that many of these women care for are from white-middle class families, it was important to consider ethnicity and culture as factors that may contribute to differing food consumption patterns. Since cooking is "the most ceremonial form of household work," it is also key to understanding how food reflects back on parents (Kaplan 2000).

Black Food for White Children

I found that many of the sitters, while they have been living in New York for years, have not significantly changed their West Indian foodways. Many of the sitters still shop for West Indian spices and ingredients on a weekly basis and cook West Indian foods for their own families' breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Most sitters with a family living in their own home wake up by 5:30am or 6:30am, and cook their family's breakfast. Those who are married prepare lunches for the husband to take to work and the children to take to school/daycare. Others without a husband or children prepare their own lunches to bring to their employer's home. In the evenings when the sitters arrive home, sometimes as late as 7:00 pm, they are expected to cook for their family unless there are leftovers from the previous night (which is a rarity). It is only on occasion and more typically among the younger babysitters, that these women will purchase food in a store while caring for children during the day. The sitters make it explicit that they do not impose their West Indian foodways on the children they care for.

For example, I asked two sitters, Sylma and Molly, whom I had met in the park on one Spring morning, if they cooked West Indian food for the kids they care for. They both immediately shook their heads in a vigorous 'no' as if it were crazy for me to think so. They said that "the parents leave food for them [the children]". Molly then states that the child she cares for will come to her plate at lunch and want her food. She says that she cooks her own West Indian food the night before and takes her lunch with her to the employers' home. She added that when she sees what the parents leave for the child, she thinks, "Yuck" (as she makes a disgusted face while pretending to vomit). I asked both ladies what the parents leave for the children to eat and, in unison, they say "pasta."

Molly continues that sometimes the parents of the child she cares for will leave spinach or peas---"lots of greens." Sylma interjects to say that she doesn't "understand about baby food." She says, "We never used baby food. From four months you eat out of the pot" [meaning that you eat what the adults eat]. Molly added that she doesn't "understand why they use baby food." All of the babysitters that I have interviewed claim that baby food is unheard of in the Caribbean and that the babies simply eat whatever the rest of the family is eating although mashed up in a smoother consistency. They do not understand why parents in the United States give children these restricted foods without flavor to their children.

A telephone interview with Arlene, a sitter from Grenada, furthers this discussion when she speaks of her West Indian niece, Samantha, who also sits for children. Arlene continues with the story,

> Samantha used to make dumplings [a traditional West Indian addition to several dishes which is a mixture of flour, oil, and water, made into rolls, and then boiled] for the boy and girl she cared for, but they were only supposed to eat Kosher[41] food. Samantha never did tell the parents that she fed it to them and now that the children are older, they still ask Samantha to make the dumplings for them and ask her to bring it over.

Arlene says, "if you start the kids early [eating different foods] they will like it." She continues to talk about her employers' views on feeding the child she cares for, who is two years old, which are very different from the views of Samantha's employers, "I don't bring my own food to work with me. The parents don't leave food for the girl. I buy food when I am there in the neighborhood for the two of us. We are a little team."

---

[41] Dumplings were probably not considered to be Kosher by the providers, nor the children under care since the ingredients had not been blessed by a rabbi or prepared in any special manner that is consistent with Kosher food tradition, which the parents in this case insisted on.

She said that she later found out that the mother didn't care if Arlene fed her different types of food as long as she's eating. Arlene now regrets not having given her more of a selection when she was younger after gaining final approval from her employer. She says that "she would have trained her to eat different foods."

In both Arlene's and Samantha's experiences, it appears that they have a close relationship with the children they care for based on not only the care they give to the children or "services" they provide, but specifically through the food they put into the mouths of these children, maybe even the act of feeding itself. In Samantha's case, there is an obvious motivation on the parents' part to stake their claim on the children's spiritual health by ensuring that they eat Kosher food, but there is a counter motivation by the West Indian sitter also. The sitter's motivation is to expose the children to other foods in order to broaden their palate, but perhaps this goes even deeper. As Arlene posits, "we are a little team." And in Samantha's case, the children she cares for still ask for dumplings as an act against their parents' wishes and/or culture. The sitters are asserting their own claim on the physical bodies of these children and experiencing an emotional closeness to them through the feeding practice itself. History is essentially being fed to the children as Gusfield would assert when he says the human body is a "perpetual source of meaning and an object of historical variation. It is an instrument of purpose and a goal of aesthetic perfection…How the body is conceived and how human beings act toward it is as much a matter of culture and history as are the manners and morals of food habits…" (1992:75). The bodies of the children under care, then, are like vessels (Sokolow 1983) in which West Indian sitters can pour a culture different from that of their employers with the goal of asserting some form of control through closeness.

Though the children have already acquired some ideas of culture imposed by their parents, they do recognize a difference in the culture that West Indian babysitters are asserting. This is evidenced by the children requesting specific foods from the sitters that are different from what their parents leave them.

As mentioned earlier, some parents do not mind the fact that childcare providers are broadening the palate of their children by introducing them to West Indian foods. Carol, who cooks almost all of her own food and has worked in childcare jobs where she was responsible for the cooking, spoke about how good it makes her feel to know that the children she cared for enjoyed her food,

> Today I make Okra and rice cook it up together with chicken and coconut milk and stuff…and he [the child she cares for] tell me bring some rice for him because Monday I had rice…so I bring some today and what I cook in a little container. Would you believe when I bring him from school, if you see when he sit down…and them ladies does laugh in the park cause he does sit down and he chomp and chomp it down…oh my god! His father calls him an Italian Trini [Trinidadian] because he eats fruit cake, he eats roti, everything!" Carol laughs and immediately continues with a story about a girl she cared for, who can't pronounce her name correctly and therefore calls her "Josie." The little girl even wants to have special playdates with Carol in the park on Saturdays and makes food requests for the occasion such as macaroni pie, pelau (a rice and beans dish), and stewed chicken. The girl asks, "Josie, you take the order" and she replies laughingly, "yes, I take the order." The girl will eat the food and tell Carol "Oh Josie, you make my day."

Again, Carol is amused that these children under her care for enjoy something that she is producing for them with her own hands. In some way, she is putting on a performance that indicates her power over them and even sometimes the parents themselves who are not, perhaps, able to make this type of food. What is missing, however, is Carol's acknowledgement that she is now providing food purchased with her own money and additional unpaid services to the children for whom she cares. The apparent loss of power through taking an "order" does not seem to bother her. After all,

the work involved in meeting these special requests is something within her control since ultimately, she can always decline the request. She also expresses a closeness to these children when she laughs at how much the children love her cooking and her diligence in fulfilling their special requests.

The Gift of Cultural Exploration and Retention

Several West Indian sitters have observed that traditional foods across the Caribbean, in spite of their sameness, may be named or prepared differently in the different countries. One of the greatest examples of this difference in preparation occurs with the "one-pot meal" that almost every participant in this study mentioned—Callaloo (Houston 2005). This popular dish, which resembles a thick soup, is made with okras, ground dasheen leaves or spinach, butter, spices, and coconut milk. It is clearly the favorite among many of the sitters I observed and interviewed. Even the younger sitters such as Hazel and Debbie, who do not cook West Indian food on a daily basis claim that Callaloo is their favorite dish and they would make it for themselves on occasion. However, there were no identical descriptions of how to make it in terms of consistency. As Carol noted, "Trinidadians like their Callaloo ground up and smooth…I don't like the way Guyanese make it…It's too thick with chunks of spinach… They don't grind it up like we do." Because of the usually slight but sometimes significant differences in food across the Caribbean countries, West Indian food is also shared among sitters at the park in order to introduce a type of food that may not be offered in another country, establishing what appears to be a deeper expression of cultural connection in affirming similarity by exploring differences.

On one cool fall morning, Carol came over to talk to Janet, another sitter from Grenada, as we were all sitting on a bench inside the infant playground near the slides and jungle gym. She immediately stated how she "stopped cooking for the ladies because no one was coming around consistently." In a lengthier conversation two years later, Carol retracted that statement and explained in more detail how she does "still cook for the 'ladies,' but in the winter months it is too cold and they don't come around the park as much." She commented further saying that "all the women have been asking for [her] to bring food for them," a request she is accustomed to hearing from the children for whom she cares. This park tradition is common for Molly who loves to cook and has regularly carried food for the other West Indian sitters at the park for years. In asking her how the phenomena of bringing food for others begins, Molly explains,

"For example, Debbie don't know about saltfish cake, how we [Guyanese] make it. We make it a different way, so I always promising her to bring saltfish cake for her, but I don't tell her that I'm making it for tomorrow. I will give her a surprise tomorrow."

When asked how sharing West Indian food with the other childcare providers in the park makes her feel she replied that "It makes me feel good that I could make something and I could share it and they enjoy it…I love to share…I would like to think that they think of home." In a separate interview, Debbie said that every time she cooks or eats West Indian food, she is reminded of Grenada,

"It brings back memories…These are the things we usually eat at home, so like when you eat it, you think about maybe your family because you always eat this together. You think about maybe your friends…the environment you used to be eating this food in and now you eat in a different environment."

Unlike Molly, Debbie has never cooked for her employers, nor does she cook for the other sitters in the park. However, she said that if she were asked to cook for one of the other sitters, she would but it "depends on the mood [she's] in and the type of food."[42]

Molly takes pride in being able to cook for other sitters at the park and when she makes a promise to bring food for them, she always follows through. I have experienced this personally when Molly told me to meet her at 9:00am the morning after our interview because she would make me some saltfish cakes. At exactly that time the next morning, Molly had my two saltfish cakes ready in a Ziploc bag. I told her that I would taste it and tell her what I thought. A few days later I saw Molly waiting at the bus stop in the neighborhood and she stopped me to ask what I thought of the cakes. I told her that "it tasted so good and had the right amount of pepper that I even let my daughter have some for lunch and she ate it all up," which is unusual for a twenty-one month old. Molly smiled and said that she was happy that I had shared it with my daughter, perhaps because it was her way of ensuring a form of West Indian cultural reproduction. As Kaplan notes, it is "through…her continual acts of food exchange, both as producer and as consumer, that [the] person is constituted as part of a community" (2000). This food exchange between Molly, other sitters, and me reinforces the sense of community felt among us all while also offering a site for exchange and comparison.

---

[42] In a Maussian sense, the gift of food to another sitter is voluntary and not expected to be reciprocated, but rather simply enjoyed as a nonverbal communicative expression (Mauss 1990). This gift of food among West Indian sitters does not appear to be returned obligatorily or redistributed in any form (Davis 2000). Through this theory of the "gift" Tarlow explains how it connects human beings on a more spiritual level (1996). The exchange of food as a gift for West Indian babysitters in Brooklyn parks indeed connects them and creates a social community in much the same way as in other societies (Lupton, 1996).

Transition from Public to Private Spaces

The transition from public to private spaces, whether from the public parks to a sitter's private residence, or to the employer's home, added to the social order that exists within these spaces and to the constraint of West Indian foodways expression.

Molly talked extensively about bringing food to her employers although it is not required as part of her primary job as a sitter. Molly explained to me that her employer begged her saying, "Oh, bring me food" when she became aware that Molly would be cooking that night at her private residence. Molly continues,

> So I used to bring them [food]….I used to bring to them nearly every week…On the weekends I used to bring for them, but it's a couple weeks now that I haven't made for them…Now they're telling me 'oh you're going home to cook a lot this weekend Molly?' [since it was Easter weekend] and I said yes. They said 'okay!' because they been looking for it.

While Molly's employers did not explicitly request that she bring food for them after the Easter weekend, by enquiring whether she would be cooking and communicating their enthusiasm at the prospect, they implied clearly their desire that she bring leftovers. This does not appear to bother her at the moment, but does suggest a power struggle could ensue because of the added obligation. However, in other ways, it reverses the power relations between Molly and her employers. Molly can now determine when to bring food or not thereby leaving the employees guessing whether or not they need to prepare their own food for the day.

Debbie who also brings West Indian food with her for most of her lunch meals when working as a sitter for two-year-old Margaret states that "she [Margaret] loves it, she got a taste one time and then she got addicted…She will leave hers [food] and then she will eat all of Debbie's," referring to herself in the third person. When asked about

the differences in eating West Indian foods at her private residence versus the employers' home, Debbie affirms that,

> When you are eating in your own little environment you feel more comfortable than when you're eating out, you know, in somebody else's environment or among other people, maybe people you don't know that good or something like that…you may tend to maybe do other things like…when you're eating home you play loud music, but when you're in someone else's place you may not be able to do that, so all of these things could change the way you feel.

This discussion with Debbie illustrates how private spaces lend a sense of comfort that is not necessarily experienced within the home of the employer, but rather saved for the private home of the employee. This sentiment is echoed by Arlene.

She speaks with me about the difficulty in eating at the private residence of her employer. "It's too hard to warm up the food at work...I wasn't raised with a microwave." But she does claim that if there was a toaster-oven, maybe she would have used that. Using the stove to heat up food makes things too complicated and arduous for her at work. Further to this, while walking home with Arlene one sunny afternoon after coming from a park, Arlene remarked that she once went to pour herself a glass of orange juice from the container in the fridge and noticed that the mother must have drunk directly out of the carton although the container was quite full. Arlene was disgusted when she said "I saw this ring of lipstick around the nozzle of the container and it just made me sick to think that I almost poured a glass of juice from that container for myself…it was so nasty." Arlene found that eating in the private residence of her employer was difficult on multiple levels and prefers to go out in the local neighborhood and pick up something to eat.

In her experiences as a nanny over a period of years, Victoria also found that food in the private sphere was uncomfortable for her. She said that she would sometimes be

offered food, but generally she brought her own. Victoria says, "There was never an open-refrigerator policy, you know, with 'take whatever you like.' Every once in a while she [the mother] would say, 'Oh, I have takeout in there. If you want some for lunch go ahead.' But that was pretty much the only time that was discussed." Victoria preferred bringing her own lunches to work or going out with the two children to pick something up from a local store and eat at the park rather than eating at the employer's home, or worse yet, asking for food from the employer's fridge.

One winter afternoon, I observed five West Indian sitters including Gail, a sitter from Grenada, as they hosted a "play date" at the home of Gail's employers [presumably with their permission as is usually the case]. I had been invited to join in with my daughter. Gail was preparing to cook some West Indian stew chicken that another sitter, Victoria from Grenada, had bought, along with rice and beans. While Victoria and Gail were primarily in charge of cooking the meal, there was a sense of community at this play date. On the bottom floor of the duplex in a brownstone close to the park where the sitters regularly meet, many of the women were sitting on the carpet in front of the television playing with the children they care for. It was a scene which contradicted previous literature as well as Marga's observations as a park employee which had suggested that West Indian sitters do not play on the ground with the children they care for (Colen 1995). What I found at this playdate was that traditional food preparation for these women is a starting point for social interaction, discussion, and cultural preservation, perhaps more so as they are in the presence of the white children they care for and want to reify their West Indianness on a more conscious level.

The sitters proceeded with care in the preparation of the chicken, first cleaning it by rubbing it with lemon, then seasoning it with the "right spices," and debating one another on the correct methods for browning sugar for the chicken when stewing it. The debate on how brown the sugar should be when in the pan or pot comes from the need to ensure that the chicken does not become too sweet or, if the sugar becomes too black, as Arlene suggests, "The chicken will have a bitter taste." The debate continues as an example of cultural variation in foodways, since some sitters are Trinidadian and others come from Grenada.

The food sharing and discussion that occurs in this playdate[43] takes various forms. Some of the sitters eat their food on the floor while continuing to play with the children they care for, while I and others sit on a couch or chair to eat the food. There are no formal arrangements for the consumption of the food, but this may have more to do with the casual setting of the playdate itself since there aren't enough highchairs for all of the children to sit in. The children remained on the carpeted floor and thus some of the sitters also remained seated on the floor with the children. Much of the discussion for the next half hour, while eating the food, is about the taste of the food, how much of a particular ingredient (such as garlic, cumin, or coriander) was used, and how it differs from another West Indian type of food.

None of the children partake in the consumption of West Indian food since most are still under the age of two at this playdate and/or are primarily being fed from a bottle.

---

[43] Children this young can participate in a playdate by simply being included in the social space that has been created by the providers. They are spoken to and played with as part of the bonding process that takes place outside of their time spent with a childcare provider. Many of these children will also see each other when they are with their parents on the weekends.

Since most employers are not present or have had their breastfeeding stunted in order to return to the workplace, providers are often prepared with powdered formula or cold bags of pumped breastmilk for the children in their care. I should note here that breastfeeding never came up in my fieldwork as something a mother should or shouldn't do. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that some of the providers knew I had breastfed my children as this was often the reason why I had to leave a site. It could also be because they grew up in the Caribbean where homemade formula [regular milk and some type of porridge-type cereal] and/or breastfeeding are used. They had never acknowledged any stigma with either feeding choice[44]. While there was no stigma attached to the practice of breastfeeding among the providers whom I studied, they did verbalize their slight distress when breastfeeding limited their outings to public places. If the employer was not pumping her milk and worked at home or was resting at home, the providers would sometimes have to go back there frequently throughout the day in order for the baby to feed. This was seen as a nuisance to some providers.

A playdate gathering of several sitters at an employer's home, while the employer is not present, offers a much greater comfort level than that experienced by Debbie and Arlene when they are simply in the homes of their employers with the children for whom they care, even when the employer is not present. The private social food space of the playdate mimics that of the public social food space at public parks where West Indian

[44] In Linda Blum's book *At The Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary U.S. (1999)* she discusses how African American women who were seen as better breastfeeders than their mistresses while working as wetnurses from the days of slavery. African American women were later demonized and blamed for their own children's suffering as single mothers. This led to white women feeling empowered by their own "civilized" lives, and ultimately led to better formulas for feeding babies in order to sever the ties that bound black women to white babies.

sitters can experience food sociability among each other—in groups. The common cultural background that is shared among these women provides a comfort level that is not necessarily experienced just between sitters and the children they care for. When sitters have an opportunity to share in their ethnic identities through the food they eat, there is seemingly more meaning given to food as expressed through elaborate discussions. This meaning is demonstrated through categories that include detailed conversations and banter about preparation, taste, and ultimately the food memories of "home."

Food and Mothering

There is an aroma of control in the air when you hear a West Indian woman talk about food. It is control in the purest sense. This control is evidenced through the food practices of West Indian babysitters specifically. I cannot count the number of discussions I have had with Molly about various food dishes that end up in a roll of the eyes because I have asked her to repeat a particular recipe ingredient that I should have remembered. Molly can rattle off any dish as if she were making it right in front of me in real time. This made me self-conscious because of my lack of interest in cooking, especially with gender ideologies that suggest as a mother I should know how to cook. I distinctly remember telling Annie, a Trinidadian sitter I met in Carroll Park who is in her mid-fifties and cares for a two-year-old girl part-time, that "I always have to follow a recipe exactly in order to cook anything, especially West Indian food." Her reply was, "Nah man, if you taste it once, you know how to make it." At that moment, I began to question my mothering skills. What is it about food and mothering that pressures women into feeling that they should be able to whip up a meal within thirty minutes for a family

of eight? As Lupton reminds us, food and its connection to maternal love have been marketed to audiences worldwide for decades (1996) and thus has been reproduced on all levels in society. This topic of equating food with mothering skills came up often. (Katz Rothman 1986, Lan 2006)

West Indian women, like Latina domestic workers discussed in Hondagneu-Sotelo's book, often referred to the fact that their employers don't feed their children "proper food" and criticize employers for not physically feeding the children (2001). This sentiment was expressed in a variety of forms. For example, I bumped into Deondra, a sitter from Trinidad in her late fifties, down the street from my home one early afternoon in June during the workweek. The streets were quiet since it was just after the lunch hour, around 1:30pm. She had only one of the three children she cares for with her in a stroller while I was headed to the gym to exercise. Deondra asked "Where are the children?" and I replied "with Sharon," my sitter whom I know she has met in the park. I explained that I was heading to the gym (my clothing gave that away as I was wearing spandex pants, running shoes, and a tank top—in my right hand was a pair of headphones for listening to music while I work out). I asked Deondra till what time she would be working, and she said late. She told me that she has to put the kids to nap. I told her that I try to have the kids fed and napping before Sharon comes over so that she has a couple of hours to relax before the chaos of two toddlers begins. I added "I try to always…have the food prepared in a bowl for them so she just has to heat it up in the microwave." Deondra surprised me by saying "that's because you are a real mother and you care for your children." Intrigued by this statement, I ask,

"What do you mean? Don't all mothers prepare the food for their children?"

Deondra explains "No, these people [female employers] don't always prepare the food." She continues,

> Motherhood means that you feed your children, you bathe your children, and you spend time with your children…These mothers go to work and don't do anything for their children and then want the sitters or nannies to do everything, that's not motherhood…See you want to be with your children, feed them, give them a bath to be with them, that is a good mother.

While I was flattered by her validation of my mothering practices, I was also very concerned about the fact that perhaps Deondra doesn't understand fully the life practices of the employers that she works for. For example, it sounded like Deondra was taking Horschild's Time Bind stance that long hours at work may be an avoidance tactic for dealing with the everyday hectic family life at home (1997). Everyone's economic position is different and how they divide their time may be different from someone else, yet Deondra criticized the "choices" that her employer has made. I am privileged to have a husband who has a salary that supports a family of four and that I have had flexible hours in graduate school. This to me is a privileged position that needs to be considered when speaking of "good" versus "bad" mothering.

This topic came up again in a lecture I gave at Queens College. During the question/answer time allotted at the end of my presentation on West Indian foodways, a woman of West Indian background exclaimed that "West Indian sitters bringing their home-cooked food to work with them and then allowing the children they care for taste it makes it more difficult for working mothers who don't have the time to cook and can only give jar foods or pasta." What struck me most about this comment was the fact that this person implied that babysitters were "non-working mothers." How can this be? While we need to be careful about pitting employer against employee, let's consider a

babysitter, who is a mother, waking up early enough to prepare breakfast for her family and take a half to one hour commute to work, taking care of someone else's child for eight to twelve hours, and traveling back home to have food ready for her own family. How is it that this sitter finds the time to cook? And further, how can it even be implied that she is a non-working mother? Perhaps the answer to this question is that the work babysitters do is considered "mothering" and not work and therefore invisible as such.

Food Fights

One late morning in Fall 2006, I had Debbie, Molly, Rachel, and Janet over to my apartment with the children they care for. They wanted to cook for my birthday. All of the ladies, with the exception of Molly, came at around noon. Once Molly arrived at 1:00pm, the cooking had already begun. Knowing how much Molly loves to cook, I was anxious to hear what she would have to say about the food that Janet and Debbie had already begun to prepare. No sooner than these thoughts ran through my mind, Molly peered into the kitchen and asked,

"What's going on? What are you making?"

Janet and Debbie both blurted out "Baked chicken."

Molly was obviously not happy with those words and began to oversee the entire process. Janet asked me for barbecue sauce to put over the chicken and I said "Oh, I've never put that on my baked chicken before" and Molly added "Me neither." Janet rebutted by saying "Well, let's say it's barbecue chicken then." I asked her what to do with it and she said "Just pour it over the chicken" as it sat there in the white casserole dish. I did just that and asked if I was doing it right. Molly quickly jumped in saying "you have to put the chicken back in the bowl and mix it around to get the color all over."

Janet didn't seem to think it made a difference and Debbie said laughingly "that's too much work." I just dumped the chicken in the bowl while Debbie mixed it around to appease Molly. Molly, being the eldest and a mother who enjoyed cooking for her seven children, was assertive enough for the other babysitters and myself to fear the brunt of her disapproval in the kitchen.

On another occasion, I saw Molly sitting just outside of the infant playground with one of the other West Indian sitters and waved while Jason, my husband, stayed to chat with her for a little while. I went into the playground to put my son in the swing and Jason came after a minute or so with my daughter to do the same. When Jason left, I went out to sit with Molly. After a few minutes I took out the photos of the sitters on their "Babysitter Appreciation Day" which had been organized by Irene at Carroll Park. I started to ask her who everyone was so that I could distribute the photos. She reiterated that the lady in the striped shirt, as she pointed to a photograph with Irene in it, was the "devil." I asked her why and she said that Irene was argumentative and that if she tried to organize the event again next year, she (Molly) wouldn't come. She pointed to Carol and said, "If she organizes it, I would come, she is very organized." Molly then pointed back to the first woman and said, "She is a warrior, she's the devil". I asked what that meant? And she said, "I heard that she gone cuss out Carol because she [Irene] didn't get any roti and was using foul language around all the white people." Molly continued, " I don't like when people get on like that because it makes it look like black people can't be organized".

Molly was evidently upset by the way Irene was speaking loudly and being argumentative in front of the white constituents of the park. This was one of the only

times I heard Molly speak of race as a marker of West Indian babysitters as "other" in the parks, but the food incident was enough of a trigger to exploit these feelings that Molly has of her place in the park. Interestingly enough, this fight over food rights at the event was the only disagreement in the entire day where over fifty women gathered. The sitters set up West Indian food dishes that included rice and peas, pelau, baked chicken, curry chicken, roti, vegetables, and noodles, along with some other smaller side dishes such as macaroni. The sitters created a social food space by designating an area of West Indian food that could only be eaten by those wearing the red t-shirt and by occupying an entire area of park benches by blocking them with strollers and diaper bags. The sitters also constructed this social food space by turning their backs to those not wearing the prerequisite shirts and using their (the sitters') bodies to cover their food. Even I had to be walked over to the food area with Molly for her to explain that I was West Indian and allowed to eat the food although I hadn't received a shirt, but had donated money to the event.

How We Eat

From speaking and eating with the sitters on numerous occasions over the past few years, I could determine that there was a pride taken in the food and eating practice of West Indian culture. Whether it was the types of food being purchased, the texture that was preferred, the cooking methods employed, or eating the final production piece [the meal], the sitters always commented on how West Indians do it differently from Americans. Similar to what Kaplan found when black students demonstrated pride in the foods they ate for lunch versus their white counterparts in high-school, it was as if the babysitters were proud that "black mothers can cook better than white mothers" (2000).

Carol spoke of having to leave her sons at home while she took a live-in job in Long Island for eleven years. Her youngest son of six boys would constantly call her in the evenings to request that she come back to Brooklyn to cook for him although she would leave food for the older brother to defrost during the days so they could eat something in the evening. She talked about the youngest son pleading, "Ma, I wish you would come, I didn't eat no dinner." She told me,

> Lord, and that used to freak me out. I used to stay downstairs in my room [in Long Island] and I crying long water, but me ain't tellin' she [the employer] nothing. It used to stress me when he would tell me he ain't eat. I never leave my children in Trinidad…We eat more food than people in America here. We cook three times a day and heavy food. In the mornings, I didn't used to buy bread, I baked bread. When I baking bread, it's six and seven [loaves of] bread because it's like six children, me, and my husband, and boy children eat I'm telling you. So in the morning before they go they're getting a slice of bread with sausage in it or cheese or whatever I have and a cup of tea. Never eating some cereal and going to school. In the Caribbean people…hardly buy cereal, that's a waste of time. Either they bake or they, you know, something heavy and eat and go to school. When a child goes to school down here [in the United States] they can't learn nothing, all they're looking to the clock to see is when to go and eat lunch. You always got to fill their belly before they go to school. So I used to do that.

This commentary was a common one among sitters. They all assert that back in the Caribbean they cooked their own meals throughout the day with enough food for the entire family to eat. There were no discussions of Caribbean "fast food" when they talked about food since convenience foods are often looked on "as undermining cookery skills and traditions" (Mennell 1985) although this does not mean that they don't use it. The admission of doing so is enough to ensure constant teasing of being "not a real West Indian." But it is not only the preparation of food that sitters find different in the U.S., it is also the method of eating. One day I overheard a conversation between a West Indian sitter and the West Indian instructor (Derek) of a children's tumbling class in which my

daughter and I were participating. Derek was saying something about "sucking the bones" when eating fish and said to a sitter from Barbados, "I bet you suck the bones [of chicken and beef] too," and she replied "Yes, that is the best part." I later asked the lady from Barbados if she meant "sucking the marrow" and she said "Yes, that's where all the flavor is, it's the best part." Almost all of the West Indian babysitters I observed eating in Brooklyn parks ate their meat right down to the bone and began sucking on the ends to get the bone marrow out.

One playdate I organized at my own home where food was prepared with some of the sitters in the neighborhood, Janet expressed to me that there was no use for cutlery. The food (rice, beans, and chicken) was ready and I began to take out all of the plates and cutlery so that everyone could dish their food out in the kitchen since most of the kids at this point were getting hungry as demonstrated by the frequent fights over toys. All of the adults dished out a plate of food and began eating while feeding the children from their plates or from their own little dishes that I provided. I asked if anyone needed a knife and Janet says to me "Yuh forget we are West Indian, we eat with our hands". I laughed as we continued to eat. It is true that several dishes in the West Indian culture can be eaten with one's hands, but it was the deliberate association of eating with the hands and "West Indianness" that struck me most in this brief dialogue.

West Indian babysitters have been able to create a social space within public parks that allows for cultural expression through the sharing and talk of food. Because of the daily interactions that occur in this negotiated space that anchors the community in a unique way, West Indian ethnic solidarity is expressed through the symbol of food. While there were some instances of inter-island competition in terms of consistency as

with the example of Callaloo, there were only few expressions of competition through interviews and observations. The social food space is born out of the frequency with which food is a part of the public setting of a park and the nature of the intimate work being done in the park – childcare. Through the food voices of West Indian childcare providers, we can see how food is discussed in public parks and used as a mechanism for social networking and cultural preservation. For some childcare providers the negotiation of private space becomes an issue, which may inhibit cultural expression through West Indian foodways as they seek to hold onto the "taste" of the homeland as a means to preserve their identities. Through the providers' voices, however, we see just how critical the symbol of food is to the formation of their interactions among each other and the maintenance of West Indian cultural identities.

West Indian childcare providers made it clear that there were differences among West Indian islands and cultures as well as between the West Indian and American food cultures. Even these differences, however, served to promote the group identity among the West Indian childcare provider community and at times inverted the subordinated position that many of these women hold to a more elevated status of motherhood in the household hierarchy.

Chapter IV: Mobility for the Non-Mobile

As we walked towards the park, Debbie with Taylor, the child she cares for, and I with my son Matisse, Debbie stood still in front of the pubic library to check the cellular her cellular phone. The phone's red light was flashing red. There were three messages awaiting her. Debbie explained that Molly was to meet her at the library before storytime to tell her what she was doing for the day and so she was expecting a call from Molly. Debbie added just before listening to the messages that "if it was too cold, Molly said that we could go by her [employer's home] but that if it was nice, we could go to the park." Debbie listened to the messages. Not one was from Molly. There was one from Hazel and two from a friend who was looking into booking a flight for Debbie and Sharon (another sitter from Grenada) and a few others. They were planning to go to Atlanta for the West Indian Carnival weekend. We continued to walk to the park, but no signs of Molly or Hazel. The park was surprisingly empty for that time of the morning—perhaps the sixty degree weather with cool winds didn't help. As soon as we entered the park, I sneezed several times in a row. Debbie was convinced that I was suffering from allergies. We stood on the ramp that leads to the infant playground once we noticed that no one that we knew was inside the play area. With impatience and concern over my excessive sneezing, Debbie decided to find out where Hazel was instead of waiting for her and called her on the cell phone. Hazel answered her cell phone and told Debbie that she was "now comin' to the park." We awaited her arrival.

Technology, Places and Spaces

Relationships between people and the environment are continuously changing as we move from the industrial era to the technological era of the internet, satellite radio,

and mobile phones (Gumpert and Drucker 1998). Our interactions in both public and private spheres become more complicated as new communications technologies develop around these inventions. This form of communicating becomes the norm under which people of most classes, races, and both genders perform their daily routines of work and pleasure in a variety of spaces, though not necessarily in the same way. Specifically, public places that are expansive geographically, such as parks and sidewalks, permit this language to become integrated into the environment as they allow for human mobility. This can be seen clearly in Brooklyn public parks where cellular phones become an appendage to people walking around, including childcare providers. Although urban public spaces such as parks are often populated by people who do not necessarily know each other (Lofland 1989), these spaces become bounded areas where sociability is constructed even when public life appears to be disappearing due to technological developments (Gumpert and Drucker 1998). Some may question the technological era as a facilitator of sociability, but Gumpert and Drucker remind us that "...social rejection of technological innovation is a virtual impossibility because each of us is born into a preexisting web of communication and technology" (1998:424 therefore our basic interactions are affected by this form of technology and expand the area of inquiry into the fluidity of time and place as it occurs through various mediums (Caronia 2005; Katriel 1999; Humphreys 2005).

This web of communication through the use of technology begins to complicate matters because it blurs the boundaries between public and private places (Humphreys 2005). With West Indian babysitters in this particular study, sociability and the construction of social space are made explicit, yet there is still a consistent renegotiation

of public and private space (Mitchell 2005; Humphreys 2005). In the intimate social spaces created in the private home of the employers by the employers' shared cultural meanings (Caronia 2005), West Indian babysitters can now find ways to somehow connect to their own cultural and familial norms during their workdays. This "expanding nonphysical world of connection" (Gumpert and Drucker 1998:422) changes the private home space to a public space where conversations can occur with those not inhabiting the immediate environment (Caronia 2005). West Indian babysitters redefine their daily experiences by using cellular (commonly referred to as cell) phones in this way. They are able to construct a meeting both in the private home and while on the move from private to public places thereby "de-spatializing communicative action" (Katriel 1999:96) and rendering themselves continuously connected to their employers, peers, and family.

This chapter examines how West Indian childcare providers use mobile phone and internet technology to offset some of the isolation inherent in domestic work. I look specifically at how interactions in public places are patterned through these forms of communication in order to create a social space. Cellular phone use has many purposes. For example, cell phones are a means to connect with other sitters during the day in order to determine daily meeting places while in transit. They are also used in public parks to make plans between sitters for the weekend. Most existing research conducted on West Indian sitters has not looked in depth at the sociability that takes place through the use of a cellular phone, nor the boundaries set by employers on cell phone usage, since some of these phones are paid for by the employer and thus act as a source of control on the "freedom" of the babysitters (some providers have two cell phones, as discussed later in this chapter). Going beyond research that looks at how domestic workers use the mobile

phone to perform "backstage" and "frontstage" spatial relations (Lan 2006), this study additionally suggests that cell phones, the internet, and other technologies are used as a mechanism for surveillance while simultaneously fostering patterned social space creation in public and private places.

Cellular Phones

I first came to realize that cell phone use was heavily relied upon[45] by West Indian childcare providers when I gained entry into their social group. I knew that I had achieved this status when Rachel, from St. Lucia, began calling me to arrange a meeting place with her and the rest of the sitters either in the park or at storytime in the public library. They were no longer waiting to see if I was around at the park, instead they would seek me out by calling while en route to a particular location to see if I would be joining them. It was at this point, and after reading several fieldnotes, that I noticed almost all babysitters have a cell phone, something that our technological generation has now taken for granted as a symbol of middle-class status and of being part of a web of communication.

As I continued with observations in the park, I started to note the various ways that babysitters use cellular phones. Some were obvious: to determine meeting places, call family members back in the islands or in New York, pay bills, and stay in contact with employers. Some were not as obvious: the babysitters were able to socially exclude others from their conversations even in their immediate presence as well as decide whom to interact with over the cell phone through caller-identification. In a related vein, I also

[45] This was further evidenced by the fact that several providers could be seen wearing cell phone earpieces for most of the day while walking about the neighborhoods they worked in.

observed how social spaces were created in a public park by way of language use and body position while on the phone. This, combined with the fact that many sitters call "back home" from a cellular phone during the workday to stay in touch with family members and old friends, helped me explore how cellular phones might be a means of preserving West Indian culture and combating isolation in the workplace while at the same time excluding others.

Gender and Cellular Phones

Not only are West Indian babysitters using cellular phones in this way, but so are the employers of these women, especially the mothers. Mobile phone use is gendered in several ways. Leung and Wei (2000) found that women use cell phones longer than males for work while Rakow and Navarro's study showed how women tend to use them more for managing the household, family, and community work, all helping to preserve "women's subordinate social position" (1993:145) in a way similar to the washing machine in its pseudo-liberatory effect. The washing machine was seen as cutting down the amount of time needed to wash clothes when in fact it made it possible for women to do more washing and general housework. Cell phones have extended the ability to work from any location at any time; therefore the mothers of the babysitters' charges are subject to parallel shifts where home and work duties can be carried out simultaneously (Hochschild and Machung 1989). In this same way, West Indian childcare providers who have children of their own either in the U.S. or back in their homeland used cellular phones while working in public places, where a paper note or land line might not be the appropriate form of communication. Both groups (employers and employees) used

cellular phones as a means for carrying out their overlapping parallel shifts. For employers, managing work duties with family duties varies, as Brenda explains,

"She [the mother who is a school teacher] only calls me if she wants me to do something for her. That's when she'll call me. Like Easter time, now last week, she called me to boil some eggs for her classroom…."

Unsure whether what I was just heard was correct, I ask "…you had to boil the eggs for her classroom work that she has to do?"

"Boil the eggs. She called me and asked me to boil the eggs for her classroom. And she came and picked it up and went back to school" Brenda says. Brenda made it clear from the roll of her eyes she did not feel that she should have to do her employer's school work. Clearly, the employer in this case was using the cellular phone in order to delegate to Brenda work that goes beyond the childcare duties that were originally stipulated in her job description. The employer managed to provide services for her work (in this case an Easter activity) while exploiting Brenda in the process by calling her on the cell phone to have her execute the job duty. The employer later called Brenda again and told her to boil eggs for the charges to design since the employer wouldn't have time to decorate the eggs after her day's work at school.

These mobile phones have redefined not only employers' workplaces, but how the division of domestic space is organized (Gumpert and Drucker 1998). Accessibility for employers has become a defining factor in how childcare is provided due to this parallel shift in managing both home and work responsibilities. Some employers go as far as stipulating that cell phone access is mandatory and if need be a cell phone will be provided by the employer to the childcare provider with certain rules. Brenda spoke

candidly about these very specific rules when I asked how often her employers call during the workday:

"Sometimes, twice, three times, four times for the day" she said.

I then asked her, "Was it more in the beginning?"

"First of all they gave me a cell phone when I just started to work. And then he said, the husband said to me 'oh we're giving you that cell phone, but it's only for us to call you.'"

Since I knew that the employer was aware that Brenda had children of her own, I asked Brenda, "So no one else could be in touch with you?"

"I couldn't call my kids from off it," she replied.

For West Indian babysitters, these specific rules equate to a loss of control in their daily routine, but for female employers it is a means of existing "in their [employers'] domestic and work worlds simultaneously" (Rakow and Navarro 1993). The employer is able to use "remote mothering" techniques, a term coined by Rakow and Navarro to mean in its most basic sense to parent from a distance, where she is perceived by other parents, her own family, and others (perhaps co-workers) as being constantly available to her children, family, and childcare provider by having a cell phone (Rakow and Navarro 1993; Leung and Wei 2000). Providers also use this remote mothering technique in order to do the same with their own children. In the field, cell phones were used by both employers and employees as a way to ensure that children have eaten their food, taken a nap, done their homework, had a successful music, dance, or art lesson, and more generally, are behaving properly.

Checking in on the cell phone about a child's behavior was of top priority for Carla's employer. In a conversation with Carla about the reasons why her employer calls on the cellular phone, she explains how the employer attempts to pull information throughout the day to determine whether or not to come home,

> She likes to ask what mood her son is in because her son…I'm not there, but from what I've heard from her and the other sitter, like he'll yell and run around on the floor and act the fool. You know he thinks she [the mother] did something, you know or whatever. So she always calls every, like every hour or so to see [imitating the mother] 'what mood is he in? Where is he? How is he doing?' And if I say good…I realize now that if I say 'oh yeah he's in a great mood,' she comes in [meaning home] earlier. So he's always in a great mood [both of us laugh].
>
> "Regardless of what he's doing?" I ask.
>
> Carla continues while pretending to speak to the employer over the cell phone,
>
> "Yeah, he's in a great mood, he's outside playing, he's having fun."

She then resumes her regular speaking voice after her fooling performance to say "regardless of what mood he's in, come home and deal with him yourself …I'm gone."

Calling to check in from work constantly however, tends to be overlooked by employers as part of the group of challenges that many babysitters face. Several sitters have children and families of their own here in New York and in the islands from which they come, and they use the cell phones in the same manner as their employers. Cell phones do not require "nearness as a defining element" (Gumpert and Drucker 1998) since the ritual of defining a place and meeting have become more flexible (Caronia 2005; Katriel 1999) and it is in this context that I place West Indian babysitters' use of the mobile phone to call their family and friends in the Caribbean.

Calling Back Home

As Horst points out in her article about how mobile phones have transformed transnational communication in Jamaica, the mobile phone provides continual ties to relatives in the U.S., but has also become "an object of ambivalence, bringing unforeseen burdens and obligations" (Horst 2006:143). By connecting and maintaining social relations with people without having to cross national borders and through varying means of communication, Horst describes this "transnational social field" (Levitt and Schiller 2004) as a way for Jamaican nationals to express their love to relatives abroad in the U.S., stay involved in the family's daily activities abroad, and even make requests for specific items they wish to receive in their homeland. On the other hand, the unanticipated consequence of having such "freedom" in communication was the fact that relatives in Jamaica would sometimes become frustrated at family members' complaints about how hard their lives were in the U.S. leading their Jamaican counterparts to wonder why they left in the first place. In addition, Horst describes the sometimes excessive monetary requests from family members in Jamaica, and how relatives and friends in the U.S. would use the "Caller-ID" feature on the mobile phone (one that displays the number of the person calling) to avoid answering calls coming in from Jamaica, which could lead to tensions in the relationship. While some of the disadvantages to having a cell phone for West Indian childcare providers in Brooklyn are similar to those expressed in Horst's research, I found that most women enjoyed the practice of communicating in a transnational social field.

Brenda describes her use of the cell phone to call people in Grenada when I ask her how often she calls back home,

"Oh Lord, sometimes it's bad… Sometimes I run up my phone bill like $200, 300 or something dollars. But this morning, I texted everybody."

Interested in how she used the text messaging function on the cell phone, I repeat, "You texted them?"

B: Yes, I texted them to wish them Happy Easter. So I texted everybody and everybody call me back saying 'I don't know how to use the text.' I taught them how to do it, so they text me back most the time. I call often.

TMB: Like everyday would you say?

B: No, maybe twice a week.

TMB: And who do you talk to back home?"

B: Talk to my cousins, my nieces, I have a friend and I talk to him all the time.

Speaking on the cell phone to family and friends is common with most sitters. Rachel, for example, finds comfort in knowing that she can keep in contact with her father in St. Lucia, who gives her the latest gossip on friends back home, "Did you hear that this one did this?" Because her father likes to keep her up to date on events in St. Lucia, Rachel prefers not to call her dad on the cell phone because he speaks too long, which would raise her phone bill. Likewise, some prefer to use their home land line because their employers pay for the cell phone and they do not feel comfortable using the cell phone to make personal calls when someone else is paying the bill. Jennie says, "I want to feel comfortable and be able to talk for like an hour" when she calls her friends and family in Grenada. "I don't give too many sitters the phone [number] but the mother says 'you can, you can,' so yes, I can give it to sitters who want to contact me for playdates" although Jennie admits that she doesn't like other sitters having the number. Carol felt the same way about using cell phones. She owns her cell phone but says, "I

don't be on the cell like them other girls…my ears get tired…" She even requested no long distance on it because she would rather pay the two dollars for a phone card for fifty four minutes worth of time to call back home to Trinidad and speak with her husband, whom she calls twice a week.

West Indian Babysitters and Cell Phones

Cell phones are used every day by West Indian childcare providers as one of the ways to combat isolation in their work domain and to maintain personal social networks (Katriel 1999, Humphreys 2005). They are now able to interact "together in new ways and situations where collective action was not possible before" (Rheingold 2002:27). There are several meetings constructed throughout the days by providers such as organizing playdates, making plans to meet at the public library for storytime, or simply meeting to run errands together. Rachel tells me how "all the babysitters carry cell phones" and Carla affirms, "oh yeah, all the time. That's what we use [it] for—playdates or you want to go to this park. Especially me and Jennie, we rack up some minutes."

Public parks and sidewalks are a noticeable example of how cellular phone usage constructs this sociability and mediated interaction. In these public spaces, the "visual and bodily constitution" (McCarthy 2001:121) of West Indian women work together to create a representational space.

Representational space is constructed in a variety of ways by West Indian childcare providers who use cell phones. They are able to "mark the boundaries of such an otherwise invisible place" (Caronia 2005:99) while continuing to maintain their participation in the larger interaction group (Humphreys 2005). Humphreys explains how people "constantly negotiate their private and public sense of self when using and

responding to cell phones in public spaces" while also indicating the specific markers used to create social spaces (2005:367). Humphreys found several ways in which people create this representation of space in which West Indian babysitters have participated:

- Stood or sat away from others in an area as if to avoid intrusion by other people or to not be rude to others in the area.
- Pace as a way to demarcate their space within larger public space.
- Used possessions such as bags to mark their territory where they did not want others to intrude
- The use of "Cell-Yell" (speaking loudly to make presence known) or simply maintaining "minimal main involvement" defined as a person talking on their mobile phone to justify their presence and thus remaining minimally involved in public space activity.

Looking for these markers, it was evident that West Indian child care providers use all of these strategies or techniques to create representational spaces in the public park and on public sidewalks. I remember one morning seeing a West Indian babysitter sitting down at one of the picnic tables inside a large open park space. Her hair was shoulder length, black and relaxed straight, with a slim headband pulling the hair away from her face. She wore dark denim pants, a blouse and a heavy, knitted black sweater. I almost never saw this woman talk to others in the park, except for other West Indian babysitters. She sat quietly as she does most mornings and used her cell phone to pay the bills that were stacked in her checkbook, which is the only time I had ever seen her use the cell phone. This routine of sitting by herself to make personal calls on her cell phone was her way of creating a private space within a public place. She indicated

through her low tone, limited eye contact, and "bench sitting" position that she did not want any intrusion by other people, like most individuals who are handling private financial matters.

West Indian babysitters would also use cell phones while pacing back and forth and strollers to block off areas of the benches that surround the open park spaces from other public park users and, in addition, leave the diaper bags on the seat of the bench to indicate they are using that space. It isn't unheard of to see ten to fifteen such strollers and bags along an entire side of the public park benches while the sitters are either using their cell phones or talking with one another while watching their charges.

The idea of "Cell-Yell" however, was not seen as commonly was the opposite, what I am tempted to call "Cell-Silence." West Indian babysitters typically do not want others to hear their private conversations with family or employers. It is considered insulting to other West Indians when one boasts about planned trips back to the homeland since not everyone can afford to do so, or about other matters that are seen as no concern to others. Often what is observed is that the sitters do not want full disclosure about their relationships with their employers. Some tend to communicate to other babysitters that their working relationship is open, honest, and without tension, when really what can be overheard is the employer dictating certain directions to the babysitter throughout the day, which would make the babysitter feel disrespected in front of her peer group. Babysitters will hide their true working relationships by speaking softy through their cell phones, although I was able to capture some discussions by sitting close enough. On the other hand, some babysitters spoke quietly on their cell phones so as to not appear too "friendly" with their employers whom they actually did like working for. There seemed

to be a precedent set among some babysitters that you shouldn't "like" your employer (when someone is speaking positively about their employer, the providers become quiet and do not engage in further conversation perhaps because of skepticism or denial that someone could possibly have a decent employer), so they would speak badly about them in public parks and then joke around with their employer on the cell-phone. I also observed sitters that spoke negatively about their employers in the parks and then said some of the most wonderful things about them to me in private. These highly contradictory social relations between employer and employee were evidenced through cell phone conversations.

Similarly, when speaking with family members in public places, babysitters will speak in a low tone to maintain their privacy. Therefore, the notion of Cell-Silence preserves the cultural West Indian ideal that states one should never boast about what one has or what one is doing, while maintaining a good working relationship with the employers in private. In many Caribbean cultures, speaking in a low tone is associated with self-control and proper public conduct. Yelling loudly in public would be considered improper and a lack of "brought-upcy," (lack of manners) so providers were careful to monitor their phone behavior in public places.

Who Pays the Cell Phone Bill?

All of the West Indian babysitters I interviewed agreed that the employer should be responsible for paying some, if not all, of the cell phone bills since it is now considered a tool for the work of childcare providers. Moreover, cell phones that are used during the workday come with many restrictions, such as limited free minutes, that lead some babysitters to take drastic action such as refusing to answer their cell phones

even when they know it is the employer who is trying to contact them. Most babysitters agree that the employer has every right to know what is going on during the day with their child, but not at the expense of the babysitter.

Brenda described a situation that occurred between her and the mother of the children for whom she cares in which Brenda was restricted from using the home phone line,

B: ...I used to answer their house phone, and she[the mother] stopped me from answering the house phone.

TMB: Why?

B: I think one day what happened was that I had the bigger one when he was a baby and somebody left a message on the phone and I forgot to tell her. So she was like don't answer the phone, let the answering machine pick up. So what I do now—sometimes they would be calling and I know they're calling and I wouldn't answer the phone. I would run away from the phone, I wouldn't answer it. And then they would be calling me on my cell phone and I shut it off! And then when they come they say, 'I was trying to get you.' And I was like, well, I don't know...I didn't want to answer my phone you know. I pay my cell phone bill, I pay all my bills.

Who pays the cell phone bill is a common concern among West Indian babysitters. They state that they do not necessarily have the financial means to pay for their cell phone bills, especially when it is the parents calling frequently or in the case of emergencies when the providers are out with their charges and need to call the parents. Trinidadian babysitter Irene was in this position after her youngest daughter put her personal cell phone in the fish tank. After going without a cell phone for some time, she finally told the employer that they needed to purchase her a cell phone for work. She said,

> I'm always at doctor's appointments… somewhere with the kids [and] need to call car service in case of [an] emergency. In every job that I've had, they would get me a cell phone whether I had a cell phone or not…Even if you have your

> own cell phone and they want to pay some of the bill, then that's fine. If you have your own cell phone, that doesn't have nothing to do with them [the employers] because if you're taking their kids out or anything, the cell phones is always good because of emergency…

Irene has two cell phone plans and two phones now, one that she shares with her husband and one that she shares with the employer.[46] She still calls the phone "her phone" although she has limited minutes imposed by the plan that the employer gave her. Irene stated that she tries not to go over the minutes. She makes some personal calls on it, but does "try to use it just for them…I don't like to put personal stuff in work."

Darlene, on the other hand, does not "believe in" owning a cell phone unless the employer is paying for it although she admits that she has been looking into it. Amused by the fact that if all cell phone plans actually offered each other's features (meaning that one type of phone plan offers free long distance while another perhaps offers unlimited text messaging, but neither would provide both), they would all go bankrupt, Darlene thinks that cell phones are taking over the way babysitters do their work, but she makes it clear who should be responsible for the purchase of cell phones for childcare providers,

> I've never purchased a cell phone myself…I've been in jobs where they give you a cell phone with the strictest understanding that it's only to be used for work purposes…I see the way how some people are with the cell phone, they've got the thing stuck to their ear every time you look at them… people [employers] say 'Do you have a cell phone?' and I say, 'No I don't'…'Okay, we'll give you a cell phone.' And I've heard people went on the interview and the person asked if they had a cell phone and she said 'no' and they said 'well, you've got to get a cell phone before you start this job.' They wanted the worker to pay for the cell phone. Now that to me is a job you don't want.

Here, the cell phone has provoked a small social transformation in determining whether someone should or should not take a job. The cell phone can also bring about

---

[46] Cell phone sharing plans allow two or more people to access a shared number of minutes with a single bill, which is typically paid by the employer.

another transformation. It has the potential of closing the gap between the public and private domains of communication in the relationship between employer and employee.

Darlene became bothered when she talked about workers losing their jobs for refusing to give the employer their own personal cell phone numbers, but she also admitted, "I blame the workers to a certain extent because if I [were to] have a cell phone, I don't see what business my cell phone has to do with my job, it's my cell phone."

Concerned for that parent out there who desperately wants to check in with his or her childcare provider to hear how the child is behaving or simply to ask how the day is going I asked, "What if the parents want to get in touch with you?" Darlene responded,

> I have no problem with that, just give me a cell phone. If you want me to use my cell phone, you should be contributing to the costs. To me, you've got a nerve, I'm paying the bills, you probably aren't giving me enough money as it is anyway, and you've got the nerve demanding that I give you my cell phone number for you to use up my minutes? What am I, a Charlie [an ass]? Why would I agree to that? And if you're going to make those demands, then this isn't the job for me.

While this stance against paying for a cell phone for the sake of an employer is sound, I was not fully convinced that childcare providers could be so selective about their employers' demand as Darlene indicated.

Unlike Darlene, Grace, who also works for Domestic Workers United, recently became the owner of her own cell phone, a birthday gift from her cousin,

> I had a lot of slack for not having a cell phone…I didn't see the need for a cell phone…not to say that it's not a worthwhile tool. I'm just not one of those people. So I had one and I didn't even know the number…and I start giving out the number to a few people and stuff like that, but…the last job I had, I didn't get one. But when I got mine, I didn't tell them, I didn't give them the number…If she [the mother] wants to be calling me on my number, she has to be paying me. She has to be contributing.

Very much like Darlene, however, Grace believed that there is a price to pay if an employer wants to "control" a babysitter's movements throughout the day. Both Darlene's and Grace's statements contain some hostility or resentment, but clearly include a consciousness about a private and personal possession that should be respected as such throughout the workday. Grace continues,

"She can get a phone and put me on her plan and it's just for her business. When I leave, I leave it at her house…But if she wants it, she's going to have to pay. You can't let these people get the better of you…but if you feel you need to know every step I make, you give me a cell phone."

In a similar discussion with Victoria, the same was true, that the employer should contribute monetarily to the use of her private cell phone, but she added that there are some advantages to having a cell phone as well,

> It was my personal cell phone. So I definitely felt at times that maybe that they should be paying for it because the amount of time I spent talking on it during the day – which most people don't use their cell phones too much during the day – definitely it was substantial. It was definitely substantial. But, you know, I guess at other times it was positive to have a cell phone. You know, it's certainly good for making the play dates and all that kind of stuff, and finding out where mom is when she's not home on time and all of those things.

The advances in cell phone technology have made them accessible to almost everyone with prices decreasing annually for the simplest phone and calling plans becoming more diverse. It is, though, still the consensus among West Indian babysitters that employers should pay for the cell phone if it is a requirement of the job position and depending on who actually is paying for the phone, that person can choose to define the limits of the job and in essence, the power relation.

Surveillance: Parent Blogs, Nanny-Cams,and Strollers

While many sitters gain primary employment through word of mouth networking, virtual technology has become a significant resource for many sitters. One day when some of the sitters came to my house for a playdate, Debbie asked me to do a posting for her on a babysitter website because she would be looking for a new job in Spring 2007. Taylor, the two year old Debbie cares for, would be staying home with her retired father and therefore wouldn't need hired childcare services any longer. There are several "parent blogs" on the internet whereby parents and babysitters can post their needs for childcare or employment availability. I asked several sitters if this was a regular means of getting a job as a sitter or nanny. They all said yes. They told me that sometimes the employers themselves will do the posting with a blurb on the proficiency of the babysitter to help sitters find new employment. One of the problems with this new way of finding work for these particular women is the fact that several sitters do not have internet access at home and therefore either do not know how to navigate the internet or cannot access it without paying a fee at one of the internet cafés that may charge up to a dollar a minute. Although the public library has computer access, sitters do not use it for this feature since they are watching small children when they are at the library. Moreover, the library is specifically reframed by providers as a play space—it is not necessarily about the books or internet access.

The internet, however, is not always used for posting or searching for jobs, and it is increasingly being used for surveillance as are cell phones and other technological products. Using a guided full-text search on the periodicals database LexisNexis, I checked the relevant articles in the Northeastern newspapers, where many middle-class

families get their daily national news information. The articles revealed that surveillance is one of the main uses of cell phones by employers. Not only this, but "nanny-cams," which are small cameras that can creatively be installed in various ornaments around the home are used to "keep an eye" on what their childcare provider is doing when the employer is not at home. The term "nanny-cam" alone is disturbing because it creates the notion that surveillance is most needed for those performing the duties of a "nanny." Some companies even advertise themselves as "nanny surveillance companies" to play on the insecurities of parents with a new babysitter (Hollander 1998). While these mechanisms have indeed allowed some employers to monitor and ultimately "catch" their babysitters in some act of deviance, often these devices are a way to ensure that the babysitter is under the employer's control at all times in the private household. The babysitters are constantly in the private sphere where their actions are being monitored while their self-esteem, autonomy, and worth are diminished through surveillance tactics. Darlene spoke about her employer's friend who had a nanny-cam installed in an ornament for her sitter and Darlene's employer simply laughed and said, "Darlene would never go for that, she'd figure it out in a second."

West Indian sitters, remaining a predominant choice for many Brooklyn families, still face some of the harshest criticism from the very people who employ them. This criticism and surveillance, is now posted in virtual form—on the internet. Erynn Esposito, a community organizer and documentarian, informed me that Park Slope parent sites on Yahoo Groups have gone to great lengths to "ensure the safety of their children." Erynn explained that one website chat room bore a string of emails whereby parents graded "nannies" by race. I asked her what she meant by this and she further stated that

"West Indian sitters were at the bottom and Tibetan women were rated #1." Apparently this "grading system" began when one parent was trying to let another parent know that she saw her West Indian sitter use physical means to discipline a child and wanted to get the sitter fired. This string of emails led some parents to state that this type of discussion was completely racist. In fact, one woman who employs a West Indian babysitter (but not the sitter who had disciplined the child) even remarked it "makes me so upset that you are looking at my sitter with this racist eye while they are with my child."

When I asked Darlene about her take on such a grading system, she concluded that West Indian women have been doing domestic work for many years in New York and have worked so many babysitting jobs that,

> They know what they're worth…they know what they should or shouldn't do and they have higher standards than someone who recently came in and are more placid…more agreeable…because you have some people that if they can take advantage of you they think you're wonderful, but if they cannot take advantage of you, then you're not that wonderful.

Whether or not the newer immigrant Tibetan childcare providers are more easily manipulated cannot at this point be confirmed. However, Darlene's words reflected the conclusions she had arrived at in her work for DWU with recent immigrants who are placed in this vulnerable system of domestic work.

A Grenadian provider, Tricia, whom I met at Carroll Park in June 2005, told me that some of the parents on this very website said that "the West Indian sitters are taking the white children to Jay street (Fulton Mall, which is mainly a black ethnic enclave and shopping center) and they [the parents] disapprove." She was very upset by the comments made by these parents who judged the responsibility level of babysitters in their everyday work. These comments also beg the question, why is it so terrible for

West Indian sitters to want to go to a shopping area that has mainly black clientele? Maybe certain gentrified neighborhoods are more easily transformable "private" public space in most parents eyes and going to an "ethnic" neighborhood is considered "too public," hence synonymous with "unsafe." What about the comfort level of babysitters who go out with the children they care for? Perhaps it is even more rudimentary than that: the purchase prices of everyday items at the Fulton Mall are lower than those found in most of the neighborhoods where these babysitters work. Further, this new form of surveillance through the internet is a concern for several babysitters and parents alike because it shows how boundaries of private versus public space are becoming more penetrable by potential strangers. A recent article in the New York Times called "Spying on Nanny" shows how surveillance goes beyond the internet and onto the strollers of the children. According to the article (Nov 19, 2006) a former New York City prosecutor has apparently created a website that, "offers parents a small license plate in exchange for $50. Once parents affix the plate to their child's stroller, any 'concerned citizen' with access to the internet can file an anonymous report on the nanny pushing the stroller so parents know where their children have been" (McLaughlin and Kraus 2006). Surveillance further weakens the already strained relationship between employer and employee by playing up the fears that most parents already have when their children are under the care of another.

Even Victoria found that the surveillance of babysitters on the internet could be damaging. She found that the internet could be "probably more negative than positive" because it allows information to spread "like wildfire" although she admittedly benefits from the advertising that she does online. The comfort people take in using the internet

as a resource for surveillance is also a point that Victoria considered, "…I think that people are very willing to say things in that environment that they would never say to somebody in person…" From a researcher's perspective, this makes surveillance perhaps "easier" than confronting an employee about what they are "possibly" doing incorrectly.

Comfort through surveillance and being able to connect with others should not be overlooked when studying childcare providers and the structure of their workdays. The frequency with which both cell phones and the internet are used by providers and their employers has meaning for both parties. This meaning can be as simple as the ability to reach out to family members abroad and locally, or to other providers in the work communities, but the meaning can be deeper. Using cell phones and the internet can mean that one is avoiding confrontation with family members or with employees. It could also mean that someone is being subordinated through the various surveillance tactics that are being utilized to control public behavior. All of these possibilities culminate in making the use of such technological advances a more complicated issue than I have outlined in this dissertation and an issue that warrants further study.

Technology is a necessary part of how people do their work in the twenty-first century. It is evident both from what employees say about the ways in which they use technology and how employers use it, that technology has interwoven itself into the family dynamic in a unique fashion by making international communication more possible while at the same time controlling public behavior through social spaces and surveillance. Whether or not people want to believe that technology should play such a large role in everyday life, it is evident that technological advances such as the internet and cell phones have become integrated into our daily experiences. Therefore, for both

childcare providers and their employers, it is important to understand how people adapt to such mechanisms and to reach some form of consensus as to how technology can be properly used throughout the workday.

Chapter V: Where's My Money?

As I was walking from the park back to my home with Molly and Michelle (who was in her stroller) one late morning in the summer of 2006, Molly asked me if I knew anything about 'susus.' Not having a clue as to what she could possibly be talking about, nor recognizing the term in my West Indian colloquial vocabulary, I immediately admitted that I did not. She began to explain that it was something that she and the other babysitters did together as an informal way of saving money. Molly said, "Some island people call it a 'pot', 'meeting', 'partner,' or a 'box,' " all terms that she appeared to think should ring a bell with me because of my West Indian background. She then told me that one of the sitters, Lyla, is the one who organizes her susu (meaning that Lyla collects the money, distributes it, and is in charge of deciding who can be a member). Molly described the susu as a type of collective savings among the babysitters that stems from West Indian traditions in which all members of the group decides on the amount of money (a "hand" as they call it) to "throw" into the "pot" each week, then each member makes a contribution every week and in turn gets the full amount that has accrued during her assigned week. The amount varies according to which susu you belong to. One babysitter described the susu in this way,

> You can do it as big as you want or as small as you want. You can do twenty-five dollars a week or a hundred dollars a week, it depends on how, you know, you want to run it. Most of the time it's a hundred dollars a week, usually. It runs for eighteen weeks. Each week eighteen people put in their hundred dollars (throw a hand in the pot) and one person gets $1800 until each person gets their own (pot) and then you start it again.[47]

[47] See Aubrey Bonnett (1981) for more detailed analysis of the susu system.

While Molly was describing this savings system, the use of words such as "pots" and "hands" evoked the language of card games. After investigating academic scholarship related to this issue, I came to realize that several group of first generation immigrants to the U.S. have these forms of rotating credit organizations (Feagin 1999, Kasinitz 1992, Watkin-Owens 2001, Foner 1979, Bonnett 1981). For the purposes of this thesis, rotating credit associations will be defined as "associations formed by a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given in whole, or in part, to each contributor in rotation" (Ardener 1964:201). Molly said that having this form of savings is how many of the babysitters pay to go back to their homeland, demonstrate financial status to institutions in order to obtain formal loans or lines of credit, or how they save up for some other goal-oriented purchase. "Susu" is similar to Saskia Sassen-Koob's description of "San" the rotating credit associations which people in the Dominican Republic use as a form of savings for social rituals such as weddings and funerals, and even for immigration documents or travel (1979).

The susu is not something that many of the babysitters talk about in public, yet it is organized in public places such as libraries, churches, and even in hospitals (Rabinovitch 2005). None of the employers I have interviewed or observed, mentioned or knew about their babysitter's involvement with susus or that they are organized in public insitutions. When I eventually asked my mother if she knew anything about susus, I was surprised to find out that she in fact organized one among her fellow librarians in 1965 at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. It was comprised of eight people—all from West Indian backgrounds including Trinidadians and Jamaicans. My mother recalled how one white British woman who worked in the library was approached to join

in the susu, but refused because she felt it was better to deposit the money in the bank to get the interest in order for it to be more profitable to her. It was not until I began speaking more with West Indian babysitters that I realized the susu was something in which almost all of the babysitters participated in and is not something unique to the recent immigrant's experience in the U.S.

Background

Geertz's analyses of rotating credit associations in Indonesia, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Africa, look at how these economic savings act as "a device by means of which traditionalistic forms of social relationships are mobilized so as to fulfill non-traditionalistic economic functions" (1962:242). He also acknowledges the socialization process by which children learn this pattern of behavior as an important part of societal function, although this is less true with the children of first generation immigrants in the U.S. (Bonnett 1981) who tend to culturally distance themselves from this practice. Geertz's analysis compares and contrasts the rotation order among members who participate in the various countries, and the rules of obligation that are understood by members. For example, in Indonesia's version, called 'arisan', the person who draws from the monetary fund is responsible for preparing a small feast for the following meeting. The Yoruba's version, called esusu, in Africa, (which is where the West Indian term 'susu' is said to have originated (Huggins 1997)), has a more bureaucratic system where the organizer may not have any personal social relationship with the members of its rotating credit association.

Biggart and Castanias (2001) determine that indeed social and economic spheres are embedded and that social relations are used to manage what may be considered

"irrational" impulses in order to have some useful and, one may argue, rational functions. They claim that "economic actors use their knowledge of their social relations and the relations of others to advance their interests" (Biggart and Castanias 2001:480).

Beyond the social aspects of rotating credit associations, there is a more concrete and practical use for these informal savings: they represent capital (Ardener 1964). Ivan Light posits that West Indians in general tend to take more risks when it comes to making business choices than their black American counterparts and therefore, rotating credit associations are a way to facilitate the capital necessary when competing for business (1972). In an article that outlines how West Indian immigrants to the U.S. differ occupationally from their British counterparts, Foner points out the West Indians' ability to use these forms of mutual savings could partially, but not entirely, explain how they raise "important source[s] of capital for business ventures" in the United States (Foner 1979:288; Garcia 1986). Gerber notes that these forms of rotating credit associations became even more crucial to ethnic groups that are discriminated against when attempting to use corporate financial institutions (1982). But as Bonnett suggests, West Indians do not solely use rotating credit associations to support business ventures (1981). For example, Aldrich and Waldinger found that immigrant groups who arrived in the United States with their families (as opposed to leaving children or spouses behind in their homeland) are at an advantage because of their ability to have family members participate in the "norms stressing collective achievement" and therefore do not necessarily rely on rotating credit associations for capital investment (1990:128). Kasinitz also found that West Indians tended not to use susu money for business ventures

(1992). Likewise, in my research, susu money was used primarily for small consumption needs and not larger capital investments in businesses.

West Indian Susus

According to Bonnett, who wrote a comprehensive book outlining exactly how West Indians use rotating credit associations, this form of savings is "a generational adaptive mechanism to cope with the urban complexities of New York" (1981:347). In essence, these associations or susus are more important to the first generation West Indians than their second generation children who have assimilated to Western culture and therefore use formal banking institutions. In my interviews, none of the babysitters talked about their own children participating in such associations. However, several of the babysitters' mothers were participants. It seems that with each generation, it is becoming less important as a means of saving money.

For the susus to work among these women (all susu participants in this research were women childcare providers), the organizer of the susu must be trustworthy and reliable. While there are no official rules that participants must be of a particular race or ethnicity, West Indians make up the entire membership among this group of babysitters. Additionally, there is no core documentation within the associations (i.e. receipts, or invoices). Only simple records such as a list of names with dollar amounts next to them are kept to determine who is in line for receiving the money from the pot or who owes money to the pot, and all transactions are made in cash. This makes tracking such associations and determining the exact number of susus in operation difficult as in the case of Bonnett's work (1981). Default on payments (since each member must contribute every week) is rare in susus, but it does happen. The susus are legally run in the United

States, but are considered part of the informal economy meaning they are not regulated by the state or private financial institutions that otherwise would regulate monetary circulation (Castells and Portes 1989). Aubrey states that friendships are used as collateral and this is why "some organizers try to limit membership to people whom they know very well, mainly those who are members of their social network (1981:351)." Social relations are used essentially to "assure economic relations...to reduce risk and to sustain predictable economic outcomes" (Biggart and Castanias, 2001:481). The social control of running a susu is diffused among the women.

Irene, one of the susu organizers among babysitters whom I interviewed, said that "you are responsible for any friend that you bring into the susu and doesn't pay their hand." By not paying their hand, members can guarantee exclusion from future community relationships—in this case, the West Indian babysitter community, although I have not personally met anyone who has experienced this. Perhaps due to the possible embarrassment of not paying, providers always make sure they do pay. This social pressure to comply, then, is crucial to the reproduction of the susu. And while some countries have integrated these credit association systems formally into their development strategy plans and commercial banking endeavors, many first generation immigrants continue to participate in the informal system in order to remain accountable and under the radar of authorities since some are undocumented (Bonnett 1981).

It's a West Indian Thing

> *"Look, this susu is not a Trinidad thing, for Guyanese and Bajans [Barbadians], Jamaicans and small islanders have it, too. Of course, they call it by a different name. This is more a West Indian thing that cuts across the island groups. In my susu I have had members from all the islands. I only have to mention I'm starting one and people from all the islands ask me to join up. You would be amazed to*

> *know how it has helped us to get ourselves together. Yes, this is really a West Indian thing." –Susu participant (Bonnett 1981:67)*

This expression of susus being a "West Indian Thing" is commonly heard among the babysitters. What is key, however, is that though some things have changed since Bonnett did his study of susus in the 1980's in Brooklyn (i.e. the amount of money that is paid out to the organizer of the susu), the real story is how many of the susu traditions have remained the same.

Most babysitters in my research have participated in susus at one time or another, yet they do not all agree with the unwritten rules that are followed, nor do they all participate. But for those that do actively participate in the susu, they have strong feelings about its function within the West Indian community.

Denyse and I sat in Washington Park in Manhattan with Darlene and another Trinidadian babysitter as they all handed out flyers for the Townhall Meeting for Domestic Workers United and the Bill of Rights. Denyse explained that "whoever gets the last 'hand' (payout) can now take the first hand in the following round meaning that she has doubled her take." So if you want double the money in the same month, you take the last hand of one ten week cycle and the first hand of the next ten week cycle. People use that money for whatever they choose such as a down payment on a house (after several rotations are collected), a car, their kids' college tuition in the U.S. or in their homeland, trips back to the islands, or trips to other destinations such as Canada or within the U.S.

I asked Darlene how she thought susus became so prevalent among West Indian babysitters in Brooklyn and she answered,

"I think that probably came about many many years ago where black people back in the islands didn't open up bank accounts and yet they needed money to do certain things with and I think that's how it came back [in fashion here in the U.S.]." This informal credit system "is the only way they can narrow the gap between their small incomes and consumption needs." (Bonnett 1981:39).

I asked both Darlene and Denyse "why not simply put the money in an account to accrue interest? What is the benefit?"

Darlene, who is from Barbados and does not participate in a susu responded, "…what you say is true, is that there is no interest on it…" She continued, "I guess the difference is also like you can say 'well, why not go to the bank and borrow the money?' but if you go to the bank, there's procedure."

"I guess they could be afraid too if they're undocumented" I said.

"Actually, some places you can open up a bank account even if you're undocumented."

"But aren't they afraid of the transactions?" I asked thinking that there must be some concrete answer to why West Indian babysitters don't exclusively rely on bank accounts for savings. Darlene matter of factly stated, "They could be, but if they are, they wouldn't try to open up a bank account."

As she saw that I was still not convinced, Darlene went on,

"If she [pointing to Denyse] wanted money, and say if something happened to her family back in Trinidad, and she wanted money immediately, she could call up whoever is running the susu" to get an early hand.

Another consideration to explain the continued validity of the susu is that suggested by Bonnett who finds that susus allowed "low minimum investments" unlike the formal financial institutions that often demanded higher minimum investments (1981). Lastly, there is the social pressure to participate in a susu.

In a later conversation, Carol re-affirmed the advantage of the susu in paying out large sums of money. When asked why she does not simply put the money into a savings account at the bank, she replied, "…you just figure you're getting the money in a bulk that's why most people do that." Carol primarily used her susu money for green card fees (totaling $1500) and so endorses the economic exchange,

"I makin' sure I throw that susu…That's how Trini people does pay their bills, they buy their house and everything with the susu…That's what helped me pay immigration, for the lawyer" (and any other penalties for staying beyond the period of her permit).

Carol finally exclaimed, "They don't give anything free in immigration."

In a separate discussion with Irene, she told me why susus work beyond formal banking institutional savings offers when she said,

> Not a lot of people understand it if they're not West Indian. If you're not West Indian, you won't understand it. In the sense that...It's easier, it's like a savings. It's like you're saving money. Because if you were to say 'okay I'm going to put aside a hundred dollars every week,' sometimes that never happens. You end up spending it. But when you know you're committed to giving to somebody, you're committed to something, you're going to give it. So sometimes people do it for vacations, people do it to pay a bill, people do it for kids' graduations that are coming up, they do it for that… People do it just to have money for the summer to go vacation, stuff that you can't usually save money for. This is a good way of saving money, so that's why I say people do it as big as they want, or as little as they want.

When I pressed her further about the fact that it is not possible to accrue interest on the susu money she replies,

> I don't know if your mom…but if you ask your mom, she'll be like ---no. You know why? Because a bank, for me, a bank you can always go and take it out. ..Somehow we feel like if it's in a bank and not in my hand---it has to be somewhere where I know I could do like this [as she slaps her hand with the other to show the money is tangible] and get it. But if you put it…because you know you're committed. You know if you don't get that person that money, when it's time to get your hand, you're not going to get it, or they gonna take out whatever you owe. So it's…this is something that started—please, how many years ago. I knew it growing up as a kid, my mom knew it growing up as a kid, so this was a way for us to save, like West Indian people of poorer class to save. And somehow we felt safer doing it like that…rather than putting it into a bank…You have to face that person every time, because it's usually somebody in your area, or in your job, or somebody that you're going to see all the time.

"So they know where you live or where you work" I stated.

"And I can come get you" Irene said with a smirk on her face. We both laughed.

So, although susus are not being used to start small businesses in the West Indian childcare provider community, it is clearly being used to uphold traditions and maintain social bonds that create an enforceable trust among the "ladies."

Tips

In my conversations with Darlene and Denyse about susus and why they work among West Indian babysitters, Darlene brought up an integral part of the susu economy that has been overlooked in theoretical discussion. When describing susu activities between the organizer and the other participants or "lenders" (Bonnett 1981), Darlene spoke specifically of the financial exchange that occurs ritually as someone is getting their 'hand.' Darlene explained,

"…Whoever is running (I mean for me, we call it 'meetings'), whoever is running it, whoever takes their hand usually gives them [the person running the meeting] something."

Confused I asked, "Like a tip?"

"Alright, call it a tip" Darlene said.

Denyse interjects,

> Well, we call it the pot… but it all depends on who runs it and where it is run. Because, we do it in a church setting, so nobody takes any money. If you take $1000, and it's 10 people, you get your $1000, but if it's a village setting [meaning more casual, in the park or with people you know] the person who is doing it [organizing the susu or keeping the money] receives $5 from every person…in a village setting…Because I remember at home [in Trinidad] when I used to do it, the person who is holding that money gets 'pot', they get five dollars…so actually, the person who is holding the money gets something in return.

While some of the babysitters acknowledge that there is a difference between church and village settings, not all are convinced that one is better than the other, especially when dealing with an honorary donation to the organizer of the susu. For example, Jennie who is from Grenada, is fully aware of susus among babysitters and other groups. She explained how she once belonged to a susu that was organized in a church setting among West Indians—both male and female, but would never join one again. Jennie had originally joined the susu in order to save $2000 for her wedding expenses in 1999. The couple in charge of the susu wanted her and her husband (they participated jointly since the money was for their wedding) to give them money as compensation for handling the susu money and activities. Jennie's husband went to pick up their "hand" and gave the male organizer in the church forty dollars for his time and effort. The organizer said in return "people usually give me a lot more than that." It was

at this moment that Jennie realized that the susu was being held "in order to take money out of poor people's hands." She says,

> West Indians are poor people and why must someone take money out of our hands and for what—to get rich themselves? It's not fair to the people who are trying to save what little money they have to buy the things they need…I don't believe in that susu business, you just need to do the math…and realize that it's not worth it. How is it that I'm putting in my $1000 and then have to pay someone a hundred dollars? Just do the math and it doesn't make sense. People are so stupid to get involved in that.

Jennie's hostility toward susu organizers was expressed in contrast to Irene's experiences as an organizer herself. Irene tells a different story about how she runs her "Village" susu among babysitters in Brooklyn,

> Well, what happens is usually when people collect their hand they give you a $10 or a $20, you know, but you don't really do it for that. Some people do. Some people are crazy with it. But, for me, since I know myself, I don't ever do it to gain anything. It's something that I think we're all average people, we don't have a lot of money… why would I try to take from you? Why would I take from you when we're all trying to make something, so usually I don't take. When they draw their hand they would say, you know, 'I'll take you to lunch' or they give me $20 or whatever instead of demanding okay when you get it you have to give me a hundred dollars—no, that's not how I do it.

Irene empathizes with her susu members and their status as immigrants that earn lower wages in New York, but there appears to be some socioeconomic advantages to being an organizer that she is not acknowledging. Those organizers, like Irene, who claim to not want anything in return, still do in fact receive something whether it is a free lunch or money (which she does not refuse), so organizers are benefiting in ways that are different from the other susu members. Some organizers take $100 out of each payout and therefore receive an additional "hand" without even contributing to the "pot." There is an advantage to having power over people's money in this informal setting that makes

susu participants feel obligated to pay out an extra amount from their hand, similar to a banking institution's exorbitant fees.

Trust

Beyond the issue of honorary money set aside for the organizer of the susu, there is the matter of "trust" among new members joining the susu. Carol belongs to a susu organized by a Trinidadian friend who lives near her. Their children went to the same secondary school together in Trinidad and someone introduced them to each other in Brooklyn. They have been friends ever since. She has been in the friend's susu for around eleven years. Carol explains how susus work both in Trinidad and here in Brooklyn when it comes to trusting someone new,

> When you get your hand, you have to make sure that you pay for someone else to get their hand. If it's not a fair person, you can't be in susu because you have to pay for someone else to get [their hand]…When somebody just joins a susu, you mustn't give them no early hand, you have to wait…If you want to throw a hundred, you could throw the hundred, but I throw fifty because I can't throw the hundred.

She also states that "you have to be honest with your susu…If I can't make, I tell her that I can't make."

Irene is also quite cautious when dealing with new members in the susu that she organizes among babysitters in Brooklyn. Although she claims to have never had problems running her susu, she still does not take people whom she doesn't know. She says,

"I don't take strange people, I don't take, you know, it's people that I know, that I trust, because if you're in it and you don't give it [the money] to me, there's nothing I can do to you. I will stand the losses because if I'm running it I have to make sure that when the time comes, the next person gets their money. So usually it's people that you know."

Trust continues to be a theme with Irene as an organizer,

> …my mom and I did it between me, her, and a friend for years before it got bigger. You know, and usually it gets bigger with people that you know because they see you running it, they see you running it decent, and you're getting all your money, and you're fair, and they join. And it's up to me to say yes or no. And if I don't trust you, 'no.' And if you go into it the first time and I have problems getting to you to get the money, you're not in it again.

I ask if people approach her about participating in the susu, or she approaches them.

> Well, I never really had to approach anybody. It's usually like, if you're in it with me and you know a friend who says 'well I need to save some money because next year I want to go on vacation or next year I want to pay down on a house' or whatever, then you can bring that person and say well I know someone who is in a susu. And I ask you, okay, if you bring this person in, you're responsible. If I don't know that person, you are responsible, so you better make sure that that person brings it [the money] otherwise you are going to have to give it [money] to me. If I know the person, then it's my responsibility. But no matter how it runs, at the end of the day, even if you don't get that person to give the money, I still have to find it [money] when it's the time to give that person the money because I'm the one who's running it…

Newer members to the West Indian susu are not always trustworthy according to Jennie. While Jennie does acknowledge that some people benefit from susu money, she tells a frightening story and says that "the susu is getting out of hand." She recalls a friend's story of how her husband was robbed at gun and knife point because the thieves knew that he was holding the susu money. Jennie's friend who ran the susu had taken someone new that year and believed it was that person who robbed her husband. The thieves waited for the wife to leave the house and had to have known that the susu money was going to be paid out that day, so they robbed the husband who was home. They even cut his long dreadlocks as a sign that they were not afraid.

This type of story is not typical of susu tales among babysitters, but it does show how violence can penetrate the informal system that has been set up among susu

participants who have little recourse, something that is not discussed at length in Bonnett's work.

Chapter VI: Organizing Childcare Providers

…we all need to play a part in finding the solutions to our many problems…
--Maloof 1999:49

The struggle to organize domestic workers began in the early twentieth century when the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was passed, as part of the New Deal, allowing workers, excluding domestic and farm workers, to organize and bargain collectively (Van Raaphorst 1988). What made these two groups' exclusion more intriguing than the fact they were both dominated by people of color was the fact that their "working conditions resembled institutionalized slavery" and thus, in the case of domestic work specifically, reflected "a system that explicitly disregards and renders invisible what is regarded as 'women's labor'" (Poo and Tang 2005:113). This "women's labor" is arguably immigrant women's labor (Savage 1996) as also noted with Home Health Care Workers (Mora 2004) who describe domestic work as dominated by immigrant women. According to Poo, "the overall nature of immigration policies and practices in the United States …have created a climate of pervasive fear among immigrant workers" and this climate has "created de facto immunity for all employers of domestics and undocumented workers generally" (2005:113). Since the 1970's, the consequence of having a large immigrant influx of workers has resulted in competitive markets along with "the disappearance of jobs at adequate wages" (Mishel and Voos 1992). This hostile environment to labor is even more pervasive in New York City where "the horizontal structure of the ….economy" accommodates "deregulation and declining industry standards, and weakens the ability of unions to organize workers" (Ness 2005:58). As Needleman explains, "labor has been most successful at organizing during periods when the economy and job market were expanding" (1998:73) and not when the

economy has leveled out. And in 2000, the AFL-CIO offered support for a general amnesty for immigrants who were undocumented and the fight for domestic worker and farm worker rights took its proper place in the mainstream of the organization for workers' rights.

Large immigrant migration patterns to the U.S., and New York more specifically, have placed women of color in traditionally female jobs at the low end of the "service, clerical, and manufacturing sectors" (Needleman 1998:71-72), marginalizing them further in the contingent workforce of U.S. labor markets. The competition for these lower wage positions that women of color occupy also creates difficulty in organizing workers (Ness 1998). From my interviews with West Indian childcare providers, the need for organizing workers in the domestic sector is apparent since many of these women cannot afford childcare for their own biological children and are placed in a position where they have to leave their children in an apartment while they go to work to put food on the table (Needleman 1998). Because close coethnic network hiring strategies are used by employers and domestic workers themselves this marginalization is reproduced even further (Mitra 2005) making it more difficult for the mainstream labor movement to follow in the long history of attempting to organize domestic workers. It is because of this position that some West Indian babysitters resist exploitation and draw on networks of support (Colen 1986) through organizing practices that are more formal.

Domestic Workers United (DWU) is an example of this formal organization. To understand how DWU has been able to recruit over 1,300 members (of whom about 300 are active), and to fight for domestic worker rights, and gain exposure in both worker communities and legislature, I interviewed five of the fifteen DWU organizers, some of

whom are babysitters themselves and from West Indian backgrounds. Also, I volunteered my time between 2006 and 2007 to help with their phone bank outreach to new and established members. In addition to this, I have spoken with several non-member West Indian babysitters about DWU's work to determine the effectiveness of DWU's outreach efforts and why some of the outreach tactics do not succeed among West Indian childcare providers.

Domestic Workers United was founded in 2000 out of the work of two domestic Worker organizations in New York called The Women Workers Project of the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) and Andolan Organizing South Asian Workers (AOSAW). The director of DWU, Ai-jen Poo who is a 33 year old Chinese woman, born in Pittsburg and living in New York since 1992, explains that CAAAV, founded in 1998, was the first organization in New York to organize Filipina domestic workers and particularly those in Manhattan's Chinatown community who work in low-wage service industries such as nail and beauty salons or restaurants, while the AOSAW is a Pan-Asian grassroots membership organization that focuses on building power for low-income immigrants in the Asian community, especially the Southeast Asian refugee community in the Bronx. Ai-jen explained further,

> …after two years of kind of meeting, organizing themselves, supporting each other to fight their employers for better conditions and things like that, they were really like, 'We really need to work with all the workers in this industry, particularly the Caribbean workers and the Latina workers who are even larger populations of the workforce than we are, and we need to build the power of the workforce together.' We need to build a movement in this industry, and that's where the idea for Domestic Workers United came about. So, it was meant to be a vehicle to basically build the power of the entire industry, but also directly organize those populations of workers that were not being organized by either CAAAV or Andolan.

When I asked if there are other organizations that do specifically organize West

Indian workers, or Latina workers," Ai-jen replied no, there aren't any such organizations. "… None at all?" I asked surprised. She reported that CAAAV and Andolan were trying to build a force among the three ethnic groups. Then Ai-jen added,

> … And what we started to realize was that it really is no accident that it's all women of color doing this work, and it's no accident that it's migrants in this period…Or immigrant women. And it's no accident that the work to this day still isn't recognized, respected, or valued, that when you do the historical research you can see like a deliberate pattern of exclusion… That the work and exploitation [and] that the workforce was subjected to, and that the state actually condoned and supported [exclusion].

How Domestic Workers United Works

DWU is funded by five foundations and individual private donations. It is comprised primarily of childcare providers, at an estimated 70% of the membership according to Ai-jen. Around 20% are housekeepers, and 10% are elder caregivers. The childcare provider industry breaks down into approximately 50% Caribbean, 20% Latina, 10% Asian, and the rest African or other. For DWU as a whole, their membership is composed of 80% Caribbean-born, 15% Latina, and the remaining 5%, African Ai-jen told me.

There are four goals that DWU put forth when organizing workers according to Ai-jen. The first is "to be able to hold significant power in order to change the industry." Ai-jen does not believe that such change will come from the support of elected officials or expert professionals, but from the workers organizing themselves and developing leadership within the group. The second goal is for workers to view themselves and have others view their work with respect. As Ai-jen put it, the nation views this work [domestic work] and characterizes it as:

> Unskilled, natural, help… the work is made invisible, it's not protected, the wages are low, their time is flexible, flexible to the advantage of the employers,

> not to the workers…So, we really [need to] see education around respect for the work itself, not just as a form of wage labor, but as a form of work that traditionally women have done in the home for generations and continue to do, that isn't compensated.

I spoke with several babysitters about this very issue of respect for the position of a babysitter and improving the conditions under which this work takes place. Jennie, a sitter from Grenada, and I had the following discussion:

TMB: You talked about 'things aren't going to get better unless sitters get out of this position'.

J: Well, I mean it will never get better even if they get out because another generation is going to do it…But I'm just saying on an individual basis, you don't want to be in this forever, this, there's nothing in this, there are no benefits in this.

TMB: Now, what about things like Domestic Workers United. Have you heard of that group?

J: Yeah, I haven't been to any meetings.

TMB: Why not?

J: I've just never bothered, but it's a good thing.

TMB: You think it's a good thing?

J: It's a good thing because…we need that because the parents wouldn't do it for us because they want to be able to not pay you enough money… They want to… have you work twelve hours a day.

Perplexed by Jennie's acknowledgement of DWU's contributions, but reluctance to participate I asked again,

"Do you know what Domestic Workers United is?"

J: "No, not really, I don't know much about it. I just think it's trying to get our rights, get like rights for nannies and get the salaries and the conditions people endure, but I've never been to the meetings. I've seen a lot of flyers about it."

I realized through this and other discussions that some babysitters do in fact understand what DWU is about, but there was something else standing in the way of West Indian sitters actually organizing—a lack of faith that the group will protect workers, improve work conditions, and that it is worth workers' time to participate in organizing.

Ai-jen addresses the question of salaries and work conditions when she spoke of the third goal of DWU,

> And so the third goal is about Fair Labor Standards, and that's really important to us, not because we feel like once we have standards in place all the problems are going to be solved at all. In fact, it's pretty clear to domestic workers the ways in which the legal system really isn't set up in their interest…But that it is really important that these standards exist, because the exclusion of this workforce from legal recognition and protection has been such a huge part of how this workforce has been oppressed over time, and stayed denigrated over time…We feel like fighting for standards is a really critical part of how we're then going to build towards more freedom and more protection and more recognition, you know? So, fighting for laws for us is really specific…

To understand this concept better, I asked, "Are the Fair Labor Standards…something that…can [serve] those that are documented versus those who are undocumented?" Ai-jen answered,

> Historically, in the United States, labor standards have been such that even though…The laws are really contradictory in different areas of law, so with immigration law, it is technically illegal for undocumented workers to work. But the way that the law works is that once you're in a job, you're protected by the same laws as any other worker. So, that's why undocumented workers can sue for unpaid wages. Everybody's protected under the Fair Labor Standards Act…once they've worked…otherwise it would be slavery…which is a criminal offense.

In order to truly flush this idea out, I again asked for more information on how this could possibly work if you have undocumented workers fighting for standard employment rights, "…Now the government could still deport you, technically… But

you could still get paid for the wages… So, could an employer say, 'Oh, this person never worked for me,' if there's no documentation that they did?"

Ai-jen explained, "They could. And then the worker could say, "I did, and it was for this number of hours…"

"…The worker would have to prove then that they actually did work?" I asked. Ai-jen then stated,

> She would, but there are ways of doing that. She could basically like actually just write out every day what hours she did. And that's why we always encourage workers to keep good records, because if anything were to happen, those records, even if they're written on like napkins and things like that, can be submitted to court. Yeah, as evidence…testimonies from neighbors, doormen.

It is not uncommon for undocumented workers to organize formally in the U.S. by building coalitions that grow over time as was the case with the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign in Los Angeles. With the support of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), undocumented building workers in the JfJ campaign were able to strategize and use public relations events and protests to help produce successful union recognition (Erickson et al. 2002).

The last goal of the DWU is to build a worker's movement in order to address the root causes (racial, gendered, and systemic) of oppression for all communities and thereby truly change the day-to-day workings of this occupational system.

In addition the four goals mentioned above is the task of membership base building, which includes "nanny training programs" administered by certified professionals and held over four consecutive weekends. These programs, paid for at a reduced rate of $100 by the members, have graduated over 400 workers with a CPR certificate through the American Heart Association, along with child psychology, and

pediatrics courses. In addition, members receive a certificate for the leadership training program for workers to understand the history and development of their industry. By learning the history of the domestic work industry, workers will be able to "see how and why they have the potential to change the conditions they endure" (Waldinger 1998:114) and consider the historical context of their struggle (Fantasia 1988). The other way that DWU members contribute is through campaign initiatives that fight for the rights of individual domestic workers as well as the collective Bill of Rights that Domestic Workers United has been working on for over six years. This Bill of Rights would establish a living wage, basic benefits such as healthcare, and some option where employers can contribute to a worker's healthcare. It would give structure to notices of termination, severance, paid leave of absence (i.e. sick days, holidays, or vacation pay) as well as protection from discrimination or unjust termination. The Bill of Rights would be the first piece of national legislation for domestic work. Coalition work with other organizations and tactical organizing such as preparing for meetings and other events make up the last two components of DWU's organizational contribution.

Public Organizing and Isolation

Organizing takes form in a variety of ways and can be negotiated using numerous methods. DWU privately and publicly negotiates with employers on behalf of its members. When DWU is approached by a worker who has not been paid for the work completed, one of the organizers makes a private phone call to the employer on the worker's behalf, which can sometimes lead to argument, both verbal and legal. On occasion, they have sent letters to the employers demanding pay for DWU members, or publicly picketed their place of business. Some employers will settle with the worker and

pay the wages owed after such public demonstration. Some risk DWU filing a lawsuit or finding allies within the communities of the employers. DWU will even go so far as to get local legislators to contact employers privately or inquire about the issue at hand and apply pressure if direct action doesn't work. Workers who find themselves in this position of having to seek out an organization such as Domestic Workers United to fight for their rights (mostly live-in workers) are often secluded from their families and made to live in isolation by their employers.

Isolation is one of the reasons why DWU works to organize all types of domestic workers. Ai-jen posits that "people [domestic workers] are generally isolated…they find ways of resisting and surviving and supporting each other and stuff as a response to that isolation…But in general I would say that people do still feel pretty isolated." I asked in response to that if that differs from a stay-at-home mother; the isolation felt from taking care of children at home.

"I think so," Ai-jen explains, "because they're employees, and they have – that it's about their livelihood and so the isolation doesn't have to do with just being alone in the home, but also the fact that you have so little control over your working conditions… And the environment around you…"

Elena who stepped into the room a few moments earlier to prepare for a DWU meeting and whom I saw out of the corner of my eye scribbling notes for the upcoming meeting, overheard the discussion that Ai-jen and I were having and wanted to add something about feelings of isolation in domestic work,

> [DWU allows domestic workers to] come together to support one another, to be in a space where you can share experiences and be able to identify those patterns so that then, in our particular case, it's allowed us to be able to launch this campaign to fight for a Bill of Rights in New York state…And what makes this that much

> more powerful is that it really came from the women – domestic workers coming together to say, 'These are all the experiences that we're having'…And ourselves identifying those patterns so that we could then be able to craft together with, you know, people who know how to write legislation…and be able to craft a bill that really responded to the specific needs and conditions that people were facing. I wish there were more groups in, you know, around the country, because I'm sure that there's just thousands and thousands more who are working and living in isolation…And may not have other avenues of support.

While both Ai-jen and Elena speak of isolation as being the determining factor as to why domestic workers should organize or do not organize, and perhaps that is the case for those who occupy live-in jobs at their employer's home, the West Indian childcare providers I have been observing and interviewing who live-out of their employer's home never once mentioned the word 'isolation' as part of their jobs. Isolation did not seem to play a role in or inhibit their limited inclination to organize formally, although they clearly had feelings of oppression at times that did not contribute to any commitment to organization. More to the point, it was the fear of becoming isolated by deportation that most childcare providers spoke of as a deterring factor to committing to an organization such as DWU as illustrated later in this chapter.

Organizing in Public Places

With all of the work that Domestic Workers has put into their organization and their constituents to become better advocates for their own rights as humans and workers, it became important to understand how this organizing takes place. Outreach has been problematic in the past for DWU and this continues to be a major factor in their inability to organize in a way that would effect significant change. Ai-jen addresses this,

> … outreach is really hard. It's the most important aspect of the work, but it's also the hardest part of organizing because when you do the outreach in the parks, no matter how much you believe in the organization, you're always going to run up with a variety of responses from workers. And it's definitely hard, you know? So, it's [DWU] a space for people…it's a process…[to] get support from each

> other…But then for us to also strategize like how do we do this better, how do we reach more workers, what areas are we not reaching, and how can we improve our outreach materials?

So how does DWU obtain a membership base when those targeted are resisting? Using what Friedman would call "the use of selective incentives" (1992:157), Ai-jen offered a few details on how they attempt to increase membership. For example, they started a girl's night out, on Friday nights after work, where people come who might not be drawn to a meeting, but might be drawn to having a drink after work.

In charge of this organizing and membership recruitment are Ai-jen, who commits 75% of her time to DWU (approximately thirty hours/week), and Elena Perez, who is the Latina member coordinator and translator-interpreter at monthly member meetings or special events, and works eight to fifteen hours per week. In addition, there are four West Indian workers and one Mexican worker who are nannies or housekeepers and put in time when they can (usually around eight hours per week), since their day work offers little flexibility. The women range from their late twenties to sixties in age. When I asked whether DWU found certain West Indian workers to be strong leaders, Ai-jen responded,

"What I have noticed is that a lot of members of DWU who really organically step into leadership [roles] were heavily involved in the trade union movements in their home countries…So, like Barbara was a shop steward and on a national kind of steering committee for representing transport workers in the Barbados trade union."

Workers on behalf of DWU, like Barbara, also do member outreach picnics and

play-groups outside when the weather is nice as well as outreach at the commuter train stations where workers leave for work in the suburbs. And when the weather is good, generally workers go outside to public parks and talk with sitters.

Ai-jen reflects aloud for a brief moment,

"But it is about the members, really, like are we speaking to members, are we speaking to workers, their needs-- are we connecting with them, are they feeling like this is their organization?"

***

> *…us black people are not as determined as the Jews. The Jews have been talking about Holocaust for years. People say that you can compare Slavery to the Holocaust, but what they forget is that the Holocaust didn't happen here in America, but Slavery did. You can't compare the Holocaust to Slavery, it's apples and oranges. The Jews get so much because of what they went through, but us black people get nothing, the Jews don't let you forget about the Holocaust… --interview with Darlene from DWU*

As mentioned, Darlene is another organizing member of Domestic Workers United. Her opinion about blacks organizing is expressed in the above statement. Darlene went on to tell me what DWU has been working on,

> We are working on a Bill of Rights that addresses the fact that domestic workers have been excluded from protections… farmworkers are getting further than us and they only started in 1999. We are also working on a documentary based on domestic workers. We also have a survey that was conducted with over 500 respondents of all different ethnic domestic workers that ask questions about age, length of work, status in the U.S., employer treatment, benefits, pay scale, benefits, etc. This data is written up in what the UN will receive next month, and which I'm currently reviewing, called The Shadow Report, by the University of North Carolina, prepared for the Human Rights Committee.

Later in our conversation, Darlene expressed some of her frustrations with how domestic workers are treated in the U.S. when she made reference to the current headline

in the news, in which a man said that he lost his cat in the hollow wall of his house. She said,

"They're making a big stink about a cat, a kitten that disappeared."

I followed with "and there are people living in poor conditions and who are not making enough money and no one is helping them or putting it on television."

She responded "exactly… makes me so mad."

I asked Darlene about her participation in the marches for immigrant rights that were held on May 1st, 2006 in New York. She said that she wasn't able to attend that particular march because of a reception that she had to attend on behalf of the DWU, but that she was able to go to the one on April 29th. She explained to me that,

"the Latin American people were representing with flags and it was a very warm feeling, but at the same time, it was an embarrassment…It is embarrassing to me to see so many Latin American representatives and so few West Indians at the march…There was so much energy on that bridge."

"Do you think it is fear that keeps the West Indian workers away from protests?"

"What do you think it is?" she asked me in return. "I have been doing this since 1999. It's laziness" Darlene said.

"You think they are just lazy?"

Darlene continued,

> You know as black people, we talk a lot, but not action….I want them to get off the benches and do something…Our people want it [change in worker rights] but want everyone else to do it [protest]. They want you to plant the food, cook the food, put the plate out and you might as well put the knife and fork there beside it too…It's a lot of excuses: 'I can't be bothered because I don't have personal days or sick days.' One person can't win…One woman said to me that 'I only have two days off a week and I have groceries to get and I want to spend time with my family.' They're lucky to have two days off. Most workers don't.

What Darlene is discussing here is the "free-rider" concept[48] which J. Scott Lewis' defines as "those self interested individuals who receive the benefits of group membership without a corresponding contribution to the group" (2006:13). Friedman further explains that the problem with free riders is simply that regardless of "whether they [free riders] have participated or not, no rational actor [individual] would ever choose to contribute his or her scarce resources to help achieve such ends" (1992:159). Another problem arises when the success of the group "depends on the wide adoption of its position" (Friedman 1992:167). The free-rider problem, then, is something that DWU must contend with in its quest for membership and domestic worker involvement.

Darlene's frustration with the West Indian childcare community is not entirely misplaced, but in my interview with Jennie, I left with the impression that some West Indian childcare providers simply feel helpless in a country where "whites rule" and "blacks are not heard." I asked if the fear of deportation is so overwhelming among West Indian childcare providers that they do not want to organize themselves for better working conditions. Jennie explained,

"The way I look at it…I think it's um, the majority. I think people realize that it's hard not to crack because um a lot of times…if the majority is white, they wouldn't stand up for us. It's making no sense, you know what I'm saying, it's gonna make no sense." "If the majority of what, the group is white?" I asked perplexed. She responded,

> No, I'm saying if we get...we have 1,000 blacks. If we get 100,500 whites to say 'Hey, we need that', people will think it will be more effective. Yes, because in America, you're black. Who's going to listen to *you* anyway? So if you get 5,000 parents who say 'Hey, I want that too' we guarantee that's going to change

[48] The originator of the "free rider" concept is Mancur Olsen who wrote *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965).

> in the morning. But people just think hey, it's just a bunch of people who have nothing, who people think have no brain. It's going to happen, but when. I think if we see a shift in it, if you see the majority who was parents…this is why I've never really bothered.

I asked if it has more to do with the parents needing to get more involved. Jennie responded,

> Yes, I think the parents need to be at these meetings and say 'hey, I think what these girls [sitters] is saying is true. You know, 'we should do that.' If the parents get involved in that, not just individually at home, get involved in these groups and have the majority as white, you're going to see, it's going to happen in the morning. It will happen in the morning. But it wouldn't happen that way because they like that cheap labor…they like that cheap labor, so this is why it just wouldn't… I'm not saying that it would never, nothing's impossible, but when?

I continued exploring this issue with Jennie and finally asked, "Do you think they should stop doing what they're doing?"

J: No, it's a good cause.

TMB: So you think it's good for those who want to join?

J: It good, yeah, it's very good, um, it's a right step in a right direction. They should never stop because if you give up then nothing happens…um, I mean today they have 1,000… by tomorrow they may have 3,000, you know so…I'm not saying that they should give up…Maybe see if they can get some of the other people [white parents] to sign…I can't see that happening. You'll get a few parents, you won't get the majority who go to Congress and say 'Yes', because we need the majority, you know. People already see us as nothing once you're in that job.

This pessimism that Jennie expressed is precisely what gets Darlene fired up. Darlene explains that "When people used to be on the picket lines, fewer people stuck with it because of fear of losing their jobs." She then draws an analogy with a bus accident that happened in Philadelphia a while ago, after which thirty people claimed to have been on the bus and wanted to get money from the insurance company. As it turned out, the bus was completely empty on the day of the accident,

"They [sitters] only want to be a part of it when the battle is won [again echoing the free-rider problem]…I see more Caucasians go out to protest."

She then asked me where my participants are coming from and I tell her that I'm looking at areas of Brooklyn that are predominantly white, middle-class, and gentrified. She proceeds to tell me that she's worked often in Brooklyn Heights, Park Slope, and Atlantic Avenue to distribute flyers to other workers. She continued about her experiences working for DWU and her attempts at recruiting members,

> More than one time that I have approached a West Indian babysitter [a black woman pushing a stroller] to give a flyer and as soon as they see the name of the organization they say 'I'm not interested' and they shake their heads. I ask them if I can explain what the organization does so that they know what they are saying no to…They take off like their tail is on fire or they say I know about it already…They have been given misinformation by those who haven't come to a meeting.

Understanding Darlene's frustrations, I do not think it is enough for her to dismiss the fears that are real to other childcare providers. The fears come from a deep rooted place where going against one's employer can lead to job termination and ultimately deportation for those without work permits. Some women I spoke with have seen their peers sent back to the islands, so the fear is real to them. These fears should not be ignored, but rather understood as part of the immigrant reality for some and part of the forced dependability between employer and employee in general.

Deondra, a sitter from Trinidad, confirmed this sentiment one day while we were chatting with a Panamanian sitter on the front stoop of her employer's brownstone down the street from me. Deondra said,

"There are people [DWU] who come around the park to hand out flyers…No one wants to take them though because they're afraid to lose their job. If their employers find out, they will lose their job."

When I interviewed Molly, Rachel, and Janet in March 2007, they also expressed knowledge of the DWU organization, but felt that the fears did not only affect those without green cards. I asked Molly,

"Have you ever heard of Domestic Worker's United?"

Rachel interrupted and said, "They had a segment on that…. at the City College…on the radio…They were saying that document or not, you have the right to step up to see whether the employer is mistreating you, you have the right to report it."

Molly shook her head saying "Yes, right, right" and continues, "But not people who don't not only have the green cards, you know. I know people who have the green cards and still taking the abuse from the bosses."

"And why do you think that is?" I asked.

Molly replied, "I don't really know" while Rachel said over her, "I think because of the money."

Janet added, "I don't get that" while Molly interjected, "Yes, but [when] you have your green card, you got to look for something better… Because somebody tell me about a Trinidadian and how somebody make them cry. I said no boss is going to make me cry….green card or not."

In another discussion, Irene talked about the green card process as something that the employers should take on as their responsibility to babysitters,

> …even if it's just a work permit or something so they can work for you… Just do something for them, so they don't have to feel like like…that crazy feeling…I tell

> people, I remember a woman I worked for said that 'you know, Irene, I don't know why they don't give people their stuff because…if we have to pay people who are legal to do this, we couldn't pay them because we'd have to give them medical, we have to give them everything and if we have to give them everything, how much can we pay them? We can't have childcare. So, why not just help them out, you know, so we can do what we have to do.

In an effort to better understand this fear that employers will terminate the employment of childcare providers who decide to organize for fair labor standards, I asked Darlene if childcare providers are worried because they don't have their papers? She replied,

> We aren't going to do anything to hurt the undocumented! We have spoken with lawyers and lawmakers (those who pass bills) and they told us specifically to not add 'covers undocumented immigrants' to the bill we are currently trying to get passed" because that just draws attention and the bill won't get passed. As of right now, undocumented workers have rights under two laws that cover domestic workers and those are minimum wage rights and overtime rights.

I asked her how this works. She said "because it doesn't specifically say that they don't cover undocumented workers for domestic work, so it covers them." This was essentially the same explanation Ai-jen had given before. In fact, undocumented workers all have labor rights, including the right to form a union and not to be fired if they try, and the right to be paid what they are supposed to receive or sue if they don't receive their proper wages (something that DWU works to do on behalf of their members).

After hearing what Darlene had to say about the fears of undocumented workers, I probed Jennie's knowledge of what Domestic Workers United is trying to do,

"Why has it been so difficult to get more sitters to organize? You would think that if your rights aren't being met that you would want to organize with a group." Jennie replied,

> It comes back to status again. A lot of girls don't have their green cards and people are afraid of this public, you know what I'm saying, it's like I'm putting

> myself out there. Nobody knows I'm here, or nobody knows where I am or I exist, so that's what it is. It's people…. A lot of girls don't have their green cards as yet and they don't want to be there [with DWU], but they support it. But they don't want to be there…'What if I'm at a rally and they come and snatch me.' That's what it is. It's not that the girls don't want to be there, a lot of girls don't have their green cards and they don't want to expose themselves…That's what it's all about, but people support it [the effort being made]… People don't like what's going on.

Irene, the sitter from Trinidad, stated that fear of getting sent back to the islands is prevalent. I asked her why she thought sitters don't organize and she had this to say,

> No, like you know, people are just scared if something happens. Okay, say you go to a rally and something breaks out and the cops hold you, you don't have anything. You think they're just going to let you go? Half, some of the time they do, half the time they don't, so you don't want to put yourself in that position where you could be in the line of fire then. That's something that, for me, I think they [employers] should do for us…

Erna, another worker at DWU and a childcare provider, scoffed at the idea that being in public has anything to do with why women are not organizing. She claims, "What we do is public, we're out there every day and most people know that we don't have documents, so that makes no sense. If they wanted to do something to you, they would have a long time ago, but they [employers and policy makers] know that they need us to keep working."

It is fair to say that some employers would be in support of organizing childcare providers and other domestic workers. They feel that by standardizing the relationship, the expectations of the workday will become more standard. In speaking with Erynn Esposito, the employer who also spent time trying to organize sitters, I discovered that her attempts were also weakened after some time. Maria and her husband are in the top 5% of income earners in New York and consider themselves part of the "upper class." Erynn said that her focus is the employers, but that she passes on information to the

sitters that she herself employs and sends photocopies of DWU flyers for her sitters to hand out in the parks because it is more effective to have sitters organize than a white woman and employer telling sitters that they should join a group. She also organized a community center workshop that ran for a few sessions (regular patrons—the parents—were charged $10 and sitters/nannies were charged nothing). The group had a lot of "grand plans" as Erynn called it and the sitters just "gobbled it up" since the event was free for them and gave them an opportunity to discuss issues with Erynn and other sitters.

Erynn reiterated what Ai-Jen, Elena, and Darlene have already said about DWU, that one of the key incentives or goals for the DWU is to encourage sitters to ask employers to sign a standard employment contract. I asked her what obstacles did she or DWU faced when attempting to get West Indian sitters to ask employers for a signed contract. She stated that they were worried about their legal status. They were also under the impression that there was more labor supply than demand. In addition, she felt that the cultural differences were significant in terms of the comfort level that West Indian sitters felt to approach a potential or existing employer.

When I asked Erynn about surprises along the way in her community involvement, she said,

"I was shocked at the lack of consciousness of women employers towards women employees…When feminists go to the workplace, they have an idea of how they want or expect to be treated, but then go home and exploit the women that work for them…What frustrated me most was the unwillingness [of West Indian sitters] to speak up for themselves."

Maria said she understands that status difference and racial difference play a role. When asked about race as a factor, she said that that is why she is "trying to work with employers who are white and of her own status…her peers," -much like what Jennie had suggested as a working alternative in organizing workers-and then has her "sitters hand out material to other sitters."

Private Lives of Women

Part of the problem that was never discussed in my interviews with the DWU workers (who did not have any living children or husbands at the time of the interview) is the difficulty in moving between the public space of being a childcare provider and the private, lived space of the providers themselves in which many have husbands and children to care for. In his work on organizing unions, Fantasia gives examples of female activists who had to manage their lives around formal organizing (1988). He talked about one activist who took her husband to union hall meetings simply to ease the "tensions caused by her frantic schedule during the campaign" (1988:165). He also recounts the strain on family members as they now have to decide how household tasks need to be divided and shared. As Fantasia states,

> Part of the difficulty in disengaging oneself from private life and becoming more engaged in the public realm lay in feelings of guilt that had to be overcome. Most of these women were also wives and mothers whose sense of value and duty was partly bound up with their family roles. Even the most staunch activists had to deal with the contradiction between their traditional private role and the liberating possibilities of a public one (1988:166)

Therefore, when strategizing the organization of domestic workers, it is not only their responsibilities at work and in the community that need to be considered, but the totality of their home, family, and workplace responsibilities. DWU attempts to

accommodate the family lives of workers by offering childcare during monthly meetings and special events. But most complaints from workers regarding attendance have more to do with their feared exposure to legal or retaliatory action, especially if they are undocumented, and the fact that their off-hours are meant for private activities that include shopping, visiting with family members, and simple rest. The fears of childcare providers should be taken as a true concern that unfortunately stunts some of DWU's efforts. Overcoming this fear will be challenging, but the deep rooted nature of it must be acknowledged by organizers.

Historically, up to the 1970's, labor organizing has been predominantly led by white males in the industrial sectors of the U.S. However, since that time, the working class has been predominantly employed in the service sector where the majority population is immigrant. There is no tradition of labor organizing for this group as there was in the industrial sectors for white males. Therefore, the strides being made by groups such as New York taxi drivers and transit workers, the Justice for Janitors group, and farmworkers, who are generally isolated, predominantly male and mostly immigrant, are fairly recent. For women and domestics more specifically, labor organizing has been more of a challenge since they occupy positions in gendered spheres that are typically labeled as "unskilled" labor. It is not until people change their outlook on the importance of this type of work and its effect on the economy that change in domestic working conditions can come about.

Childcare is an integral component in New York's social infrastructure and a significant contributor to the economic development of the city. While the government has attempted to alleviate some childcare stressors through child tax and child credit

relief, it is not nearly enough to cover the expenses of full-day childcare provision that is required by most middle-class dual-income families, the employers of the childcare providers in this study. The economy depends on the work of middle-class families, yet does not acknowledge by any formal means the changes that this group has seen over the decades. Stable employment as we knew it is disappearing as it becomes more temporary and more flexible. Workers are not able to maintain the stability that was once assured them, and this is even more so for immigrant workers and women who find themselves facing similar childcare crises. Since this flexible service sector has been built into modern capitalism, we cannot readily resolve the issues of childcare. We need a structural change in how people are connected economically. Whether this means that the government assures middle-class employers and employees adequate coverage for childcare expenses beginning with appropriate release time from work (for example, Canada allows new mothers one year off work with reduced pay), or a better child credit program that gives parents adequate liquid funding (money that is not simply used against taxes at the end of the year, but money in hand) for childcare, is only a first step. DWU's attempt to assure childcare providers of a fair living wage for New York and their basic human rights is also a good step forward in resolving some of childcare issues. However, while the old union model that has helped other groups of immigrants may be able to improve the economic situation of domestic workers and is an appealing alternative for employers, it is not as grounded as the immediate networks being built among some groups, such as West Indian childcare providers. Also, the idea of organizing among childcare providers is at times taken as an intrusion on the autonomy providers have when not formally organized by outsiders or employers. So there needs to

be an ongoing dialogue about how New York and the U.S. in general not only integrate these workers into the larger social and economic structures, but alter the structure of integration while respecting the collective autonomy that this group of workers engage in on a daily basis, which is a dialogue that I attempted to present in this chapter.

Conclusion

The findings of this research allow for a more complete understanding of the social, cultural, and economic lives of West Indian childcare providers. Whereas previous research has largely focused on how immigrant childcare providers are isolated, I argue that these women have multi-dimensional lives marked by often successful attempts to transcend isolation. The public places these women inhabit and the spaces they share during working hours, in many ways allow their collective lives and cultural identity to flourish. My research demonstrates that these individuals are not necessarily living without power in an isolated work environment. While prior studies on childcare providers have used qualitative interviews to understand the relationship between employer and employee, my research focused on childcare workers in the field by using an extended place method (Duneier 1999). As an ethnographer I was able to observe the day-to-day activities of these women and how they used public spaces to interact, exchange information, and reconstitute cultural practices. The observation of daily social interaction among childcare providers in multiple public spaces has not been the focus of prior research. As such, this study offers an additional lens through which to view the social and working lives of these women.

Public Places and Everyday Lived Experience

Though at first glance West Indian childcare providers appear isolated and exploited—and this is the case for many—as I looked deeper at the social spaces they created in public places, I found a continuous expression of cultural preservation through their interactions. As exposed as they are in public places, this fact does not completely deter this group of women from enacting their collective life. In fact, and similar to Pei-

Chia Lan's work (2006), the act of cultural preservation enables their work life to continue under a variety of conditions.

Using ethnographic methods enabled the workers' voices to recount everyday lived experiences and the social processes that are manifested in public and private spaces in Brooklyn, New York. This approach allowed me to participate in some of the daily activities while at the same time documenting how over time providers' lives became a collective. By looking at West Indian childcare providers with this method, I could approach the research more holistically in order to identify patterned actions that might have otherwise gone unnoticed while at the same time observing interactional challenges and the solutions devised to meet or overcome these challenges. The complexities of these womens' experiences go beyond mere work relations between employers and employees. Instead, this research illuminates the cultural preservation that childcare providers nurture and celebrate through both traditional and contemporary means. Aside from work encounters, there are opportunities in public places for West Indian childcare providers to preserve their culture. I examined how this process unfolds through the use of food sharing, informal economic systems (susus), and cell phones as a means for communication. All offer these childcare providers both visible and non-visible means for the expression of West Indianness.

Foodways

Foodways and food sharing were not only a representation of embeddedness in West Indian culture, but also a laborious effort that participants equated with being a good mother. Demonstrating one's skills or knowledge of West Indian food formed communities within this group of women regardless of age. Food also became the basis

for the women's interactions with their charges and a point of contention between workers and the mothers of the children.

Beyond this, West Indian foodways became a strategy for childcare providers to temporarily invert the social hierarchy within the private workspaces that they occupied during the weekdays. This inversion empowered providers while simultaneously excluding some employers (especially mothers who providers felt were responsible for feeding the children) from an act of bonding with the child under care. Social food spaces were ultimately created in public parks as another way to siphon off areas that are used by multiple parkgoers.

Informal Economic Practices

Less apparent in the communal life of West Indian childcare providers was the systematic organization of susus. Susus, informal savings collectives, brought childcare providers together in public places as they communally collected private money. While under the radar of employers, susus act as a mechanism for building trust (Bonnett 1981) among childcare providers as well as providing the benefits of simple savings accounts. Formal banking institutions would do well to acknowledge these practices and determine concrete ways to include such traditional savings organizations in their new business ventures as a way to provide formal credit for low-wage workers. Childcare providers may benefit from the added value of working with such institutions to build credit that mobilizes them economically since susus are currently paying out what is being put in by participants. There are no interest gains being made on earnings and therefore, susu organizations are not able to benefit from additional monies that could be earned from the open economic markets.

Technology and Surveillance

Technology also contributed to the cultural preservation of workers because it allowed for communication between the U.S. and the islands. Workers enjoyed the freedom of being able to speak with relatives and friends back in the Caribbean, but they also found cell phones burdensome because of the prices associated with such calls.

While cell phones were used by childcare providers to communicate with family members, friends, and fellow childcare providers, they also served as a way for employers to keep watch over their employees. My findings indicate that in recent years the cell phone has served as a new form of surveillance for employers. This form of social control is accompanied by more traditional means of surveillance, which include community members informally observing childcare providers at work and reporting back to employers about their behavior. This form of surveillance was explained to me in conversations that I had in the field with a park employee, a public librarian, and other parents. Another downside of the cell phone for childcare providers was that it was required by most employers, but not necessarily paid for by all employers. So this form of communication often became a burden to workers in ways they didn't expect. Employers were able to track their employees throughout the day and even make special requests that went beyond their previously agreed upon duties.

Surveillance took on another form as well—the internet. Internet sources were used primarily as "classified ads" for childcare providers, but employers used the internet as well to tell other parents what their childcare providers could be seen doing in the parks or in other public places such as on the sidewalks or in commercial spaces. The widespread access to the internet among the middle class introduces a new dimension to

the work that childcare providers do, one that can compromise any attempt at a "normal" and trusting relationship between employer and employee.

Race/Ethnicity/Cultural Identity

This study offers a fresh outlook on childcare work in the studies of domestic labor, but also in studies of public places and spaces, by examining the implications of social positions such as gender and race in the domestic occupational arena. The findings of this research indicate that the cultural identity of childcare providers is fluid and interchangeable and is negotiated mainly through a discussion of racial, cultural, and ethnic identities in public places. Some of the tensions felt between West Indian, African American, and other ethnic groups in public places were uncovered during my fieldwork.

To reduce the ethnic terminology used to describe childcare providers from the islands to the term "black" is not sufficient (Kasinitz 1992; Waters 1999). Identifying themselves by nationality or common cultural mores appeared to be the preference of the participants of this study. The categorization of West Indians as a collective group determined how relationships were formed and ultimately how the workday was shaped. Their behaviors and use of language allowed for the control of social spaces in public parks and elsewhere and in large part dictated the social relations that seeped into private lives. Using markers of West Indianness brought these women together in ways that have not been discussed at length by other studies. These social identities are practiced in everyday life: they illuminate both the collegial work relationship between childcare providers, and the way employers fit or don't fit into their lives.

Future Research

Ethnographic studies in Brooklyn focusing on Tibetan and Nepalese childcare providers, who are revered among white middle-class employers in other newly gentrifying neighborhoods such as Williamsburg and Greenpoint, would benefit be useful. This substantive addition along with a critical analysis of how groups become "the group of choice" in a variety of areas in Brooklyn, would be insightful and lead to a more nuanced body of research on childcare providers and hiring practices as a form of conspicuous consumption. The aforementioned groups of workers would benefit greatly from this type of investigation and it would add to the growing literature on childcare providers.

In addition, one of the common themes among the childcare providers that I found, but did not elaborate on for this particular study (because it would require another ethnographic focus altogether), was that of elder care among West Indian childcare providers. Similar to the position these women took with the role of motherhood and food, many of the childcare providers I interviewed, who on some previous occasion had worked as an elder caregiver in New York, found that elders in the U.S. were not taken care of in the way they would have been in the Caribbean. The providers often talked about having to care for another person's parent (typically white upper-middle class) and how the employers (often the children of the elders in care) simply hire someone to take care of them instead. This was seen as a selfish and neglectful act by West Indian providers. Conducting an in-depth interview series along with participant observation in both the U.S. and the Caribbean would open new territory in the elder care literature. Studying how elder care is institutionalized in the United States and how elder care in the

Caribbean becomes a community or familial issue could help piece together some of the missing voices in domestic work relations.

Larger Implications

Childcare is an important, yet a largely unrecognized part of today's national and local economic infrastructure. The number of childcare providers needed in households to uphold today's economy in the U.S. far exceeds the aid offered to families to obtain childcare. This leads to questions about organized labor efforts. While non-profit organizations such as Domestic Workers United attempt to organize workers and provide them with minimum benefits such as living wages and health care, there are obvious discrepancies between what workers actually think their role is in organizing and what organizers believe is going to trigger a labor movement.

My research opened this dialogue by situating the realities of some workers who don't believe their conditions in exploitative work will ever change. For these workers, it is the employer who needs to spearhead the labor movement in order for working conditions to become better, since employers hold the political and financial power to make change. These workers do not want to participate in the public confrontations (marches, recruiting efforts) that non-profits typically use to organize workers. This is so because of fear arising out of their legal status and their perception of employer dissension. The workers' ambivalence toward formal organizing ultimately reproduces their working conditions. However, those involved with organizations such as DWU believe that with the support of workers themselves and public displays of solidarity, change can come about. This ongoing debate may contribute to the demise of domestic

labor rights efforts, or it may open up the dialogue and move the effort forward to the point where eventually all can and will want to participate.

More pragmatically, domestic workers find it difficult to better their education or improve their chances for economic mobility because of their non-negotiable dependency on childcare work. I bumped into Carol one day while waiting for the subway on my way into Manhattan from Brooklyn. She told me that she visited a New York City government agency and spoke with a counselor to determine her options as she is getting older and increasingly tired of caring for small children. She told the counselor that her passion was in cooking, so the agency mentioned that she could take a three month certification course in catering from seven in the morning to one o'clock in the afternoon and that they would place her in a work environment that matched her interests. Carol works only part-time currently and her rent is $900 a month. She is one of the many documented workers working as a provider in New York. After some deliberation, she determined that she would not be able to afford to miss any potential work (she also cares part-time for a second child after school for a few hours) because she wouldn't be able to pay her bills.

If funding were not only made available, but advertised through local churches and businesses as well as employment agencies that these providers frequent, to subsidize missed wages for skills development, these women might be more likely to take advantage of such employment options. Another option, if there were enough interest, would be to have a non-profit organization provide these courses at more optimal times. I wondered why Carol didn't consider using her susu money to finance missing wages for

the three months. Perhaps it is because she primarily used that money to fly back to Trinidad in order to see her husband or to help out her own children's financial needs.

In New York, public policy has created obstacles for domestic workers to live and work confidently knowing that they will be compensated and treated fairly. While social services have been created and are used by a small proportion of this group of workers who use placement agencies,[49] the political system has failed them in several key areas such as health care, proper housing conditions for live-in workers, termination protocol, and minimum wage security. Local advocates such as DWU have managed to get a bill to the New York State legislature and it is currently being reviewed for formal passage. This Bill of Rights for domestic workers would provide workers, both documented and undocumented, with the benefits needed to support their own families and work at subsistence levels, allowing for the possibility of greater economic mobility among this group of workers. Since the type of childcare labor they provide is desirable and necessary for families to function in New York's vibrant economy[50], it makes sense to implement a system that eradicates the economic injustices that are affecting those who are helping to raise the future capitalists of this same economy.

This study has constructed bridges between the reader and the collective lives of West Indian childcare providers in Brooklyn. Although the focus was not on the organization of domestic labor, my findings can be used to inform the work of labor unions and non-profit agencies. By understanding the complexities of the day-to-day

---

[49] In 2003 New York City created a "Nanny Bill" [Local Law 33] that demanded employment agencies inform workers of their rights and labor laws.

[50] According to DWU's research report entitled "Home is Where the Work Is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry," the number of employed women who benefit from the labor of domestic workers is estimated at over 40% in New York city.

lives of these women, institutions that seek to work on the behalf of domestic laborers can come to a better understanding of their concerns. As illustrated by the findings of this research, the concerns of childcare providers are mediated through ethnic identity, work practices, and interactions in public and private places. The needs of these working women may or may not be in line with the reform efforts sought by labor organizations. However this study may aid such organizations in gaining a fuller understanding of these participants' lives and how they understand their place in the larger economy. Such information can assist those who seek to improve the working conditions and lives of domestic workers. I often wondered how I was contributing to the working conditions of childcare providers through my own research and came to realize that I could only attempt to lead by example. My presence as someone who wants to understand this group of workers more fully and not only through the literature, allows me to participate with this group along with more formal organizers. My presence as a "good listener", a student, employer, mother, neighborhood participant, and now professor who is interested in what West Indian childcare providers have to say may indeed be the only way for me to actively engage them in the efforts being made to better their living conditions. This presence and participation in daily sociability may be the only way to communicate this unique public display of cultural preservation, which could be used to create a movement of sorts in the domestic sector.

The study also offers potential benefits for employers, for providers themselves, and for the children in their care. It allows employers to see a side of their employees that typically is not shown to them. Employers' perceptions may be broadened by appreciating how important food is to providers, how communication with family is

sometimes necessary, and more importantly how providers are treated unfairly while being scrutinized by those who occupy public spaces and may not have "the whole story." Employers may see how they can change their own actions when interacting with their employees through a better understanding of the daily struggles of providers. West Indian providers can also benefit from this research because they are able to hear their own voices come together in protest and have the added benefit of knowing that their stories have more profound implications than they may have thought. It also brings together voices that fear and support organization among domestic workers, which can hopefully bridge some of the anxiety surrounding that endeavor. Providers may also learn that some employers are equally as concerned about the welfare of domestic workers as indicated by Erynn's efforts to bring West Indian providers together. Lastly, my hope is that sometime in the future, the children that are being cared for by West Indian women will be able to see through this small window into their lives growing up and understand the challenges and celebrations that came along with raising Brooklyn.

Appendix A

Demographic Information: Median Household Income for Carroll Gardens/Red Hook (1980, 1990, 2000). Figures are adjusted for inflation - 1980 and 1990 income are in 2000 dollars. Adjusted inflation conversions for 1980 were multiplied by 2.44 and 1990 data multiplied by1.43

Year	Median Household Income
1980	$26,898
1990	$43,070
2000	$45,154

Source: Infoshare online New York: Community Studies of New York, Inc.

Appendix B

The size of the West Indian population in NYC (including Haiti and Guyana, but not Belize or Panama) by year and sex:

		Decennial Census		
		1980	1990	2000
Sex	Male	112300	146036	213145
	Female	146500	180666	280223
Total		258800	326702	493368

Source: U.S. Census Tract 2001.

References

Aldrich, Howard E., and Roger Waldinger. 1990. Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship. *Annual Review of Sociology* 16:111-135.

Amott, Teresa, and Julie Matthaei. 1996. *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States*. Boston: South End Press.

Anderson, Elijah. 2004. *Being here and being there: fieldwork encounters and ethnographic discoveries*. California: SAGE Publications.

Ardener, Shirley. 1964. The Comparative Study of Rotating Credit Associations. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 94 (2):201-229.

Becker, Howard. 1989. Tricks of the Trade. In *From Studies in Symbolic Interaction*.
———. 1996. The Epistemology of Qualitative Research. In *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Belasco, Warren. 2002. Food Matters: Perspectives on an Emerging Field. In *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*. New York: Routledge.

Berman, Marshall. 2002. A Marxist Urban Romance. In *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City*, edited by A. Merrifield. New York: Routledge.

Biggart, Nicole Woolsey, and Richard P. Castanias. 2001. Collateralized Social Relations: The Social in Economic Calculation. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60 (2):471-500.

Blum, Linda M. 1999. *At The Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary United States*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bonnett, Aubrey W. 1981. *Institutional Adaptation of West Indian Immigrants to America: An Analysis of Rotating Credit Associations*. Washington D.C.: University Press of America.

———. 1981. Structured Adaptation of Black Migrants from the Caribbean: An Examination of an Indigenous Banking System in Brooklyn. *Phylon* 42 (4):346-355.

———. 1990. *In Search of a Better Life*. New York: Prager.

———. 1990. The New Female West Indian Immigrant: Dilemmas of Coping in the Host Society In *Search of a Better Life: Perspectives on Migration from the Caribbean*, edited by R. W. Palmer. New York: Prager.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. Social Space and Symbolic Power, at University of California, San Diego.

Cancian, Francesca M. 2002. *Child Care and Inequality: Rethinking Carework for Children and Youth*. Edited by F. M. Cancian, D. Kurz, A. S. London, R. Reviere and M. C. Tuominen. New York: Routledge.

Caronia, Letizia. 2005. Mobile Culture: An Ethnography of Cellular Phone Uses in Teenagers' Everyday Life. *Sage Publications: Convergence* 11 (3):96-103.

Carr, Stephen, Mark Francis, Leanne G. Riulin, and Andrew M. Stone. 1992. *Public Space*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cassell, Joan. 1987. *Children in the Field: Anthropological Experiences*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Castells, Manuel, and Alejandro Portes. 1989. World Underneath: The Origins, Dynamics, and Effects of the Informal Economy. In *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*, edited by M. Castells, A. Portes and L. A. Benton. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2001. Grounded Theory. In *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc.

Chin, Christine B.N. 1998. *In Service and Servitude*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cohen, R. 1991. Women of Color in White Households: Coping Strategies of Live-In Domestic Workers. *Qualitative Sociology* 14 (2):197-215.

Colen, Shellee. 1986. With Respect and Feelings: Voices of West Indian Workers in New York City. In *All American Women: Lines that Divide and Ties that Bind*, edited by J. B. Cole. New York: Free Press.

———. 1989. "Just a Little Respect": West Indian Domestic Workers in New York City. In *Muchachas No More: Household Workers In Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by E. M. Chaney and M. G. Castro: Temple University Press.

———. 1995. Like a Mother to Them: Stratified Reproduction and West Indian Childcare Workers and Employers in New York. In *Conceiving the New World Order*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. 2000. *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Denton, Nancy A., and Doreen B. Massey. 1989. Racial Identity Among Caribbean Hispanics: The Effect of Double Minority Status on Residential Segregation. *American Sociological Review* 54 (5):790-808.

Deutsch, Jonathan. 2004. Eat Me Up. *Food, Culture, and Society* 7 (1):27-36.

DeVault, Marjorie L. 1991. *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dill, Bonnie Thornton. 1994. *Across the Boundaries of Race and Class*. New York: Garland.

Dreby, Joanna. 2007. Parent-Child Separation in Mexican Transnational Families. New York: The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Duneier, Mitchell. 1992. *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2002. Edited by B. Ehrenreich and A. R. Hochschild, *Global Women: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Holt.

Emerson, R.M. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2nd ed. Illinois: Waveland Press.

Erickson, Christopher L., Catherine L. Fisk, Ruth Milkman, Daniel J.B. Mitchell, and Kent Wong. 2002. Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles: Lessons from Three Rounds of Negotiations. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 40 (3):543-567.

Evans, Graeme. 2003. Hard-Branding the Cultural City: From Prado to Prada. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (2):417-440.

Fainstein, Susan. 2003. *Readings in Planning Theory: Studies in Urban and Social Change*. Edited by S. Campbell. Second ed. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

Fainstein, Susan, and Scott Campbell. 2002. Edited by S. Fainstein and S. Campbell, *Readings in Urban Theory*. London: Blackwell Publishing.

Fantasia, Rick. 1988. *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*: University of California Press.

Feagin, Joe R. 1998. *The New Urban Paradigm: Critical Perspectives on the City*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

———. 2007. The Continuing Significance of Race: Antiblack Discrimination in Public Places. In *Rethinking the Color Line*, edited by C. A. Gallagher. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Feagin, Joe R., and Clairece Booher Feagin. 1999. *Racial and Ethnic Relations*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Ferguson, P. P., and Sharon Zukin. 1995. What's Cooking? *Theory and Society* 24 (2):193-199.

Fernandez, Renate. 1987. Children and Parents in the Field: Reciprocal Impacts. In *Children In The Field: Anthropological Experiences*, edited by J. Cassell. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Figueroa, Esther, and Peter L. Patrick, eds. 2001. *The Meaning of Kiss-Teeth*. Edited by A. K. Spears and J. Dejongh, *Black Language in the U.S. and Caribbean: Education, history, structure, and use*. American Speech 77.4 (2002) 383-397.

Fine, Gary. 1996. *Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Florida, Richard. 2004. Creative Class War: How the GOP's Anti-Elitism Could Ruin America's Economy. *Washington Monthly*.

———. 2005. *The Flight of the creative class: the new global competition for talent*. New York: Harper Business.

Foner, Nancy. 1979. West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis. *International Migration Review* 13 (2):284-297.

———. 1987. *New Immigrants in New York*. Edited by N. Foner. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1999. Benefits and Burdens: Immigrant Women and Work in New York City. *Gender Issues*:5-24.

Friedman, Debra, and Doug McAdam. 1992. Collective Identity and Activism: Networks Choices, and the Life of a Social Movement. In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by A. D. Morris and C. McClurg Mueller. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gans, Herbert J. 1962. *The urban villagers; group and class in the life of Italian-Americans*. [New York]: Free Press of Glencoe.

Garcia, John A. 1986. Caribbean Migration to the Mainland: A Review of Adaptive Experiences. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487:114-125.

Geertz, Clifford. 1962. The Rotating Credit Association: A "Middle Rung" in Development. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 10 (3):241-263.

Gerber, D. 1982. Cutting out Shylock: Elite anti-semitism and the quest for moral order in the mid-nineteenth century American market place. *Journal of American History* 9:615-637.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 1986. *Issei, Nisei, war bride: three generations of Japanese American women in domestic service*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

———. 1992. From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18 (1):1-39.

———. 1994. Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview. In *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency*, edited by E. Nakano Glenn, G. Chang and L. R. Forcey. New York and London: Routlege.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

———. 1983. The Interaction Order: American Sociological Association, 1982 Presidential Address. *American Sociological Review* 48 (1):1-17.

———. 1989. On Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18:123-132.

Gumpert, Gary, and Susan J. Drucker. 1998. The Mediated Home in the Global Village. *Communication Research* 25 (4):422-438.

Gusfield, Joseph R. 1992. Nature's Body and the Metaphors of Food. In *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries*, edited by M. Lamont. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. 1991. *Ethnography: Principles In Practice*. New York: Routledge.

Harvey, David. 1973. *Social Justice and The City*. London: Edward Arnold.

———. 1985. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

———. 2002. The Geopolitics of Urbanization. In *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City*, edited by A. Merrifield. New York: Routledge.

Hauck-Lawson, Annie. 1992. Guest Editor Introduction. *Food, Culture, and Society* 7 (1):24-25.

———. 2004. Hearing the Food Voice: An Epiphany for a Researcher. *Digest* 12 (1-2):6-7.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1997. *The Time Bind*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell, and Anne Machung. 1989. *The Second Shift*. New York: Penguin Books.

Holder, Calvin. 1980. The Rise of the West Indian Politician in New York. *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 4 (1):45-59.

Hollander, Ricki. 1998. Spy or Wary Eye? Nannies on Camera. *Christian Science Monitor*, May 1, 544 Words.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierette. 2001. *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierette, and Ernestine Avila. 1997. I'm here but I'm there: the meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood. *Gender and Society* 11 (5):548-560.

Horst, Heather A. 2006. The Blessings and Burdens of Communication: Cell Phones in Jamaican Transnational Social Fields. *Global Networks* 6 (2):143-159.

Houston, L. M. 2005. *Food Culture in the Caribbean (Food Culture around the World)*: Greenwood Press.

Huggins, Sheryl E. 1997. Pooling Community Dollars. *Black Enterprise*, 1-2.

Humphreys, Laud. 1970. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. Hawthorne: Aldine de Gruyter.

Humphreys, Lee. 2005. Social Topography in a Wireless Era: The Negotiation of Public and Private Space. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 35 (4):367-384.

Infoshare, Online. October 15, 2006. Language Spoken at Home for Residence of Carroll Gardens/Red Hook 1980, 1990, 2000: Community Studies of New York Inc.

Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House.

Joseph, Suad. 1996. Relationality and Ethnographic Subjectivity: Key Informants and the Construction of Personhood in Fieldwork. In *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, edited by D. L. Wolf. Boulder: Westview Press.

Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1996. The Socioeconomic Assimilation of Caribbean American Blacks. *Social Forces* 74 (3):911-930.

Kaplan, Elaine Bell. 2000. Food as a Metaphor for Care: Middle-School Kids Talk about Family, School, and Class Relationships. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 29(4) 474-509.

Kargman, Jill. 2007. *Momzillas*. New York: Broadway.

Kasinitz, Philip. 1992. *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kasinitz, Philip, John Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters. 2002. Becoming American/Becoming New Yorkers: Immigrant Incorporation in a Majority Minority City. *International Migration Review* 36 (4):1020-1036.

Katriel, Tamar. 1999. Rethinking the Terms of Social Interaction. *Research On Language and Social Interaction* 32 (1&2):95-102.

Katz, Jack. 1997. Ethnography's Warrants. *Sociological Methods and Research* 25 (4):391-423.

Katz, James E., and Mark A. Aakhus. 2002. *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*. Edited by J. E. Katz and M. A. Aakhus. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Katz Rothman, Barbara. 1991. Symbolic Interaction. In *The Renascence of Sociological Theory*, edited by H. Etzkowitz and R. M. Glassman. Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.

———. 2001. *Recreating Motherhood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Khan, Aisha. 2004. *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity Among South Asians in Trinidad*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kondo, Dorinne K. 2001. How the Problem of "Crafting Selves" Emerged. In *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*, edited by R. M. Emerson. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press Inc.

Lal, Jayati. 1996. Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and "Other" in Living and Writing the Text. In *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, edited by D. L. Wolf. Boulder: Westview Press.

Lan, Pei-Chia. 2006. *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domestics and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

———. 2002. The Urban Revolution. In *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City*, edited by A. Merrifield. New York: Routledge.

Leung, Louis, and Wei Ran. 2000. More Than Just Talk on the Move: Uses and Gratifications of the Cellular Phone. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 77 (2).

Levi-Strauss, C. 1983. *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*. Illinois: The University of Chicago Press.

Levitt, Peggy, and Nina Glick Schiller. 2004. Transnational Perspectives on Migration: Conceptualizing Simultaneity. *International Migration Review* 38 (145):595-629.

Lewis, J. Scott. 2006. The Function of Free Riders: Toward a Solution to the Problem of Collective Action: Bowling Green State University.

Liebow, Elliot. 1967. *Tally's Corner: a study of Negro streetcorner men*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.

Light, Ivan H. 1972. *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare among Chinese, Japanese, and Blacks*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lofland, Lyn H. 1989. Social Life in the Public Realm. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 17 (4):453-482.

Long, L. 2004. *Culinary Tourism: A Folkloristic Perspective on Eating and Otherness*. Edited by L. Long, *Culinary Tourism*: University Press of Kentucky.

Low, and Smith. 2006. *The Politics of Public Space*. New York: Routledge

Low, Setha M. 1999. *Theorizing The City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Lowenthal, David. 1968. Race and Color. In *Color and Race*, edited by J. H. Franklin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Lupton, Deborah. 1996. *Food, The Body and The Self*. New York: Sage Publications.

Mahoney, Joseph L., Angel L. Harris, and Jacquelynne S. Eccles. 2006. Over-Scheduling Children: organized Activity Participation, Positive Youth Development, and the Over-Scheduling Hypothesis. *Social Policy Report: Giving Child and Youth Development Knowledge Away* 20 (4):3-15.

Maloof, Judy. 1999. *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women*. Translated by J. Maloof. Edited by J. Maloof: The University Press of Kentucky.

Martin, Linda, and Kerry Segrave. 1985. *The Servant Problem: Domestic Workers in North America*. Jefferson: McFarland.

Massey, Doreen B. 1984. *Spatial Divisions of Labor: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*. New York: Methven.

Mauss, Marcel. 1990. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton.

McCarthy, A. 2001. *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*. Durham: Duke University Press.

McIntosh, A. 1996. *Sociologies of Food and Nutrition*. New York: Plenum Press.

McIntosh, E. N. 1995. *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective*. Westport: Praegar Publishers.

McLaughlin, and Kraus. 2006. Spying on Nanny. *New York Times*, November 19, 2006.

Mennell, Stephen. 1985. *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc.

Michel, Sonya, and Rianne Mahon. 2002. *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads: Gender and Welfare State Restructuring*. New York: Routledge.

Milkman, Ruth, Ellen Reese, and Benita Roth. 1998. The Macrosociology of Paid Domestic Labor. *Work and Occupations* 25 (4):483-510.

Miller, D., P. Jackson, N. Thrift, B. Holbrook, and M. Rowlands. 1998. *Shopping, Place, and Identity*. London: Routledge.

Mishel, Lawrence, and Paula B. Voos. 1992. *Unions and Economic Competitiveness*. Edited by L. Mishel and P. B. Voos. New York: M.E. Sharp Inc.

Mitchell, D., and L. Saeheli. 2005. The complex politics of relevance in geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geography* 95 (2):357-372.

Mitra, Diditi. 2005. Driving Taxis in New York City: Who Wants to Do It? . In *The New Urban Immigrant Workforce: Innovative Models for Labor Organizing*, edited by S. Jayaraman and I. Ness. New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc.

Momsen, Janet Henshall. 1993. *Women and Change in the Caribbean: A Pan-Caribbean Perspective*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Murray, Susan B. 1998. Child Care Work: Intimacy in the Shadows of Family-Life. *Qualitative Sociology* 21 (2):149-168.

Naples, Nancy A. 1992. Activist Mothering: Cross-generational Continuity in the Community Work of Women from Low Income Urban Neighborhoods. *Gender and Society* 6 (3):441-463.

———. 2003. *Feminism and Method*. New York: Routledge.

Needleman, Ruth. 1998. Building Relationships for the Long Haul: Unions and Community-Based Groups Working Together to Organize Low-Wage Workers. In *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, edited by K. Bronfenbrenner, S. Friedman, R. W. Hurd, R. A. Oswald and R. L. Seeber: Cornell University Press.

Ness, Immanuel. 1998. Organizing Immigrant Communities: UNITE's Workers Center Strategy. In *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, edited by K. Bronfenbrenner, S. Friedman, R. W. Hurd, R. A. Oswald and R. L. Seeber: Cornell University Press.

———. 2005. Community Labor Alliances: Organizing Greengrocery Workers in New York City. In *The New Urban Immigrant Workforce: Innovative Models for Labor Organizing*, edited by S. Jayaraman and I. Ness. New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc.

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. 2008. [cited January 11 2008]. Available from www.nycgovparks.org.

Oakley, Ann. 1974. *The Housewife, Past and Present*. New York: Random House Inc.

Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Online, Infoshare. October 15, 2006. Median Household Income: Carroll Gardens/Red Hook 1980, 1990, 2000: Community Studies of New York Inc.

Ostrander, Susan A. 1987. Women Using Other Women. *Contemporary Sociology* 16 (1):51-53.

Palmer, Joy A. 2001. *Fifty Key Thinkers on the Environment*. London and New York: Routledge.

Palmer, Phyllis. 1989. *Domesticity and Dirt: housewives and domestic servants in the United States 1920-1945*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Park, Robert E., and Ernest W. Burgess. 1984[1925]. *The City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Perkins, H. Wesley, and Debra K. DeMeis. 1996. Gender and Family Effects on the "Second-Shift" Domestic Activity of College-Educated Young Adults. *Gender and Society* 10 (1):78-93.

Poo, Ai-jen, and Eric Tang. 2005. Center Stage: Domestic Workers Organizing in the Global City. In *The New Urban Immigrant Workforce: Innovative Models for Labor Organizing*, edited by S. Jayaraman and I. Ness. New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc.

Portes, Alejandro. 1998. Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:1-24.

Portes, Alejandro, and Jozsef Borocz. 1989. Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives On Its Determinants and Modes of Incorporation. *International Migration Review* 23 (3):606-630.

Portes, Alejandro, and Ruben G. Rumbaut. 2006. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Third ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rabinovitch, Ari. 2005. Money Pools Float Immigrant Dreams. *Columbia News Service*.

Radcliffe, Sarah A., and Sallie Westwood. 1993. *'Viva': Women and popular protest in Latin America*. Edited by S. A. Radcliffe and S. Westwood. New York: Routledge.

Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Reginald. 1940. *On Joking Relationships*.

Rakow, Lana F., and Vija Navarro. 1993. Remote Mothering and The Parallel Shift: Women Meet the Cellular Phone. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 (2):144-157.

Regis, Humphrey A., and Leroy L. Lashley. 1992. The Editorial Dimensions of the Connection of Caribbean Immigrants to Their Referents. *Journal of Black Studies* 22 (3):380-391.

Reingold, H. 2002. *Smart Mobs: The Next Revolution*. Cambridge: Basic Books.

Rollins, Judith. 1985. *Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

———. 1989. *Muchachas no more: household worker in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Edited by E. M. Chaney and M. G. Castro. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Romero, Mary. 1988. Chicanas Modernize Domestic Service. *Qualitative Sociology* 11 (4):319-334.

———. 1992. *Maid in the USA*. New York: Routledge.

Rozin, P. 1999. Food Is Fundamental, Fun, Frightening, and Far-Reaching. *Social Research* 66 (1):9-13.

Ryan, Selwyn D. 1972. *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Salazar Parrenas, Rhacel. 2000. Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and The International Division of Reproductive Labor. *Gender and Society* 14 (4):560-581.

———. 2001. *Servants of globalization: women, migration and domestic work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Salzinger, Leslie. 1991. A Maid by Any Other Name: The Transformation of "Dirty Work" by Central American Immigrants. In *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, edited by B. e. al.: University of California Press.

Sanjek, Roger. 1990. *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Edited by R. Sanjek. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Sassen-Koob. 1979. Formal and Informal Associations: Dominicans and Colombians in New York. *International Migration Review* 13 (2):314-332.

Savage, Lydia A. 1996. Negotiating Common Ground: Labor Unions and the Geography of Organizing Women Workers in the Service Sector, Geography, Clark University, Massachusetts.

Schroedl, A. 1988. The Dish Ran Away with the Spoon: Ethnography of kitchen culture. In *Ethnography in Complex Society*, edited by J. Spradley and McCuray. Chicago: Science.

Sennett, Richard. 1992. *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

Sharma, S., and J. K. Cruickshank. 2001. Cultural differences in assessing dietary intake and providing relevant dietary information to British African-Caribbean populations. *The British Dietetic Association Ltd.* 14:449-456.

Simmel, Georg. 1964. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Translated by K. H. Wolff. Edited by K. H. Wolff. New York: The Free Press.

Singh, Kelvin. 1994. *Race and Class: Struggles in a Colonial State, Trinidad 1917-1945*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.

Smith, D. 1981. Squeezed out of Manhattan? New Places to Live. *New York*, September 7.

Smith, Dorothy. 1987. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Athens: Northeastern University Press.

Sokolow, Jayme. 1983. *Eros and Modernization*. London: Associated University Press.

Stack, Carol B. 1972. *All Our Kin: Stategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Basic Books.

———. 1996. Writing Ethnography: Feminist Critical Practice. In *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, edited by D. L. Wolf. Boulder: Westview Press.

Sternbergh, Adam. 2006. Up With Grups-The Ascendant Breed of Grown-Ups Who Are Redefining Adulthood. *New York*, March 26, 2006.

Stowers, S. L. 1992. Development of a Culturally Appropriate Food Guide for Pregnant Caribbean Immigrants in the United States. *Journal of the American Diet Association* 92 (3):331-336.

Sudama, Trevor. 1994. Speech on Ethnic Relations in a Plural Society: The Case of the Indians in Trinidad and Tobago. In *Race Relations in Trinbago: Afro ad Indo-Trinbagonians and Basdeo Panday*, edited by F. B. Ramadar. New York: Caribbean Diaspora Press.

Sutton, Constance R. 2004. Celebrating ourselves: the family reunion rituals of African-Caribbean transnational families. *Global Networks* 4 (3):243-257.

Sutton, Constance R., and Elsa M. Chaney. 1987. *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions*. Edited by C. R. Sutton and E. M. Chaney. New York: Center for Migration Studies of New York.

Tarlow, B. 1996. Caring: A negotiated process. In *Caregiving: Readings in knowledge, practice, ethics, and politics*, edited by S. Gordon, P. Benner and n. Noddings. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Thomas, Bert J. 1988. Historical Functions of Caribbean-American Benevolent/Progressive Associations *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*:45-58.

Thorne, Barrie. 1993. *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Tilly, Louise A., and Joan W. Scott. 1978. *Women, work, and family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Tronto, Joan C. 2002. The "Nanny" Question in Feminism. *Hypatia* 17 (2):34-51.

U.S.Census, Bureau. 2001. Foreign-born Population: Statistical Abstract of the United States.

Van Raaphorst, Donna L. 1988. *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers 1870-1940*. New York: Praeger.

Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi. 2000. *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wacquant, Loic J. D. 2004. *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Waldinger, Roger, Christopher L. Erickson, Ruth Milkman, Daniel J.B. Mitchell, Abel Valenzuela, Kent Wong, and Maurice Zeitlin. 1998. Helots No More: A Case Study of the Justice for Janitors Campaign in Los Angeles. In *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, edited by K. Bronfenbrenner, S. Friedman, R. W. Hurd, R. A. Oswald and R. L. Seeber: Cornell University Press.

Walter, John C. 1977. Black Immigrants and Political Radicalism in the Harlem Renaissance. *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 1 (2):131-141.

———. 1979. Fran R. Crosswaith and the Negro Labor Committee. *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 3 (2).

Warren, Carol B. 2001. Gender and Fieldwork Relations. In *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*, edited by R. M. Emerson. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press Inc.

Waters, Mary C. 1999. *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*: The Russell Sage Foundation and Harvard University Press.

Watkins-Owens, Irma. 1996. *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

———. 2001. Early Twentieth Century Caribbean Women: Migration and Social Networks in New York City. In *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York*, edited by N. Foner. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Weblog. 2007. [Weblog] 2007 [cited June 25 2007]. Available from https://isawyournanny.blogspot.com.

Weiner, Lynn. 1989. Review: [Untitled] Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers, 1870-1940, by Donna L. Van Raaphorst. *The Journal of Economic History* 49 (2):512-513.

Wharton, Carol S. 1994. Finding Time for the "Second Shift": The Impact of Flexible Work Schedules on Women's Double Days. *Gender and Society* 8 (2):189-205.

Whit, W. C. 1995. Food and Society: A Sociological Approach: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, Inc.

Whyte, William F. 1943[1981]. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Third ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wieder, D. Lawrence. 1974. *Language and social reality: the case of telling the convict code*. The Hague: Mouton.

Wilk, Richard R. 1999. "Real Belizean Food": Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean. *American Anthropologist* 101 (2):244-255.

———. 2006. *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, Inc.

———. 2006. *Home Cooking in the Global Village: Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecotourists*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publications.

Wolcott, Harry F. 1999. *Ethnography: a way of seeing*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

Wolf, Diane L. 1996. Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork. In *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, edited by D. L. Wolf. Boulder: Westview Press.

Wrigley, Julia. 1991. Feminists and Domestic Workers. *Feminist Studies* 17 (2):317-329.

———. 1995. *Other People's Children: An Intimate Account of the Dilemmas Facing Middle-Class Parents and the Women they Hire to Raise Their Children*. New York: Basic Books.

———. 1999. Hiring a Nanny: The Limits of Private Solutions to Public Problems. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 563:162-174.

———. 2005. Migration, Domestic Work, and Repression. *New Politics* 10 (3).

Zukin, Sharon. 1987. Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core. *Annual Review of Sociology* 13:129-147.

———. 1995. *The Cultures of Cities*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.

———. 1998. Urban Lifestyles in Urban Studies. 35 (5-6):825-839.

———. 2006. David Harvey on Cities. In *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, edited by N. Castree and D. Gregory. Oxford: Blackwell.