Modern day Mary Poppins: uncovering the work of nannies and the expectations of employers

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Modern Day Mary Poppins:
Uncovering the Work of Nannies and the Expectations of Employers

by

Laura A. Bunyan

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Throughout the past few decades the number of parents relying on child care has risen. Most research on parental use of child care focuses on relationships between employers and employees of differing racial-ethnic, social class, and educational status. This dissertation was designed to examine the experiences of those who perform nanny work, the process of selecting care, and understand the experiences of those who do not seek to maximize social space between employee and employer.

Using data from in-depth interviews with 25 nannies and 27 employers, this study focuses on employer motivations in selecting a nanny, and the work experiences of nannies and employers. This study examines the role of education in shaping nannies’ work experiences and employers’ selection of a caregiver by interviewing nannies with and without a Bachelors degree, and employers who hire nannies with and without a degree.

This dissertation identifies the distinctive features of nanny work. In doing so, it examines the attachments formed between nannies and the children they care for and employers’ perspectives of this relationship. It also looks at the relationships formed between nannies and employers and the ways in which social status affects these relationships. This analysis accounts for the perspectives of both mothers and fathers, and addresses the roles of each party in nanny work. The final results chapter examines the role of nannies in social reproduction. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of the practical and policy implications of the informality of nanny work.
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last three decades of the twentieth century, the labor force participation rate of women with small children rose dramatically (Skold 1988; Casper and Bianchi 2002). This shift has led families to hire child care providers to look after their children. Interestingly, it has also become acceptable for stay-at-home mothers to rely on some form of nonmaternal care throughout the week (Bianchi 2000). This trend is reflected in the growing placement of children in educational programs prior to their entry into preschool (Uttal 2002). Despite the use of care for both groups of women, parents remain unsure of the place of child care and child care providers within their family configuration (Fuqua and Labensohn 1986). While a variety of forms of child care exist, some families are turning to nannies to care for their children.

A nanny is childcare provider who works full-time in a family’s home and cares for their children (Cheever 2003). The job of each nanny may vary based upon the age and number of children, the family’s requirements, and other factors. The work of nannies meets the day-to-day needs of the children in their care. Nannies fulfill children’s physical needs and may also assist with homework and educational activities. They may also transport children to engagements and partake in assorted activities, depending on the wants and needs of the particular family. It is not uncommon for nannies to tend to housekeeping as it relates to the children in their care. The job of the nanny is typically a long-term position and is a career for many. Nannies are expected to treat work as a professional responsibility and some families expect a long-term commitment.
Research on this population is necessary for a number of reasons. First, the number of women working for pay outside the home has increased, which has led to greater numbers of parents placing their children in some form of child care (Casper and Bianchi 2002). In addition, research suggests that it has become more acceptable for stay-at-home mothers to place their children in child care (Bianchi 2000). Quantitative research tells us that educational components of care are increasingly shaping parents’ choices of care. Johansen et al (1996) uncovered the desire of highly educated parents to obtain child care with a strong educational component. Using Current Population Survey Data, Casper and Bianchi (2002) demonstrate the rapid increase in the rate of preschool enrollment. Between 1967 and 1998 preschool enrollment for children whose mothers were employed in the paid labor force rose from 8 percent to 52 percent. The rise for children of homemaker mothers was similar with an increase from 5 percent to 43 percent.

Over the past few decades qualitative research has examined the hiring of immigrant nannies, working class women, women of color, and women without college educations and the exploitation of these groups by white wealthy families (Hondagenu-Sotelo 2001; Macdonald 1996; Uttal 2002; Wrigley 1995). It has been argued that it is much easier to delegate tasks to those who are socially subordinate, which is one reason employers seek out nannies that are sometimes worlds apart from them socially, educationally, and racially (Pratt 1999; Tuominen 2003; Wrigley 1995). In contrast, some families seek out relationships for their children with providers from different social groups with the idea their children will benefit from cross-race and cross-cultural relationships (Uttal 2002). In contrast to this are the families who seek out arrangements
with nannies who are of similar social status. For these individuals there are perceived cultural, educational and social benefits to doing so (Wrigley 1995). This group is however, in need of further exploration.

Similar to social class, gender is a central component of nannies work. The occupation of the nanny is strongly gendered. Not only do far more women than men perform this job, but the duties involved in this work resemble those performed by women in the home. Nannies appear to be more closely involved with mothers than fathers. The reasons for this may be two-fold. First, qualitative research has focused on the relationship between the mother and the female provider (Macdonald 1998; Nelson 1989; Uttal 1996; 2002; Wrigley 1995). Second, nannies are fulfilling the duties traditionally performed by the mother as opposed to those filled by the father. The job of hiring and supervising the nanny is commonly left up to the mother based on the ideology that women are responsible for finding suitable replacement care. This reinforces the idea that fathers do not have a place in this relationship. The existing research mentions fathers in passing (Wrigley 1995), if they are examined at all. The failure to address the role of fathers and their experiences in the child care process further reinforces the idea that caregiving is women’s work. Moreover, it perpetuates the thought that women should be responsible for overseeing child care, even when they are not performing it.

In the majority of paid work settings in the United States, a clear distinction exists between home and work (Tuominen 2003. This space however, does not exist for nannies. The location of nannies in the home of the employer is vastly different from a market setting and makes this form of work very different from employer/employee relationships in institutional settings (Nelson 1989; Tronto 2000). This site conceals the
dynamics of the relationship from public view (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995) and allots the employer a significant amount of power, opening up nannies to the possibility for exploitation and abuse (Romero 2001). Conversely, in institutional settings, work and the interactions that occur between supervisors and subordinates may be in the view of others. Many forms of paid labor are comprised of formal arrangements with clear rules and regulations which exist in conjunction with job descriptions that clearly demark the roles and requirements of each person’s job. In such settings, employees can fall back on their identity as professional workers to put rules into practice and generate space from those purchasing their service. The job of the nanny exists without most, if not all of these protections and the informality of arrangements make this occupation distinct (Nelson 1989).

While the job of the nanny is distinctly different from most other forms of paid labor, the one occupation it is most alike is domestic work. Similar to nannies, the work of domestics is demeaned because women have historically provided for families without pay. The location of both forms of work, inside the home of the employer, makes it invisible. Regarding domestic workers, Romero (2001) writes, “the structure of the occupation, characterized by the informality of negotiations conducted in the privacy of the employer’s home and lacking definitive contract criteria, affords considerable opportunities for employer abuses, and makes it difficult or impossible for workers to organize” (Romero 2001; 1659-60). This statement is also reflective of the experiences of many nannies. The work of nannies, is unique and distinct due to the deep attachments that are often formed between nannies and the children they care for. The “attachment factor” (Cheever 2003) makes the work of nannies markedly different from the work of
women who are solely responsible for housework. Paid child care providers may establish boundaries for themselves between paid and unpaid caregiving, yet these boundaries can easily become blurred through the relationship that develops with the child/ren they care for. We are in need of further research into each of these areas.

In the next chapter I will provide an overview of the literature on caregiving and emotional labor. I will then discuss what makes the work of nannies distinct from other forms of paid labor. Included in this section will be a discussion of the attachments nannies form with the children in their care, and parental jealousy. Social status will be incorporated in the discussion of attachment and jealousy. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of demographic characteristics of providers.

Chapter 3 will focus on employers’ experiences in hiring nannies. Ideologies of motherhood will be explored as they are central to the selection of care and the experience of both parents and nannies. A number of options exist for parents seeking care for their children. Therefore, coverage of the selection of childcare arrangements will address why nannies are chosen as opposed to other forms of care. Educational considerations in selecting nannies for care are a key issue and will be explored as they relate to ideologies of motherhood. Finally, a discussion of the reasons employers seek to minimize or maximize the differences between themselves and their employee will be provided.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology for this study. It details the reasons for conducting this research through the use of qualitative methodology. The sampling procedure and recruitment strategies are outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of procedural and ethical issues which pertain to this study.
The results of this study are presented in Chapters 5 through 9. Chapter 5 examines the role of education in employers’ selection of a nanny. It examines nannies’ and employers’ perspectives that employers seek to provide their children with well-rounded child care experiences. In doing so, many seek a nanny who is educated. They hope that this person will be a role model for their child. I suggest that the educational status of the nanny is connected to the age of the children in their care and indicate the lengths parents were willing to go to accommodate the schedule of a nanny who was in college. I conclude with a discussion of the few exceptions to this practice of hiring an educated nanny.

Chapter 6 focuses on nanny work as an occupation. It looks at the informality of nanny work. Both nannies and employers compared and contrasted nanny work with a “real job” or labor that was socially valued in the formal economy. Gendered expectations of care influenced nannies and employers thinking of nanny work as something other than formal labor. They also shaped the belief that nanny work was “more than just a job” and that nannies should not be in this line of work solely for the money.

Chapter 7 focuses on the nanny-child relationship. It examines the perspectives of parents who value the attachment formed between their nanny and their children as well as those who struggle with the attachment. I then discuss nannies experiences as they relate to the attachments they form with the children they care for.

Chapter 8 explores the nanny-employer relationship. I begin with a review of the literature on employers’ perspectives of the role of their child care provider in their family. I then examine the perspectives of employers in this research. Next I examine
the nanny-employer relationship from the viewpoint of nannies. I also present the view
of employers that nanny work is not “formal” employment, which shapes their difficulty
in behaving as an employer. The location of this labor, in the home, also impacts their
experience. This chapter commences with an examination of the perspectives of two
previously understudied groups: fathers, and stay-at-home and work-from-home mothers.

My findings conclude with Chapter 9. Chapter 9 begins with an overview of the
literature on the governess and Mary Poppins. It then provides an analysis of the reasons
for which employers seek to employ status similars as nannies. The final section
examines the role of nannies in the reproduction of employers’ social class status.
Chapter 10 is the concluding chapter of this dissertation. It provides a summary of the
findings of this research, contributions to the literature, limitations of the study, and
provides directions for future research.
Chapter 2
COMPONENTS OF NANNY WORK

The literature on nannies and caregivers is situated within the broader categories of caregiving and emotion labor. The following two sections will review the literature on caregiving and emotion labor respectively. This chapter then moves to discuss the work of nannies and what makes their work distinct from other forms of paid labor. Attachment is a central component of this and will be explored as it relates to both those attachments formed between the nannies and the children in their care, as well as the way nannies navigate the resentment of some parents over the attachments they form to their children. Social status has been found to play a role in attachments that are formed by child care providers (Enarson 1990; Fuqua and Labensohn 1986; Nelson 1989 and 1990; Tuominen 2003; Uttal 2002) and will thus be examined. Finally this chapter will commence with a discussion of providers demographic characteristics.

Caregiving

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the labor force participation of women rose greatly, while the time women spent performing unpaid domestic labor decreased (Casper and Bianchi 2002; Himmelweib 1999). Conversely, the time women have devoted to caring activities has risen (Himmelweib 1999). With this increase has come a simultaneous rise in caring activities supplied through the market (Himmelweib 1999; Stone 2000; Jones 2001). The demand for this can be seen in the growing percentage of the workforce employed in jobs requiring caring labor (Himmelweib 1999). This reallocation of caring tasks to the public sphere has become a central component of
the segment of the labor market employing women (Waerness 1984). This section will explore the various components of caring labor.

The term ‘caring’ has numerous uses, so it is important to clarify what is meant by its many forms. First it is important to define ‘caring’. According to England and Folbre (1999), work is labeled caring based on the notion that the worker reacts to a desire or need communicated by the receiver of the care. Caring encompasses a number of interconnected components. Three key aspects of care are: “caring about”, “caring for”, and “caregiving”. Due to its signification of two separate things, caring about and caring for others (Himmelwein 1999), the concept of caring is difficult to define (Himmelweit 1999; Graham 1983).

“Caring about” is a term used to refer to the emotional component of caring (Cancian and Oliker 2000). It is driven by concern over another person’s well-being and contains a relational connection as well as an emotional component (Himmelweit 1999; Fisher and Tronto 1990). Caring about, as it refers to feelings, is viewed as a fundamental human emotion. Feeling concern or caring about is different from taking care of (Graham 1983; 1991).

“Caring for”, or “taking care of”, relates to the action of attending to an individual’s emotional and physical needs (Himmelweit 1999; Fisher and Tronto 1990). It entails assuming responsibility for executing caring activities (Fischer and Tronto 1990). The two terms, “caring for” and “caring about” are not inextricably linked. It is possible to take care of someone while not caring deeply about them (Ungerson 1983). Caring about a person does not require taking any observable action. Taking care of,
however, entails assuming accountability for executing actions related to caring (Fischer and Tronto 1990).

The responsibility involved in caring becomes greater when the person must also perform “caregiving”. Caregiving involves the face-to-face (Cancian and Oliker 2000; England and Folbre 1999; England et al 2002) and hands-on (Fisher and Tronto 1990; Duffy 2005; Cancian and Oliker 2000) process of attending to individuals’ physical and emotional needs. Caregiving, as it is defined by Cancian and Oliker (2000), is essentially the combination of the action of taking care of, with the feelings of affection involved in caring about. This process is a continuous one, performed on a daily basis, requiring vast time and emotional commitments, beyond those involved in taking care of (Fisher and Tronto 1990).

The work of caregiving, as it is performed by the nanny, will be the focus of this research because it combines both caring for and caring about. The conception of caregiving as caring labor draws “together concepts from both sides of the institutional divide between home and work” (Himmelweit 1999: 28). The definition of caregiving this research will rely on is: “feelings of affection and responsibility combined with actions that provide responsibly for an individual’s personal needs or well-being” (Cancian and Oliker 2000: 2). This service develops the potential of the recipient through the promotion of physical or psychological health, skill acquisition, development, and learning (England et al 2002).
**Emotional labor**

Emotional labor is work that women perform for families for free (DeVault 1999) as well as in the market for a wage (Hochschild 1983). Emotional labor is one of the major components of caregiving. It is important to note, “not all emotional labor is caring labor, but caring labor is a type of emotional labor” (Himmelweit 1999: 34).

Hochschild (1983) coined the term “emotional labor” in her book *The Managed Heart*. Hochschild uses “the term *emotional labor* to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (1983: 7). This labor requires individuals to bring on or repress “feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others – in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place” (Hochschild 1983: 7).

A great deal of emotional labor that is commodified is fleeting in nature as is the case for the flight attendants Hochschild (1983) describes. In this instance, long-term relationships do not evolve between the worker and the customer (Himmelweit 1999; Hochschild 1983). In some instances in occupations where emotional labor is required of the worker, relationships are formed with clients; however, in most instances the formation of a relationship is not a requirement of the job (Steinberg and Figart 1999).

Emotional labor that is performed in the context of caring labor is quite different. In this environment, a relationship develops (Himmelweit 1999) as is the case for the nanny where their job requires them to form a deep emotional attachment with the children in their care and sometimes the families as a whole. This form of emotional labor is markedly different from Hochschild’s description (Uttal and Tuominen 1999).
The authentic attachment providers’ form with the children in their care makes a clear-cut trade of labor for a salary difficult (Tuominen 2003).

Similarities exist between the emotional labor of nannies and the work performed by the flight attendants in Hochschild’s (1983) study in that both workers must manage the feelings of others. Both perform labor that is intended to generate a particular state of mind in a client. Emotional labor is an increasing component of the labor performed by individuals in a service economy. Although emotional labor essentially turns emotion into a commodity it is rarely identified as work. For both nannies and flight attendants, the behavior they exhibit, from which others benefit, is seen as a natural extension of their self, rather than as work.

*Nanny work: A distinct form of paid labor*

There are a number of factors which make the work of the nanny distinctly different from other forms of paid labor. The work of nannies is a combination of two spheres that are ideologically split: the family and the market economy. In Tuominen’s (2003) qualitative research family care providers faced structural as well as private clashes when they sought to combine their duties as care providers with their “rights” as paid workers. As the work of nannies is similarly situated, nannies face parallel constraints.

Nannies and family care providers are located in an interesting situation whereby parents may uphold professional relationships with them while simultaneously rejecting the notion that their provider should behave in the same manner. On the one hand, parents are wary of providers who are too businesslike (Uttal 2002), yet they want providers to treat their jobs in the same way individuals treat paid employment. The
major difference is that parents require caregivers to work hours that are much greater than those required in most forms of paid employment (Wrigley 1995). Employers also seek to extract as much labor as possible from their employee while limiting the wage offered (Macdonald 1996). The pay is quite low especially compared to other occupations with comparable requirements and working conditions (Nelson 1999). Most jobs that are low in pay do not require a high level of commitment on the part of the worker. What is atypical about caregiving jobs is that employers are expected to make an emotional investment for very low pay (Wrigley 1995). This situation is an interesting one given the high social value placed on children in our society (Schoen et al. 1997). Children are thought to be precious commodities and parents are judged based upon their outcomes. Each of these factors creates tensions for employers and providers. This stress is further exacerbated by the fact that both groups often fundamentally resist the notion that child care is work (Nelson 1990).

This opposition comes largely from the position of paid child care in the family setting which exists for nannies and family care providers. This location encourages the association of this labor with mothering. The role of the mother in our society continues to be seen as natural, unskilled and not requiring financial remuneration. Finally, this location and association prevents child care from being understood as work (Tuominen 2003). The conception that this labor is not “real work” has been internalized by those who perform it. Family child care providers in Sale’s (1984) qualitative research did not utilize business skills because they lacked the preparation to see their position from a business standpoint. Frequently they referred to themselves as “just sitters”.
It is common for providers to experience a conflict between their status as caregivers and paid workers. Tuominen’s (2003) research on family child care providers revealed that despite the fact that workers express an awareness of their identity as professionals and workers, they simultaneously articulate the issues they face in enforcing the conditions of their contracts. These difficulties arise because of the relationships formed with both the children they care for and their families. In her study, centering on the experiences of family child care providers, Nelson (1989) utilized both mail survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to examine the relationships between family child care providers and mothers who rely on them. Providers were asked questions regarding their expectations of parents and remuneration. In their responses, the uncertainty provider’s experience as to which form of social norms should triumph became apparent, social or market exchange.

This confusion is not surprising given that parents have serious doubts about providers who operate on business principles. Uttal’s (2002) interviews with employed mothers who rely on family child care expressed this view. Her study centers around the ways mothers perceive their experiences and work through their arrangements. Employed mothers grappled with the question of whether their provider was simply performing her job or if she truly cared about the children. Views such as this reinforce the ideology that caregiving and work do not mix. Although parents are turned off by providers who lean on business practices, parents themselves depersonalize and adopt a business standpoint when raising concerns about care and when terminating relationships. Both employers and providers must navigate the divide between personal and professional relationships.
The motivations of paid caregivers are commonly discussed in dichotomous terms. Individuals either work for love or money, for altruistic reasons or out of greed (Folbre and Nelson 2000; Nelson 1999). The idea that the provision of financial incentives for work formerly done out of love will cheapen the act of caring is the most widespread concern about care work that is supplied in the public sphere (Michel 2000). Despite the trends over the past few decades which have operated together to press us toward the commodification of intimate life (Hochschild 2005), the process whereby caregiving becomes paid labor remains complicated (Tuominen 2003). It remains clouded by the conception that love and money do not mix. Anxiety crops up that when the two are mixed, caring will be performed at low standards, it will become impersonal and routine, and devoid of the love and consideration people require. The fear exists that commodification of care may drive out feelings associated with care (Folbre and Nelson 2000).

As a result, parents seek out caregivers who are driven by love for children rather than market principles. The uncertainties parents have surrounding care arrangements commonly reside in the disbelief that such relationships can or should be purchased in a market based system (Uttal 2002). Providers may lead into questions about salary with statements implying they are “not in it for the money” and that they perform their labor out of love (Nelson 1989). Direct questions about salary can be interpreted with mistrust by employers, as was found by Wrigley (1995), in interviews with female employers who hired live-in and live-out women from 29 countries. Wrigley’s (1995) work also includes interviews with nannies and heads of domestic placement agencies. Similarly, Bakan and Stasiulis (1995) interviewed heads of domestic placement agencies. However, their
research was conducted in Canada. They note the wish of Filipino nannies to obtain sufficient compensation sparked a Canadian stereotype of Filipinos as “greedy”.

Although nannies are torn between their role as caregivers and paid workers, this is not the only area in which they face issues in drawing boundaries.

Because child care providers are supplying a personal service, it is quite difficult to draw boundaries between their work and their personal life. Nannies report being on-call when they are at home. An example of this can be seen in Cheever’s (2003) interviews with migrant nannies. The following statement “Some weekends they call me five or six times,” Dominique says. “Basically, I’m on call around the clock. I feel like my life isn’t mine even when I’m at home” (Cheever 2003: 35). Ironically, providers report enjoying the flexibility and freedom in their work to create their own schedule (Tuominen 2003). This flexibility, however, can be taken too far. The personal interdependence that is commonly formed between the child care providers and the family is the informal element of in-home child care that is formally purchased. The personal interdependence can also be personally invasive (Wrigley 1995; Uttal 2002). It is important to note, this form of work is personally intrusive in ways that most forms of paid labor are not.

The flexible nature of the occupation leaves nannies open to exploitation and abuse which is heightened by the location in the home of the employer (Romero 2001; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Nelson 1989; Wrigley 1995). One nanny’s remarks sum up the plight of many. “They ask you to do a few extra things now and then, and they’re always slipping in extra stuff that’s not really in your contract – how far do you go?” (Macdonald 1996: 253-4).
The placement of this job in a home environment combined with the fact that nannies are performing work that is commonly done without pay, blurs the boundaries between home and work for both employers and nannies and complicates the arrangement. Nannies are often faced with the situation where they are forced to rearrange their personal lives to meet their employers’ needs. A written or spoken agreement may exist detailing the hours of the job, but as time goes on these rules can become increasingly flexible. Live-in nannies are particularly vulnerable to this (Wrigley 1995; Romero 2001) and this factor is one of the major reasons for which many nannies prefer live-out work (Macdonald 1996). While each of these factors complicates the work of the nanny, their work is further complicated by the intense relationships that develop with both the children in their care and those who employ them.

*Dealing with issues of attachment and jealousy*

Previous work suggests the most valued components of childcare are the emotional aspect and the attachment providers develop with the children they care for (Macdonald and Merrill 2002). The connection and emotional bond is one of the central tenets of caregiving (Himmelweit 1999). This attachment, however, is one of the most dangerous features of this work on two levels: It can bind providers to undesirable arrangements and can create tension with employers.

Margaret Nelson (1990) coined the term “detached attachment” in her research on family child care providers. Her research was conducted through the use of both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Detached attachment refers to the limitations on the attachments formed between providers and the children in their care.
As many paid care workers do, child care workers gain meaning from the emotional attachments they form, while simultaneously realizing the situation in which they work encumbers the complete range of expression of their affection. The position of detached attachment necessitates an authentic caring relationship with a child but this investment must simultaneously meet the needs of the mother. Detached attachment is hard to maintain. This provides proof of the tension between conventional ideologies that dictate that mothering is not work, the truth that it is work for all women who do it, and finally that it has become an occupation for those who perform it for pay (Nelson 1990).

Following the rules of detached attachment requires caregivers to provide the child in their care with love and affection whereby the parents and child are content with the care given. However, central to this is the fact that they must simultaneously take precautions to minimize the child’s attachment to avoid the appearance of taking over the position of the mother. Nannies must work with mothers to reinforce the mother’s position and identity as the principle caregiver. The maintenance of the mother-child bond is central not only to detached attachment but to the survival of their job (Nelson 1990). This point was confirmed by Macdonald (1996) and Uttal (2002). In this way, providers must engage in a balancing act. They must determine what forms of behavior should be tolerated from the child and which should not, how to discipline the child, how close to become to the child, and the amount of physical affection that is appropriate to show the child in their care. Finally, it is up to the provider to decide the appropriate way to behave in a mother-like fashion toward children that are not her own (Nelson 1990).

The attachment factor, as one nanny in Cheever’s (2003) work termed it, is one of the inflexible issues associated with being a nanny. Children become deeply attached to
the nanny as they grow accustomed to her presence. The result may be that parents become upset and jealous of this bond. Dominique states, “They want us to be mother and father to these children… so the kids get attached to you because you’re the one who’s always there. Then the parents get angry” (35).

Another example can be seen in Macdonald’s (1998) qualitative research on working mothers, nannies and au pairs (au pairs perform work similar to nannies however, they are from a country that is different from the family hosting them). Macdonald (1998) found mothers concurrently minimized and maximized the significance of the bonds their children formed with caregivers. Through the reduction of this connection nannies were not characterized as part of the family. Parents may do this because they feel threatened, or because they truly do not believe this person may be important in the life of their child (Macdonald and Merrill 2002). This was especially prevalent in the descriptions mothers offered of the turnover of nannies. This enabled mothers to reduce their perceptions of the effects on their children’s emotional well-being (Macdonald 1998). Similarly, employed mothers in Uttal’s (2002) study turned to business principles rather than their personal relationships at the time of turnover.

On the other hand, mothers maximize the bond between nanny and child in order to make themselves feel better about their child care arrangements. Some did this through minimizing the turnover rate or by reducing the effects of turnover on their children (Macdonald 1998). One mother navigated this issue by forming arrangements that terminated at the end of a year. Macdonald (1998) acknowledges women who tried to hold on to caregivers as long as the caregivers liked and remained in contact once they were gone were a minority.
On some occasions the attachment between the child and caregiver has been found to be acknowledged and even valued. This was the case for some mothers in Macdonald’s (1996) study who held strong views about their role as the primary parent. Like her 1998 work, mothers, nannies and au pairs were the focus of her research. This research however, differs in that it is based on a pilot study of five interviews with individuals of each group. Macdonald (1996) found mothers relied on the caregiver to provide uniformity and stability for their children. Despite the fact that it may be uncomfortable for mothers when their children love their caregiver, this “love is the ultimate currency in the family’s childcare economy” (257).

When employers overtly acknowledge the value of this attachment, nannies are able to use this as bargaining power. In such instances, nannies were able to draw on the attachment of the child in order to restructure the job. The very bonds between nanny and child that may guide employers to put forward incentives for the nanny to stay with their family for a period of time, are often the same ones which lead nannies to remain in arrangements where the working conditions are not what they wish for. Furthermore, devotion to the children in their care or the family as a whole preclude them from challenging employers regarding unjust labor practices and from seeking alternative employment (Macdonald 1996). The emotional connection providers formed with the children in their care led them to provide unpaid care beyond that initially agreed upon because they believed it would be beneficial for the children and their families (Tuominen 2003). While workers in all forms of paid labor may become attached to their work or those they work with the strong bonds that develop between the nanny and the
child complicates the work of the nanny in ways that are different from other forms of paid labor.

**Attachment and social status**

Interestingly, the attachments that are formed appear to be linked to the social status of the nanny. Existing research on attachments has focused primarily on family child care providers (Enarson 1990; Fuqua and Labensohn 1996; Nelson 1989 and 1990; Tuominen 2003; Uttal 2002) and migrant nannies (Cheever 2003; Hochschild 2003). Through the use of interviews Cheever (2003) and Hochschild (2003) tell us a good deal about attachments as they relate to migrant nannies. There are a number of reasons for which migrant nannies may form deep attachments with the children they care for. While the nature of the job entails the development of strong emotional bonds (Himmelweit 1999) most migrant nannies also come from countries where women derive their identities from motherhood. These countries include Sri Lanka and the Philippines (Hochschild 2003). Migrant nannies are worlds apart from their own families, and often their own children. For nannies who are secluded in the home of their employer and encounter work that can be depressing, some are able to gain comfort in providing the children in their care the care and love they long to give their own children. In return these children provide the nanny with what they miss and make her “feel like a mother” (Hochschild 2003: 16).

Migrant nannies may speak little or no English, limiting their ability to communicate with others and restricting their social networks. The lengthy hours and the lonesomeness fuel their love for the children in their care. This point is reflected in the
following statement by Maria Gutierrez, “I love Ana more than my two children… I am lonely here. I work ten hours a day, with one day off. I don’t know any neighbors on this block. And so this child gives me what I need” (Hochschild 2003: 24). Each of these factors increases the likelihood that they become more deeply invested in their relationships with children in their care and derive their identity from this relationship than U.S. born nannies. Migrant nannies lack alternatives that U.S. born nannies may have, which include the benefit of legal U.S. citizenship, English skills, and the potential of having family and friends in closer proximity. The work of Wrigley (1995) provides support for this claim. While we have detailed accounts of the experiences of migrant nannies (Cheever 2003; Hochschild 2003), we are lacking examinations of the attachments formed by status equal nannies.

The “attachment factor” (Cheever 2003) may be a greater issue for migrant than U.S. born nannies for the above mentioned reasons. The “attachment factor” is potentially less of a concern for parents who employ class peers and college educated women, because both employers and nannies may recognize the nanny as having employment prospects that are not restricted to child care. This is increasingly likely as employers seek out nannies based on these criteria as many report that they “don’t want someone who wants to be a nanny all her life” (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995: 310). With the understanding their current caregiver’s situation is not permanent, acknowledging the bond their child forms with their educated or class peer nanny may be easier because ultimately it is not a threat to their status as a parent or their emotional connection with their child. Thus far, research has not fully explored the attachments formed between class peer and educated nannies and the child in their charge.
Demographic characteristics of providers

Although employers vary in philosophies on hiring paid caregivers and levels of wealth, child care providers are an even more assorted group. They range from women who come from great poverty in developing nations to those who are college educated and U.S. born. A very small number are from middle-class backgrounds. Included in this group are college students whose work as nannies is temporary (Wrigley 1995).

The vast majority of child care providers in the U.S. are women. According to Murray (1996) who relied on participant observation, survey methodologies and interviews to uncover the experience of men in child care, as few as between three and six percent of child care providers are men (Murray 1996). As caring has shifted into paid labor it has become stratified. Women of color have historically been channeled into this type of work (Wrigley 1995) but are now more concentrated in certain areas. Uttal and Tuominen (1999) report women of color are twice as likely as white women to be employed in day care centers. Latinas on the other hand, are twice as likely as other women to be employed in home care. The pay scales for this work also mirror the structure for jobs that do not involve child care in the U.S., with white women on top of the scale, followed by African Americans, and then Latinas.

It is common for employers to use socioeconomic status, racial group membership and immigrant status to characterize the secondary social status of nannies. This operates in conjunction with the way the wages and occupation of child care workers are structured by race and ethnicity (Uttal and Tuominen 1999) to define the experience of nannies. The assumption that whites are better suited to care for older children and non-
whites for care of younger children is reflected in the child care centers that care for children of various ages. Older women, Latina, and African American women are hired to work with infants (Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Uttal 2002). As children age, the staff becomes younger in age, the level of education attained increases and they are more likely to be white (Uttal 2002). This differential not only spills over into other forms of child care but is also connected to the social status of care. Hiring a white nanny is thought to be the most expensive and characteristic of the white upper class.

Child care can be quite costly. In many urban areas the cost of placing a four-year-old in childcare is equal to college tuition at a public university (Folbre 2000). In most instances families who rely on paid child care are higher in class and educational status than the women they employ to care for their children (Romero 2002; Bakan and Stasiulis 1996; Wrigley 1995; Rollins 1985). It is also common for providers to be of lower racial and ethnic status than the families they work for (Rollins 1985; Romero 2002). An interesting exception can be seen in the work of Nelson (1989). In qualitative interviews with family child care providers and mothers in Vermont, Nelson (1989), found the class status of providers to be similar to that of mothers who employed them. This is explained in part by the location of many family child cares in two-earner homes. Overall, research has shown parents seek to either minimize or maximize differences between themselves and their providers depending on what it is they hope to get out of the arrangement.
Summary

Scholarship on nannies and child care providers as a whole provides us with perspective into their experiences. The existing research however, leaves us with a number of questions that remain unanswered. Although scholars have studied attachment as it pertains to migrant nannies and family child care providers, attachments have not been explored as they relate to status similarities. Research on all groups of providers has also failed to examine the impact of educational status on attachment and educational status as a whole has not been explored.

This research will permit insight into these areas and will provide greater understanding of the way attachments are perceived by employers based upon the educational status of nannies. This research will contribute to our understanding of the way educational attainment and class status not only affect parent’s understandings of the bond nannies form with their children, but will also provide insight into the nannies perceptions and experiences.

The occupation of the nanny in its entirety is also in need of further investigation. Research shows it is common for employers to behave and act in a professional, businesslike manner toward the nannies they employ. Conversely, they frown upon nannies who conduct themselves in the same manner leaving the nanny in a difficult position. Additionally, we are in need of research that explores the hiring of nannies and the work experience of nannies as it varies by educational status.

By examining the experiences of college educated nannies and those without college degrees as well as employers who utilize nannies from both groups, greater knowledge of the occupation and work experience of nannies as a whole will be gained.
This research will investigate the similarities and differences between the occupation of the nanny and other forms of paid labor as they are understood by employers as well as women who work as nannies. It will also enable me to explore the way nannies from both groups navigate the divide between their position as a caregiver and that of a paid worker.
Chapter 3
THE EMPLOYERS: SELECTION AND CONSIDERATIONS OF CARE

In the following section ideologies of motherhood will be examined as they relate to the development of the ideology of “intensive mothering” (Hays 1996). This ideology is central to the selection of child care by parents. It spills over and also impacts the experiences of both employers and child care providers in the caregiving arrangement. In this chapter, the factors that enter into parent’s decisions in selection of care will be explored. Educational considerations of care are strongly related to the ideology of intensive mothering and are tied to parents’ decisions in selecting care and will thus be examined. Research has shown some parents seek to minimize social differences between themselves and their provider whereas others seek to maximize differences (Nelson 1989; Uttal 2002: Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Wrigley 1995). The reasons for this will be explored.

Ideologies of motherhood

Although the practice of mothering and the identity of mothers are often thought to be fixed and natural, practices and definitions of mothering and motherhood vary historically. Definitions and practices are comprised of fluid social relations and interactions situated in particular moments in time but they are also founded on dominant ideologies of gender. According to Arendell (2002) definitions of mothering have a common theme, the social practice of caring for and raising children. As a result, mothering entails continuous activity and relationships that are always growing. As a practice mothering is connected to women because across the world, women perform this
work. Motherhood is intimately interconnected with femininity and is understood to be the ultimate expression of femininity. Since the nineteenth century the assumption of motherhood as the primary identity for adult women has existed (Arendell 2000). This section will explore the development of the current ideology of motherhood and the consequences of this.

Drawing from the definition agreed upon by Glenn, Brown and Forcey, Forcey (1994) defines mothering as, “a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people” (357). In regards to mothering, Forcey (1994) states, “It is also the main vehicle though which people first form their identities and learn their place in society” (357). In order to understand the way motherhood is constructed today the separation between home and work must be examined.

Motherhood was not always conceptualized as the primary identity for adult women. Historically family life and market work were not separated by time or space and a clear division between home and market work did not exist. In the late eighteenth century a split between these spheres began to occur. This separation occurred as the United States evolved into a modern industrial society (Williams 2000). The period in time when motherhood became idealized corresponds with the monumental social and political changes in society. Family farms and businesses were replaced by factories, the family economy was replaced by wage labor, and men’s waged labor became differentiated from women’s domestic labor. The disconnection of private and public spheres occurred both physically and ideologically. The impersonal public sphere of work was pitted against the nurturing sphere of the home which became women’s sole responsibility. It was in the latter half of the nineteenth century that motherhood and
child rearing became one in the same (Hays 1996). The private sphere of the family became the domain of women. This arena required qualities women possessed that were thought to be natural such as placing the needs of others first and being emotional (Cancian and Oliker 2000). It is from this point in time that our current ideologies have evolved.

An ideology is defined as: “the conceptual system by which a group makes sense of and thinks about the world. It is a collective rather than individual product” (Glenn 1994: 9). Ideologies do not each carry equal weight. When an ideology is considered to be dominant, it is representative of the view of the dominant group. The goal of the dominant group is to validate its authority over others and it does so by leading us to believe the existing arrangement is unavoidable. Consequently, in portraying motherhood as natural it “locks” women into biological reproduction. Patriarchal ideologies of mothering then do not permit women identities other than that of the mother (Glenn 1994).

Presently, the dominant ideology in North America (Arendell 2000) is labeled intensive mothering (Hays 1996). Intensive mothering involves a child-centered approach to child rearing. Suitable child rearing techniques are portrayed as financially costly, emotionally demanding, labor-intensive, child-centered, and expert-directed (Hays 1996). The focus on child-centeredness makes this process labor-intensive. While the process of raising a child necessitates work, it also involves a large amount of time. However, the ideology of intensive child rearing calls for the mother to do much more than merely make certain the slightest conditions for affection are met (Hays 1996).
Under the ideology of intensive mothering child rearing is not only time and labor intensive, it is also financially costly.

“First, for those who can afford them, there are the costs of tumbling classes, the swimming and judo and piano and dancing lessons, the child psychologists, and the special child-centered outings and vacations. For many, there are also the costs of the child’s education from preschool through college. Then there is the expense of child-maintenance accessories – the toys, the books, and the designer fashions – all of which go well beyond the already high price of simply providing for the child’s physical needs” (Hays 1996:121).

With all the options available, parents, particularly mothers, face increasing pressure to provide their children with a multitude of opportunities for advancement.

The intensive mothering ideology is a race and class based one. In her work on social class and cultural capital based on intensive observations of families with nine and ten year olds, Lareau (2003) notes, the lives of middle-class children are dominated by prearranged activities that are managed by parents. Through ensuring their children have a variety of experiences parents partake in a process she calls concerted cultivation. This is the approach to child rearing currently adopted by many middle-class parents. This approach stems from the concern middle-class parents have regarding how their children will advance in society. Tronto (2002) argues especially for women who are well off financially “good mothering” is intimately connected to the success of their children in a competitive capitalist society. One of the fundamental jobs mothers must perform involves preparing their children to fit into existing societies (Ruddick 1989). Parents are progressively more determined to ensure their children are not denied any chance which may lead to their development and advancement. Middle-class parents who adhere to the present standards set forth by professionals and take part in the process of concerted cultivation intentionally seek to stimulate development and cultivate their children’s social and cognitive skills (Lareau 2003).
These standards, as well as the standards by which mothers’ success is evaluated have become even higher. Mothers are judged on their abilities to rear children who meet or surpass the expectations of specialists (Tronto 2002). For the majority of the twentieth century this romanticized notion of motherhood stemming from white, middle-class Americans has been held as the collective type. Under this form, the job of mothering is placed solely on the mother (Glenn 1994). This pressure follows the assumption that the mother is the best caretaker and that children require care by a single person (Hays 1996).

Recently the term “Alpha mom” has been used to describe women who do it all. The alpha mom balances a multitude of responsibilities including family, career, and extracurricular activities for herself and her family. Alpha moms seek to excel in all areas of life including parenthood (Lynn 2007). The Alpha mom emerges at the height of the pressure on women to provide their children with every opportunity imaginable. Uttal (2002) found employed mothers felt they were making good choices in regards to child care when they felt as if they were offering their children as many opportunities as possible.

Mothering takes place under varying cultural and material resources and conditions. Yet these conditions alone do not decide the way mothering is understood, structured, and executed. Mothering is created through the actions of both women and men located within particular historical moments. Mothering is socially, not biologically constructed (Glenn 1994). Further complicating the job of mothers is the fact that childrearing ideologies, like motherhood, have varied over time. Additionally, when adult women are denied identities other than the status of mother, it further complicates the issue of transferring care to others who may infringe on their identity and primary
status. In the section that follows the rationale behind the selection of the nanny as a caregiver will be explored.

**Selection of child care arrangements**

According to Rapp and Lloyd (1989) who compare the “home as haven” ideology of mothers using care in a center versus family child care through the use of questionnaires, most families with children rely on some form of child care at one point in time. The selection of appropriate child care arrangements is a very important and difficult decision for parents to make. At least in part, the educational, social and psychological development of children depends on the experiences they have in child care (Powell, 2002; Johansen, et. Al, 1996). Child care arrangements have shifted greatly over the past three decades (Uttal 1999). The existing literature focuses on four types of arrangements. Family or kin care, (Uttal, 1999; Powell, 2002) day care centers, (Johansen, et. Al 1996; Murray 1996; Powell 2002; Wrigley and Derby 2005) family center care, (Johansen, et. Al 1996; Nelson, 1989; Wrigley and Derby 2005) and in home care or nannies (Bakan, et. Al 1995; Cheever 2003; Hochschild, 2003; Hondagenu-Sotelo 2001; Johansen, et. Al 1996; Macdonald 1998; Powell 2002; Toronto 2002; Wrigley and Derby 2005). This section will review the trend in selecting nannies for care.

Mothers are the most preferred providers of care for children, followed by fathers (Casper and Bianchi 2001), then other family members (Fuqua and Labensohn 1986). The use of relatives for care is strongly connected with the idea that parents should care for their own children (Skold 1989; Uttal 1999). Because of the idea that extended family members most closely resemble and approximate the values of immediate family
members, reliance on immediate family members for care has historically been favored over more formal arrangements (Uttal 1999; Hertz and Ferguson 1995). Even when parents have a preference for another arrangement they may fall back on family because of this belief (Uttal 1999).

The most significant change in child care arrangements is the decline in reliance on relatives for care that has occurred since the 1970s (Uttal 1999). The rise in paid labor force participation for women has diminished the supply of female relatives available to provide care. The trend whereby individuals live farther from other family members than in the past has also greatly reduced the supply of prospective caregivers who live in close proximity (Casper and Bianchi 2002). Each of these factors in conjunction with the increase in hours women spend away from home has necessitated the shift toward care arrangements that are more formal (Fuqua and Labensohn 1986).

The three most commonly used formal care arrangements are: care in a day care center, family child care providers, and nannies, ranging in order of formality (Wrigley and Derby 2005). Arrangements are selected based on a number of factors which include location and convenience, cost, number of children needing care, and employment status of parents. Although child care has largely been shifted from the home into the market, many Americans strive to select child care that mirrors their home environment as closely as possible (Williams 2000). Mothers that report location, hours and cost as important factors in choice of care more commonly select nannies rather than day care (Johansen, et. Al, 1996). Nannies are used over other arrangements because of the option of having the provider come to the home (Tronto 2002). This not only minimizes travel for parents, it also enables the child to remain in a familiar place. Although using a nanny is thought
to be a very expensive practice, which may limit its use (Skold 1988), it becomes a more affordable option as the number of children in the family increase (Wrigley 1995) because the cost of center care rises with the number of children (Johansen, et. Al, 1996).

Dual-earner parents must account for flexibility and select arrangements that match their work schedules. On the other hand, families with only one earner may seek care for enrichment purposes (Casper and Bianchi 2001; Uttal 2002). And still others may rely on paid child care in order to enable them to partake in leisure activities. It is important to note, research has yet to thoroughly examine the latter group. Whether child care is essential for parents to work, relied on mainly to augment cognitive and social development for children, or simply used to provide parents the ability to engage in leisure activities, influences parents’ choices of caregivers (Casper and Bianchi 2002). Parents who are employed full-time may also be concerned with safety and emotional warmth. Conversely, those do not work full-time for pay are free to select care based on a variety of other factors and care is more optional. For this group, care may be used for mothers to engage various activities.

The social class of the family is not only a determining factor in whether or not families employ a nanny and for what purposes, but is also commonly a component in deciding what they hope to gain from child care. Wealthier families might focus on emotional components of care. They are able to “take for granted” the physical components, which include safety (Cancian and Oliker 2000). For some, keeping the child clean, fed, safe, and providing emotional care is not sufficient. Emotional attachments are commonly assumed and taken for granted by many wealthier families (Wrigley 1995).
Age of the child (Johansen et al. 1996; Kahn and Kamerman 1987), flexibility (Wrigley 1995), and perceived control over the care (Tuominen 2003; Uttal 2002; Tronto 2002) are also factors parents have considered over time. More recently, educational and socialization factors have entered into parents’ decisions.

In their quantitative Johansen et al. (1996) showed that mothers with children under the age of three were most likely to choose nannies over center or family child care, as this type of care was deemed the most convenient and developmentally appropriate for this group. Older preschoolers were more likely to be in center care than younger children. This stems from the idea that infants need care that mimics the mother-child relationship and the belief that center care is impersonal. As children age, their perceived social and educational needs shift. As a whole, care arrangements have been found to vary by the age of the child, because children who are in school do not need care, and because developmental needs change as children age (Casper and Bianchi 2001).

Parental perceptions of educational components of care are strongly influenced by the age of the child (Wrigley 1995; Johansen et al. 1996; Uttal 2002). Regardless of class and educational status, parents do not see the need for an educated caregiver, or an arrangement with an educational component, when their child is very young. At this time immigrant caregivers are often utilized until children are able to talk, or until they become school aged (Wrigley 1995; Uttal 2002). Middle-class employers who hired uneducated caregivers to care for their infants were no longer satisfied with their arrangement once their children were learning to speak (Uttal 2002). The same pattern has been found for immigrant caregivers (Wrigley 1995). As children age, cultural and
educational aspects of care increase in importance for some parents (Wrigley 1995; Johansen 1996). For parents who understand child care as supplying a cultural education, this becomes a decisive factor in choosing a child care provider as children age (Wrigley 1995).

With the increase in entrance of mothers into the workforce, families are seeking flexible child care arrangements beyond the limited hours available through day care centers and family day care. These forms follow a more fixed schedule and reflect traditional business hours of nine to five (with some variation) Monday through Friday (Wrigley 1995; Bakan and Stasiulis 1996). Additionally, parents who do not work may seek care that is flexible. In home providers, or nannies as they are often called, have offered a reliable solution to the constraints of day care (Wrigley, 1995; Bakan and Stasiulis, 1996). Although the hours day care centers operate are thought to be inflexible, according to the Census (2006) many are open twelve hours per day. In addition to the rigid hours held by some centers, centers may have strict policies regarding sick children which limits the options for some families (Johansen, et. Al 1996).

Parents who seek the greatest amounts of control over the care their child receives often turn to nannies. Those who use family day care in a provider’s home may seek relationships with providers that are more equal or peer-based (Tuominen 2003). In this situation both parties are afforded power. Parents have the ability to remove their child from the arrangement and the provider is reliant on them to retrieve their child by the established end time. Care in the home of the employer is different from both center and family day care because of the straightforward, unarbitrated interaction over the conditions of child care that takes place between the provider and the parent (Macdonald,
1998). For employers, control is increased when the care takes place inside their home which is the case when they use a nanny (Uttal 2002; Tuominen, 2003; Wrigley 1995).

Choices made regarding how care will be provided and who will supply it stem from the preoccupation of parents regarding the competitive advantage of their children as discussed previously. Parents often believe children receive more attention from a nanny than in other settings and that this form of care mirrors the parent-child relationship. Thus, the use of the nanny may be connected to the notion of competitive advantage (Tronto 2000; Wrigley 1995; Lareau 2003). Parents often think nannies will provide their children with personal attention. As the nanny is their employee, they believe they have power over the care their children receive (Wrigley 1995).

Education appears to be a major factor that is increasing in importance for parents when they select a form of care for their child. According to Johansen et al., (1996) highly educated parents begin to consider their children’s education once they become preschool age. Parents with less education however, were far less concerned with the educational aspects of care for their preschool children. It also appears that ideologies of what constitutes good care are class based. Due to financial constraints and necessity of care, parents must make choices that suit their needs.

While many parents would like to be able to consider educational components, their ability to do this is limited by a number of factors. Some families seek care for their children while they are employed, others utilize it while they engage in outside activities, and some turn to it mainly for developmental and educational advantages for their children. For families where a stay-at-home parent is present, it may be more common for them to select an arrangement that emphasizes education as child care may be used.
principally as an enrichment activity (Casper and Bianchi 2000). Those in families where both parents work must select an arrangement that matches both work schedules. Arrangements vary based upon the age of the child because as children age they do not need care while they are in school and because their developmental requirements shift (Casper and Bianchi 2002). Educational aspects of care will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Overall research shows that parents do not see the quality of child care as one-dimensional (Johansen et al 1996). As a whole, care arrangements have been found to vary by age of the child, because children who are in school do not need care, and because developmental needs change as children age. Selection of care depends on parent’s educational level, social class and whether they are relying on paid care to provide the mother the ability to engage in paid labor or in social activities. Selection of care, particularly for the upper-class appears to be moving towards providing their children with something extra, an added advantage that will enhance their development in some way. The role of nannies in this process is in need of exploration.

*Education and ideologies of “good” mothers*

Scholars as well as parents have been debating the use of paid caregivers for children for decades. Ideologies continue to dictate the idea that children are best cared for by mothers (Casper and Bianchi 2001; Skold 1989). Traditionally, parental concerns over child care stemmed from the ideology that the appropriate role of mothers is in the home, caring for their children (Macdonald 1996; Cancian and Oliker 2000; Uttal 2002). The heightened attention in the 1980s given to maltreatment of children at the hands of
child care providers (Wrigley and Derby 2005; Casper and Bianchi 2002) fueled people’s anxiety about the best form of care. Concerns regarding child care have undergone major transformations in recent decades. Apprehensions once centering on safety have been replaced by anxiety over appropriate educational development and socialization. To an extent, the social, psychological, and educational growth of children is a result of the “experiences they have in child care” (Johansen, et. Al, 1996; 760). Caregivers expose children to new ideas, give them new experiences, teach them basic skills, and socialize them to norms (Uttal and Tuominen 1999). Today’s parents, especially those of the middle and upper-classes, often seek child care arrangements where they can maximize their children’s learning.

In recent decades, as children age, cultural and educational aspects of care have increased in importance for parents (Wrigley 1996; Johansen et al 1996). Notions of appropriate social and educational development once targeted at older children are now being applied to toddlers and infants. This trend can be seen in the rise of the early childhood education profession. The development of this profession has not only significantly altered the way care is provided; it has reshaped who provides child care. The professionalization of child care is intertwined with the commodification of these services (Uttal 2002).

One of the greatest changes in education in the latter part of the twentieth century is the increase in preschool education (Uttal 2002). This rapid rise in preschool and nursery school enrollment has occurred since the 1960s. Researchers at the Census Bureau initially attributed the growth in enrollment to the increase in labor force participation of mothers (Bianchi 2000). It is interesting to note, the rate of preschool
enrollment has increased as steadily for children of non-employed mothers (Casper and Bianchi 2002; Bianchi 2000). An increase in private preschool enrollment is likely according to the U.S. Department of Labor (2006) as the worth of formal education becomes widely acknowledged. Preschools however, are not being used solely to prepare children educationally, parents are also using them to prepare their children socially (Uttal 2002).

Over the past few decades we have seen a shift in the nature of childhood. This shift has accompanied the mounting educational expectations our society holds for children. These expectations require a substantial financial investment and parents face increasing pressure to purchase specialized services for their children. These expectations are also intimately connected with ideologies of good mothers. Education has grown in importance and in order to be admitted to the best colleges children must distinguish themselves from others. Because of this pressure, parents constantly strive to improve future opportunities for their children. Involving children in special classes and extracurricular activities enables parents to do this (Bianchi 2000).

Child care and day care centers are capitalizing on this shift and repackaging themselves as “learning centers” in an effort to appeal to parents seeking educational opportunities for their children. Educational aspects of care enable parents to view non-maternal child care more positively. Uttal’s (2002) qualitative research on employed mothers using child care, found mothers are more self-assured about those who are caring for their children once they learn of the educational materials and activities located in centers. They were also more confident in their choice of care when they understood the arrangement as an additional form of educational and social enhancement that would
promote the development of their child and would be in their child’s best interest. Even when mothers did not feel child care was fully what maternal care would offer, they were satisfied in their choices when the use of care centered on “principles” of promoting development. Looking beyond a temporary mother substitute, parents have started to rethink child care as offering something that is not only different from, but beyond what maternal care provides.

Educational attainment has been found by social scientists to be the most significant factor in determining income. It is not surprising that a significant rise in educational expectations of children has occurred over the past few decades. This rise reflects the rapid increase in educational requirements for entry into the labor force (Bianchi 2000). For employers with professional jobs, hiring a cultural or class peer to care for their children can be of utmost importance. These individuals acquired their jobs on the basis of cultural capital and education, and they want the same for their children (Wrigley 1995).

A great deal of the work of mothers perform is intended to transmit and preserve the social capital of the family. Parents today have a great sense that their children need to “keep up” in an era of economic anxiety” (Williams 2000: 36). Parental care is intimately tied to this ideology and this ideology “has produced shifts in childrearing norms that have rarely been noted” (Williams 2000: 36).

The use of nannies who are college educated reflects ideologies of good motherhood as well as this growing trend of early childhood education and the increasing importance of education and cultural capital as a whole. Utilizing a college educated nanny allows parents to seek out appropriate role models for their children because these
women can socialize their children into their class status. Indication of the market for college educated nannies can be seen in the development of companies such as “College Nannies and Tutors” established in 2001. Founder of Beacon Hill Nannies in Boston, Katherine Robins comments on high-end nannies. Education is what makes them so marketable. “CEOs want college-educated nannies with degrees in such fields as education, nursing and child psychology and are willing to pay for it” (Jones 2006). Robins’s agency places anywhere from 300 to 500 high-end nannies in a given year. College educated women may become nannies for a few reasons. They may gain greater fulfillment from overseeing the development of a few children for a number of years than from a large group of students that changes every year. Additionally, the pay can be equivalent to, if not better than teaching. In Boston alone, some nannies earn more than lawyers. Some parents are turning to nannies to home school their children. This trend is growing among higher-end nannies (Jones 2006).

This shift in nature of childhood and the emphasis on educational aspects of care have come about largely as a result of the pressures placed on parents, particularly mothers to raise successful children (Tronto 2002; Lareau 2003). Educational aspects of care are important to study as parents face mounting demands to raise children who are socially and educationally advanced. They are also of utmost importance to examine as parents are increasingly transferring care of children to others. While some parents will farm out particular aspects of care, others will reserve the same components for themselves. Research has shown parents seek particular qualities and demographic
characteristics in providers based on the need they are hoping to fulfill. This will be discussed in the sections that follow.

**Minimizing difference**

While many parents look for differences between themselves and their providers, others are uneasy with having someone who is socially different from them raising their child and sharing their house. In such instances, parents look for caregivers whose values and practices are similar to their own (Uttal 2002; Wrigley 1995). It is a commonly held assumption that those of the same racial-ethnic background and class status possess the same values. Parents who hire class peers believe their caregiver’s educational experiences will strongly influence their child-rearing practices. American college students are the most commonly sought class peers. College students may have the cultural credentials parents seek for their children. If employers are in a position to be able to use care part-time, parents who would like the quality of care the upper-class are able to purchase, but who operate on a more limited budget can go this route (Wrigley 1995).

Aside from the social, cultural and educational benefits these parents believe they are providing their children, a number of other factors enter into their decision to hiring class peers. Class peer caregivers tend to be more financially, socially, and emotionally independent than class subordinates. They rarely have dependents and often have their own families to rely on for support, both emotionally and financially. It is also less likely that class peers will turn to their employers in emergency situations whereas caregivers of
different socio-economic status tend to lack these supports and are more likely to rely on the family they work for (Wrigley 1995).

Despite the advantages employers gain, the benefits of cultural similarities are met with downfalls when employers hire those of similar class status. Class peers carry some authority as they get children ready for a social world with which they are familiar (Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Wrigley 1995). In giving up the advantage of class status, Wrigley (1995) writes of one mother, “she cannot ask her caregivers to get lost, she can’t make them withhold their opinions, and she can’t make them suppress their social lives” (60). The power that class peers gain is echoed in the work of Pratt (1999). In her exploration of the contribution of poststructuralist theory to labor market theory, Pratt (1999) uses a case study to describe the positions available to Filipina women. Pratt (1999) found nanny placement agencies were distinct in their differentiations between European and Filipino caregivers. In his discussion of seeking a European caregiver over a Filipino because of educational aspects of care, Bob expresses his fear of seeking similarity. “I kind of think somewhere down the line it’s gonna be: “Well, why am I ironing this man’s shirt when I used to be a university scholar?” (Pratt 1999: 229).

Because the nature of the caregiving job requires the subordination of the employee to the employer, those who hire employees that are parallel in class status unavoidably produce a predicament for themselves (Wrigley 1995). In some instances, parents sacrifice having a provider who performs domestic work for one who possesses cultural capital and is socially similar. One class peer, Sonia, was able to draw on her cultural capital to create a privileged position, which made up for her lack of domestic skills. As she does not consider this position to be a lifetime occupation, she is able to
rise above the demands of it. Sonia takes comfort in her upper middle class identity. She views the appeals of her employer for her personal service to be the result of their inability to be independent. In doing so, Sonia does not feel demeaned by the personal requests the parents make of her (Wrigley 1995).

Recognizing their caregiver has other viable alternatives, families who employ those of similar class status attempt to strengthen their caregivers’ emotional obligation through the provision of a setting that is family like. This is done by making themselves personally available to their employee and through not creating a strong differentiation between the child care labor they perform and that they allocate to the nanny. Parents who hire class peers reduce the division between child care as they perform it and as those they hire to do it. As class peers are integrated into families, they are able to feel the work they perform contributes to the functioning of a family that they are a part of. In this way, they can feel that the work they are doing is at least semi-voluntary (Wrigley 1995).

Nelson’s (1989) study on family child care providers in Vermont provides further insight into class peer relationships. Her research represents the exception because the class status of providers was found to be similar to those who purchased their labor. In these instances, similarity may make communication easier between the two groups. Despite this, fundamental ideological disparities existed between the groups of women that hindered their ability to relate to one another. The majority of family day care providers possessed traditional “notions” regarding the appropriate place for women and the centrality of motherhood. Many of these women could not comprehend how mothers could leave their children in the care of someone else while they sought paid
employment. Often they reported leaving other forms of paid employment because they couldn’t handle leaving their children in the care of others. Conversely, mothers who utilized this care could not grasp how it was possible for providers to remain home with children all day. In the section that follows the reasons for which employers seek to maximize social differences between themselves and the nannies they employ will be addressed.

*Maximizing difference*

In terms of demographic characteristics, those who pay for care are quite dissimilar from those who perform this work. In the majority of child care arrangements, female providers are subordinate to their employers in social class (Nelson 1989) and educational status. Providers are also commonly from different racial and ethnic groups than those who employ them (Wrigley 1995). This may be due in part to the structure of the occupation, however; it is common for employers to seek out particular demographic characteristics in their employees. Whether parents seek similarities or differences depends on a number of factors that appear to be specific to the aspects of the job they are looking to fulfill. These include tasks which relate to housework or education and whether parents are seeking an equitable relationship or not.

Uttal’s (2002) found working mothers who rely on paid care for their children who are not yet school age, sought relationships for their children with child care providers of other races. They chose relationships with women from cultures and social groups other than their own because of the idea that their children would benefit from these experiences. Mothers were able to tolerate dissimilarity in practices and values
when they understood them to be advantageous to their child in terms of social development and enrichment prospects.

The history of domestic work in the United States demonstrates the view of privileged groups that those who are socially and economically subordinate are well suited to perform their menial labor. Employers who seek immigrant caregivers maximize the control they have over the worker through capitalizing on class and race differences. Wrigley (1995) found employers tend to expect caregivers who are socially subordinate to perform housework along with child care. This was particularly true for new immigrants who lack familiarity with arrangements and protections from abuse. The work of Pratt (1999) confirms this finding. Filipina caregivers in British Columbia were commonly required to work longer hours than European women and to perform a broader variety of tasks not related to child care. Employers reported it was much easier to delegate tasks such as child care, cooking, and cleaning to those who are not status peers.

Although employers who seek to maximize social distance between themselves and their employee may extract more labor from their worker, they frequently reserve some aspects of work for themselves or others. This is especially true of tasks related to consumption, as they tend to be culturally specific. Employers rarely entrusted class subordinate caregivers to make purchases for them. Shopping in some instances was found to be limited to fill-in items such as grocery staples (Wrigley 1995).

Employers may require class peers to assist children with homework, a requirement that is rarely made of class subordinates. Almost all educated parents read to their children, a chore that is difficult to perform for providers whose first language is not English and for those who have little education (Wrigley 1995). For some parents the
limitations on what the caregiver was able to do enabled mothers to reinforce their role and feel a part of the parenting process.

One mother in Uttal’s (2002) study reported seeking a caregiver who could teach her children a second language. Several factors influenced her desire for her children to become bilingual. “If we continue to live in California I believe Spanish will be a dominant language even within the public agencies, in a short time…. And I want my children to be competitive in the job market. I want them to be comfortable with other cultures. I want them to be respectable, respect, have respect for differences” (51). Although a number of reasons are cited for seeking a bilingual caregiver, the primary reason remains educational in nature.

A number of researchers have examined the experiences of parents who employ nannies and reside in California (Uttal 2002; Wrigley 1995). For this segment of the population employing nannies, it may be more reasonable to be concerned with their children becoming fluent in Spanish due to its growing prevalence. Depending on the area in which individuals in my sample live, this may or may not be a practical concern. It is possible, those on the East Coast are only concerned with their children learning a second language for educational purposes. It would not be considered a survival tactic as it is in states such as California.

Overall, the experiences of race and class subordinates have been found to vary. Some employers do not appear to be greatly affected by these differences while others capitalize on them. The preference in employing class subordinates has been well documented (Nelson 1989; Wrigley 1995). Nelson (1989) reported middle-class employers who engaged in such practices felt a heightened ability to disregard their
caregivers personal needs and to “dehumanize” them. When differences were maximized parents felt they were able to get more out of their employers and were more comfortable exploiting them (Nelson 1989; Wrigley 1995).

Parents, mainly mothers, provide a fair amount of instruction to race and class subordinates. This is done in a variety of ways. Some women take time off when a new caregiver begins in order to teach them how they would like their child cared for. Others rely on their own mothers to instruct caregivers while some provide written instruction. Areas in which clear-cut rules can be implemented are limited, therefore some parents seek to control the schedule of their providers. They do so through encouraging or limiting interaction with others, restricting television viewing, controlling overall mobility, and other aspects of the providers’ day. Health and nutrition are areas of conflict for parents and caregivers, “as science-based and folk traditions mesh poorly and caregivers do not entirely accept parents’ authority in these areas” (Wrigley 1995: 114). Regardless of the aspect of care parents seek to control, capitalizing on social differences enables them to do this to a greater extent than those who employ status similars.

**Summary**

The existing literature covers an array of topics related to the use of childcare providers and the issues parents, particularly mothers, face in selecting and relying on care. The themes that have materialized provide the starting point for the basis for my study. Aside from noting that educational aspects of care enter into consideration for parents when selecting a particular form of care, existing research has failed to thoroughly examine educational components of childcare as they relate to the work of
nannies and to the selection of nannies on the part of employers. The relationship between the nanny and the family and its affect on the occupation of the nanny must be examined. Although the work of nannies is distinctly different from other forms of paid labor, research has yet to examine whether nannies seek professional relationships and experiences despite the limitations of the setting they work in. A great deal of attention has been devoted to examining the relationships between nannies and employers from very different class and race statuses, little attention has been given to nannies and employers who are similar in racial and class status and the outcomes this has for the relationships formed. This research will also contribute to our knowledge on the role of education in the selection of care as well as in the work experience of nannies.

Childcare providers are typically thought of as providing care for families where the mother is employed full-time. It is important to account for the previously unexamined group of women who are also selecting care; this group is comprised of women who do not work for pay outside the home yet hire a nanny. Attention also needs to be given to the characteristics families who fall into this category look for in selecting a nanny. Additionally, we know little about the duties and expectations of nannies who work for employed women as compared to non-employed. Finally, the ways these expectations and roles preserve or challenge the mother-child bond have yet to be explored.

This research will fill the gap in the literature by addressing each of these ideas. While this literature review has largely focused on mothers as the existing literature has done, I seek to incorporate fathers into the picture and examine the justification fathers make for the use of the nanny. I also seek to explore the way fathers describe the
relationship of the nanny to the family. In-depth interviews will provide me with perspective into the existing themes as well as the gaps in the literature on caregiving, nannies, families, motherhood, and paid and unpaid work.
Chapter 4  
METHODOLOGY

The overall goal of this dissertation was to gain insight into the experiences of women who work as nannies, and women and men who employ nannies. I was primarily concerned with examining the meanings nannies and employers made of their work and personal relationships. This study also set out to explore the similarities and differences in nannies work experiences by education level, as well as employers hiring strategies as they were connected to the educational attainment of their nannies. In this chapter I describe the methodological approach I used, my sampling strategy, the interview and data analysis process, and finally, the ethical issues I faced related to this research.

Methodological approach

This qualitative study was designed with the goal of generating theory as opposed to testing hypotheses. Due to my interest in uncovering the meaning nannies and employers made of their work, relationships, and experiences, qualitative research methods were best suited for my study. In-depth interviews with nannies and employers of nannies allowed me to address each of these questions. Interviewing allows the researcher to have access to the experiences of others and their perceptions of events (Weiss 1994). It is also useful as it provides researchers with insight into individual’s thoughts and ideas from the participants’ point of view (Reinharz 1992). Therefore, qualitative methods were essential to uncovering the lived experiences of the individuals who participated in my study.
Qualitative methods allowed me to gather data on aspects of individual’s lives that may not be accessed through the use of quantitative methodologies (Glaser and Strauss 2006). Through the use of qualitative interviews, previous work on child care providers has produced fruitful information. Research on child care providers can be broken down into three groups: day care, family child care and nannies. Research on family day care providers has been conducted through the use of interviews (Tuominen 2003), surveys (Fuqua and Labensohn 1986) and a combination of the two methods (Enarson 1990; Nelson 1989). Day care research has mainly been conducted through the use of surveys (Fuqua and Labensohn 1986; Murray 1996) and through interviews and participant observation (Murray 1996). Research on nannies has been restricted to the use of qualitative research (Macdonald 1996; 1998; Hochschild 2003; Cheever 2003; Wrigley 1995). It is possible that this widespread use of qualitative methodologies is due to the lack of accurate statistics on these populations, which does not allow for quantitative studies.

The work of nannies and the relationships between nannies and employers are often hidden from the view of society. In-depth interviewing provided access to participants’ experiences, “in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz 1992: 19). In qualitative methodologies, deviation from the question or topic, which cannot occur when quantitative methodologies are employed, is encouraged as it permits interviewees to delve into details of their personal life. The use of open-ended questions, which I relied on, increased the possibility for discovery and explanation. These questions allowed me to generate theory because these interviews allowed me to be flexible and permit themes to emerge from data (Reinharz 1992).
Qualitative researchers often use grounded theory to understand the data that is produced from interviews. Rather than beginning with a preconceived theory to explain the experiences of my participants, I allowed themes to emerge from my interviews. The use of grounded theory permitted me to discover themes that I may not have discovered, had I imposed a theory on my data. The following section details my procedure for sampling, data collection and analysis.

**Sampling strategies**

The goal of my study was to perform a comparative analysis of the work and relationship experiences of nannies and employers of nannies with a college education, and nannies and employers of nannies without a college education. My purpose was not to be able to draw generalizations from the experiences of those interviewed to the population of nannies and employers as a whole, but to gain further insight into the lived experiences of these two groups in their own words. As a result of my sampling goals, participants were sought based upon their relevance to the topic being studied (Neuman 2000). This research sought to select participants based upon gender and educational criterion.

This research was exploratory and not meant to be generalized to the population of nannies and employers as a whole. Thus, due to financial and time constraints, a convenience sample of to fifty-two participants was used for this research. I interviewed twenty-five nannies and twenty-seven employers of nannies. Due to my interest in generating new theory, I restricted my sample to live-out, U.S. born nannies that did not have children. While each individual will have personal demands that take them away
from their work, the demands of having a child may alter the dynamics of the job and their experience in various ways. This is something I sought to avoid. I also interviewed employers who hired a nanny who met this criterion. My sample was restricted to female nannies because the use of male nannies in the United States is a relatively recent move.

In light of my goals, my sample was comprised of four groups: I interviewed female nannies that had obtained a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree (twelve). The second group was comprised of female nannies without a Bachelor’s degree. The individuals in this group, either did not have a degree (nine), or were presently enrolled in a four year college (four). The third group consisted of employers who utilized a nanny with a Bachelor’s degree or higher (eleven); whereas the fourth, and final group consisted of employers who hired a nanny who did not have a Bachelor’s degree (eight), or who was enrolled in college (four). While a number of employers hired multiple nannies, the numbers of nannies that fall into each category are difficulty to count as four employers hired two nannies, one that had a Bachelor’s degree and one who was attending college. Therefore, they are not counted in the above mentioned calculations.

Previous research has been limited to the study of female employers relying on nannies for care (Uttal 1996; 2002) or to female nannies (Macdonald 1996). The omission of men from this process reaffirms the idea that this form of work is “women’s work” and moreover, that the job of hiring and supervising the nanny is a job to be done by women. In order to combat these ideologies, in addition to the four groups I interviewed, I sought to interview make employers. Looking at the perspectives of nannies and those who employ nannies from a number of standpoints provided me with a more accurate understanding of this work and the experiences of both parties. Table 1
illustrates the demographic profiles of this sample. I interviewed nineteen female employers and eight male employers. Each of these men was the spouse of one of the women I interviewed. While I conducted twenty-seven employer interviews, at times I also reference these as nineteen employer pair interviews, in an effort to avoid counting responses multiple times as eight pairs hired the same nanny or nannies.

It is important to note, I only interviewed one party of an employer/employee pair. Prior research interviewed nannies and their direct employers (Macdonald 1998). I purposely avoided this because of the serious questions I held about the validity of data that would be drawn from such discussions. I feel restricting my sample enabled both parties to respond freely to the interview questions as they answered my questions with the knowledge that their responses would not be matched to their employee or employer. Additionally, it alleviated concerns that their employer or employee may find out the information that they disclosed.

Nannies ranged in age from nineteen to thirty years of age, with an average age of 24.5 years of age. The employers ranged in age from twenty-eight to forty-five years of age, with an average age of 35.8. Several of the nannies held multiple nanny positions simultaneously (five) and a number of employers hired multiple nannies simultaneously (eight). This was interesting and useful because it allowed them to speak to multiple experiences.

All of the employers I spoke with presently hired a nanny. Some employer’s and wife/husband employer pairs were hiring their first nanny (eight), whereas others had employed a number of nannies over the years (eleven). The vast majority of the nannies I interviewed were working as a nanny at the time of the interview. Three of my
interviewees had left nanny positions within a matter of days of speaking with me. Much like the employers, a few nannies were working at their first nanny job (eight), whereas others had worked for a number of families previously (seventeen).

The final criterion nannies and employers had to meet to participate in this study, was that they could not be related to their employer/employee. This was important, as research has shown the preference for placing children in relative care (Fuqua and Labensohn 1986; Skold, 1989; Hertz and Ferguson 1995; Uttal 1999). Limiting the sample to those who were not related was necessary in keeping with the goals of this research. Finally, due to practical limitations the sample for this study was drawn from Connecticut and New York State.

This sample was not racially diverse. It is also impossible to compare the racial composition of my sample with national averages, given that accurate data on individuals who work as nannies and parents who employ a nanny does not exist. Eighty-five percent of the employers I interviewed identified as white and less than fifteen percent identified as non-white or biracial. Similarly, ninety-two percent of the nannies in this sample identified as white and eight percent as Hispanic. It is unclear what theoretical implications the lack of racial diversity in this sample has on my findings. However, the lack of diversity does speak to the types of nannies the employers I interviewed, and the employers of nannies I spoke with were looking to hire. Samples in previous research have been far more diverse in terms of racial, economic, and educational differences between caregivers and employers (Macdonald 1996; 1998; Wrigley 1995). The chapters that follow will address the social similarities between nannies and employers in my sample and the impacts this has on their work and personal relationships.
The employers in this sample were highly educated. Ninety-six percent had attained a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree. Sixty-seven percent held advanced degrees. The majority were also in committed relationships, ninety-three percent. And Ninety-three percent of the employers in this sample identified as heterosexual.

In keeping with the initial goals of this dissertation I was able to interview two stay-at-home mothers and five employers who worked from home at least part-time. Nine out of the twenty-five nannies I interviewed worked for a stay-at-home mother. Four worked for families where a parent worked from home at least part-time or was on leave from work. I now turn to discuss my recruitment efforts.

**Recruitment Strategies**

My recruitment efforts were quite extensive and I used a number of recruitment strategies to obtain my sample. In order to reach employers, various advertisements in the form of flyers (see Appendix C) were posted in a large radius. I posted flyers in the following areas: coffee shops (both local and chains), fitness centers (both YMCAs and private gyms), activity centers targeted at children (music classes and play groups), libraries, children’s clothing stores, grocery stores (specialty, local, and chains), and in a research center at a University. I only obtained one interview with an employer as a direct result of my flyers. I also contacted nanny placement agencies, which did not lead to any employer interviews. I posted advertisements on a nanny site however, my only contact from that site did not result in an interview because the employer never committed to a time to meet. The bulk of my interviews came directly from postings on Craigslist, a free online website that features classifieds. I posted on four separate sites in
Connecticut and three in New York State. Each advertisement was placed under the “Child care” section. I obtained eleven interviews this way. I attempted to secure interviews through personal connections, but only four were obtained this way. I also relied on participants’ referrals and two interviews were secured on referrals from other employer interviews. Six interviews with men were obtained through their wives.

Finally, I paid for an advertisement in Connecticut Parent magazine (See Appendix D), which was quite costly, and only yielded one interview. And I advertised in the Danbury News Times, a newspaper, which did not result in any interviews. I did receive one phone call from the newspaper advertisement however, the person did not fit the criteria for the study. While advertising on Craigslist was the most useful avenue, it was also quite frustrating. A number of the employers who reached out to me were looking for a nanny. Therefore, I often waited for them to find a nanny in order to do the interview.

I used the same sampling strategy to reach nannies as I did to reach employers. Similarly, I only secured one interview through a flyer and one through a referral. It is important to note that I did receive a number of phone calls and emails from nannies as a result of my flyers however; only one actually fit my sampling criteria. Therefore, the response rate to flyers was not entirely low, but the individuals who responded did not fit the parameters of the study and were therefore not included. Again, Craigslist was the most useful avenue for recruitment but had the same limitations. Many nannies were looking for employment and thus, ineligible to participate in my research. My advertisements on Craigslist led to twenty-one interviews. Finally, two were obtained through connections I formed with nanny placement agencies.
The use of the internet, specifically the website, Craigslist, was central to my ability to recruit my sample. However, the use of Craigslist may have led to bias in my sample. First, in order to access Craigslist, individuals must have both computer and internet access to view this site. Therefore, nannies and employers who did not have access to both would have been less likely to be included in my sample. However, public libraries provide both computer and internet access to patrons. In an effort to recruit broadly, throughout the course of this study I continually posted flyers in an effort to both reach my goal sample size and to attain a more diverse sample. Each time I traveled to do an interview I took time out to post flyers in that area. While my flyer response rate was low, two participants noted that they saw the flyer and it served as a reminder to them to contact me. In the first instance, the person found my advertisement on Craigslist and then saw the flyer, which jogged their memory about the study and led them to contact me. In the second, I used snowball sampling to recruit the individual. At the time of our interview she said, “I saw your flyer at [location] and remembered I needed to contact you.”

Craigslist was also limiting because it prohibits “cross posts” and searches neighboring Craigslist sites to ensure you are not posting a similar advertisement multiple times. Therefore, I had to change my advertisements substantially in order to run more than one advertisement at the same time. Furthermore, I only posted under the heading “child care.” Craigslist has a section for “volunteers” which I did not utilize because of their prevention of cross posting. I also had sufficient success with the “child care” which led to my decision to continue to post in this section, but I may have achieved
different sample characteristics from posting under a different heading such as “volunteers.”

Two additional possible sources of bias in my sample include age of nannies and educational attainment of employers. First, the nannies included in this sample were young, with the oldest being 30 years of age. It is impossible to determine how the ages of those in my sample compare with nannies as a whole because data on nannies is limited. One reason the nannies in my sample were young is because many were educated and using nanny work for a short period of time. The second reason is due to my efforts to reach nannies who did not have children. This characteristic may have led to the age range of my participants. The educational attainment for employers was quite high (see Table 1). Over half of my sample of employer’s employed a nanny who was educated. This was likely someone they sought out given their educational attainment. I also found posting phrases such as, “student” or “dissertation study” in my advertisements on Craigslist was an effective tool for recruitment. Having undertaken research projects of their own, many employers were willing to help me in my research. Each of these characteristics made my sample consist of employers who were educated. Again, due to a lack of accurate data on child care providers and consumers of child care it is difficult to tell what the educational attainment is of the general population of employer’s of nannies.

As a whole I feel respondents answered my postings on Craigslist and were willing to participate in my study for a variety of reasons. Many employers participated due to their understanding of the challenges researchers can face in recruitment for qualitative research. One employer told me that she could use the money and another
asked if her husband would be paid too if he did an interview. Many employers were simply interested in participating because they had found the process of employing a nanny to be full of surprises and they wanted to share their experiences. Similarly, many nannies felt they did not have others who could relate to their experiences and thus were eager to speak with me. Like the employers, some nannies had been involved in majors in college that required a research component and were willing to help. I was surprised because I did not get the indication that any of the nannies were participating simply for the money, some even tried to refuse my payment and several of the employers refused payment.

Within my advertisements I used the terms “babysitter” and “nanny.” I was unsure which term individuals in this line of work would use. In my sample, 26 out of the 27 employers referred to their caregiver as a “nanny.” Only one referred to them only by name. Each of the nannies also referred to themselves as a “nanny” rather than a “babysitter.” Therefore, nanny is the term I adopt and use throughout this dissertation. It is important to note, as I found, some individuals used these terms interchangeably. For instance, some of the nannies found “babysitting” work on a website called Naniesasneeded.com. While this site uses the word “nanny” in the title, the services are actually, as the title suggests, on an “as needed” basis. Sittercity.com was a website nannies and employers frequently referred to using in their search to find a job or an employee. Despite having the word “sitter” in the title, this website caters to a variety of types of child care and personal services which include, babysitting, nannies, and pet care. At times some nannies and employers used the term “babysitter.” Only one nanny was upset with her temporary employers’ reference to her as a “sitter” (see Chapter 6 for
discussion). Some nannies and employers used both terms, “babysitter” and “nanny.” When nannies used the term “babysitter” they referenced their additional part-time labor or their babysitting work in their teens. Some nannies also used the term “babysitter” in reference to discussions of the children they cared for. For example, a child would ask when they were coming back to baby-sit. Similarly, employers used the term baby-sitter to refer to their children’s requests to see a current or prior nanny or to discuss those whom they relied on for a night out, but not full-time or regular care. The term “nanny” did not automatically mean full-time status but that this individual, aside from the parents, was the most constant caregiver. Cathy, an employer explained the distinction between the two terms to me:

I feel like a baby-sitter is someone who is kind of in and out more quickly than a nanny. A nanny is someone who kind of is consistent within a child’s life. Like I said, the girl who has been with me for three years I have to say, absolutely I would consider her a nanny. But the others they are in and out within semesters so it’s more like a baby-sitter situation. (Cathy – employer)

As a whole, both parties used the term “nanny” to refer to work that was long-term and most agreed that the status of a nanny was different from that of a babysitter.

The interview process was quite rewarding but also very frustrating. I traveled a good distance (approximately one hour) to meet each of my participants and due to the line of work they are in; many nannies cancelled an interview at the last minute. A significant number cited their employer’s requests for them to work later than they had originally planned as their reasoning for doing so. I have no reason to doubt their statements given the flexibility of this form of work. The interviews with both nannies and employers ranged from an hour to two hours in length. Two interviews with male employers were very short, approximately fifteen minutes in length (see Chapter 8 for
discussion). I met participants in a location of their choice. The vast majority of nannies, eighteen, selected Starbucks. I conducted three interviews in local coffee shops, one in a sandwich shop, one in Barnes and Noble in the café, one in my office at work, and one in a Starbucks in Target.

Interviews with employers were much harder to secure than those with nannies. Obtaining interviews with fathers was the most difficult. This was twofold, as I will discuss in further detail in the chapters that follow, the women employers in my sample were much more involved in the recruitment process for their nannies and were significantly more involved in the supervision of the nanny than were their husbands. The result of this, was that men were not likely to be looking for a nanny and thus, did not contact me. Also, they lacked interaction with the nanny and therefore, were reluctant to speak with me. My willingness to meet employers in their home was a blessing and a curse. It was imperative as it allowed them to participate in an interview. However, the constant interruptions by children caused issues with keeping employers on track in our discussions. Fifteen of the twenty-five were conducted in the home of the employers. Seven at Starbucks, one at Barnes and Noble in the café, one at a local coffee shop, one at a lunch spot, and one in an employer’s office.

The interview guide, which can be found in Appendix A, served as a guideline for my discussions with both nannies and employers. Qualitative researchers debate whether it is best to begin the interview with a standardized set of questions (Reinharz 1992) or open-ended less focused questions (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) argue it is unwise to set up interviews with questions that are structured. Doing so sets the tone that right and wrong answers exist and may limit participant’s responses
later on in the interview. Conversely, Reinharz (1992) argues beginning the interview with standardized questions, which cover demographic information, may put the interviewee at ease. I followed the approach put forth by Reinharz (1992) with much success. I began the interview with set questions, which covered demographic characteristics. I then said, “Now we are going to begin the open-ended questions. Please feel free to go into as much detail as you would like when answering the questions. It would also help me if you could provide me with examples of the ideas that you are discussing.” The vast majority of interviewees did not need much prompting however, I often used phrases such as, “Can you tell me more about that?” Or, “Can you tell me the story of a time when that occurred?” to prompt further discussion. The majority of my participants were at ease and spoke freely. Only one nanny and two employers required significant prompting.

The basis for the questions that guided my discussions came from themes existing in the literature, as well as my experience in my work as a nanny. I relied on two separate interview guides. The first was used for my interviews with nannies, and the second for interviews with employers. The questions listed on the interview guide for the interviews with nannies fell into the following categories: demographic questions, how they came into the job, questions about their arrangement, their relationship with the parents they work for, educational aspects of care, their relationship with the children in their care, questions concerning the time they were not required to be at work, parental interaction, and the occupation itself. The interview guide for employers is similar. The following is a list of the questions that I relied on for my discussions with employers: demographic questions, how they selected a nanny, questions about their arrangement,
their relationship with the nanny they employ, educational components of care, the relationship of the nanny with their children, parental interaction with the nanny, the occupation. It concluded with questions about interaction with the nanny when she was not required to be at work.

As a whole I relied on my interview questions to guide my discussions. In a few instances, we diverged completely from the guide. In each instance, the employer, a woman wanted to talk at length about her frustrations with her nanny or her husbands’ lack of participation in child care. After the completion of twelve interviews, I revised the interview guide to include questions about how nannies felt about their employers as mothers and as fathers. This was something that was hinted at in my initial interviews and was quite beneficial to my research.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were allowed to address any points of interest that had not been covered. The majority felt everything had been thoroughly covered. A few took the opportunity to express their frustrations and this allowed them time to reflect on their experience and voice their concerns to an interested party. Despite this, the vast majority of nannies and employers in this sample were happy with their work arrangements and the relationships formed.

Weiss (1994) writes, “The risks to respondents in qualitative interviewing are not usually significant” (123). Confidentiality, however, could pose a concern for participants. Therefore, I guaranteed that the names of all participants would be replaced with pseudonyms in an effort to maintain the anonymity of interviewees. This promise appeared in writing on the consent form. It was also reiterated at the start of the
interview. Additionally, any additional identifying characteristics or information was changed or omitted in the write-up.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all tapes and transcriptions were kept in my home. Other than myself, only my dissertation committee had access to my transcripts. Participants were provided with both my cell-phone number (which had a password protected voice-mail system) and my email address. My email address was also password protected and kept our correspondence private. I also used my school email address, which included my academic affiliation.

My interviews began with the signing of the informed consent form (see Appendix B). Interviews were not conducted until they signed the consent form. At the start of each interview participants, were reminded that their participation in my study was completely voluntary. Because we were discussing information that was personal and important to them, participants were informed at the start of the interview that they were free to choose not to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with and that they may end the interview at any point. No one refused any questions or suggested they wanted to stop the interview.

With the consent of each participant, each interview was audio-recorded in order to enhance accuracy and improve the ability of the researcher to recall vast amounts of detail and information (Taylor and Bogdan 1998; Weiss 1994). The IRB approved consent form also provided a space where they consented to the recording of the interview. Audio-recording the interview allowed me to devote greater attention to my respondents, because it alleviated my fear that I would miss something they said while trying to jot notes down (Weiss 1994). It also provided me with the ability to transcribe
the interviews once they were completed. This allowed for more accurate analysis of the interview. In order to protect the identities of my participants, pseudonyms were used in place of names provided and any identifying information was removed.

**Data analysis**

Each interview was transcribed as quickly as possible following the interview to make sure all of the relevant information was fresh in my mind (Maxwell 2005). I did hire two individuals to transcribe a total of five interviews. However, I had to go back through each one and listen to each tape again to ensure accuracy. Once the verbal text was transcribed, I coded it and analyzed it for emerging themes. Transcribing interviews allowed me to study each interview (Lofland and Lofland 1995) and was quite beneficial to me. It allowed me to think about the themes that were emerging while I listened to each tape.

I used the constant comparative methods put forth by Glaser and Strauss (2006). I compared the responses of male employers to those of female employers. I compared the responses of nannies to employers, and nannies as a whole to one another and employers as a whole to one another. In doing so I found a number of commonalities and differences between nannies and employers, among nannies, and among employers.

I did not use any software in the coding of my data. I hand coded each transcript for the categories which emerged from the data. For example, “together time” was a theme that emerged in my discussions with nannies and employers. This theme explored nannies’ and employers’ perspectives of the time they were both together with the children. Upon analysis of each of my categories, I found far more similarities between employers, between nannies, and between nannies and employers, than I found
differences. The chapters that follow reveal my findings. I turn now to discuss ethical
issues I faced.

Procedural and ethical issues

As I noted above and indicated on the informed consent form, with all qualitative
research there is the risk that the participant may become upset during the interview.
Because of this, I looked for signals of discomfort. I did not receive any indication of
this. However, a few of the nannies cried during their interviews when they discussed
former children they had cared for. Despite this, they did not appear uncomfortable in
the discussion, but expressed that they truly missed these children.

Some nannies and employers sought advice from me knowing that I was also
interviewing the population they worked with. In some instances, I did provide reassure
for employers, particularly those who struggled with their children’s emotional
attachment to their nannies. Many mothers, and even some of the fathers appeared to
appreciate being able to discuss their experiences and concerns with me as they expressed
that they did not have many other people to voice their experiences. The nannies
especially expressed to me that they did not have other people in their lives that could
relate to their work experience. Several commented on their attachment to the children
they cared for and the sense of loss they felt when they left a prior family. Because of
this, they were grateful for the opportunity to discuss their experiences with me. Overall,
I feel the interviews were positive for these individuals.

I did not feel that any individual I spoke with was in a dangerous situation.
However, a few nannies disclosed issues of sexual harassment to me and one disclosed a
prior employer’s drug abuse and the way he sought to involve her in his abuse through
the receipt of packages. However, in each instance the nannies had removed themselves from the situation and were therefore, no longer in danger. Several nannies also disclosed issues where employers had cancelled checks or owed them money that they had never received. In the instances of cancelled checks they felt they could not take any course of action, given that they did not pay taxes on their wages. In each instance the nanny was no longer working for the employer however, given their continued involvement in nanny work and the likelihood that this could occur again in the future I informed them that they could contact the Department of Labor to assist them in obtaining the wages they were owed. As the chapters that follow will explore, these individuals saw themselves as something other than “real” employees and their informal arrangements led them to believe that they were not entitled to this past compensation.

Nannies and employers were quite curious about my research and how I arrived at this topic. At times I disclosed my experience working as a nanny and at other times I did not. This usually put the nannies at ease. Employers were far more interested in helping me obtain my sample given their educational backgrounds and their understanding of the frustrations recruitment can bring. However, one employer did say, “well you are probably more sympathetic to the nannies.” I expressed that I had considered the issues nannies face from both sides, which is why I sought to interview employers. Like the employers, several nannies also noted that they had undertaken research projects in college and were therefore, sympathetic to my recruitment efforts.

As a whole, I believe participation in these interviews was a positive experience for my interviewees. It provided them with the opportunity to discuss aspects of their life they did not commonly get to talk about, with an interested person. I was also quite
surprised by the willingness of employers to let me into their home so that I could complete the interview. Some allowed me to interview both them and their significant other. During the in-home interviews most of the employer’s children were present. When these interviews took place back-to-back, one parent would occupy the children while I interviewed the other. One woman had me come to her house at night while her children slept. Some employers even refused to accept my payment.

**Organization of chapters**

Central to this study was the goal of uncovering the role education plays in employers’ selection of a nanny. Therefore, the findings chapters begin with Chapter 5, which illustrates employers’ preference in hiring a college educated nanny. I found work and personal relationships were strongly intertwined and both parties had difficulty separating the two out. Chapter 6, 7, and 8 address the job of the nanny. While Chapter 6 speaks primarily to the job itself and looks at nannies’ and employers’ perceptions of “work” as they relate to the job of the nanny, Chapter 7 and 8 focus more on the personal relationships formed and the impact of this on the job. Chapter 7 uncovers the perspectives of nannies’ and employers’ in regards to the attachment formed between nannies and the children in their care. Chapter 8 discusses the ways nannies’ and employer’s perceptions of their relationship are impacted by their social statuses’ as well as the affect this has on nannies’ work experiences. Finally, Chapter 9 ties together the previous chapters with an examination of the role of nannies in children’s socialization and in the reproduction of employers’ social standing. In the next chapter I begin to describe my research findings.
Historically, society has viewed child care as an unskilled profession. Nanny work, in particular, is seen as lacking skill because it is performed by women and society considers the job as one demanding only what is already within women’s “natural” abilities (Tuominen 2003.) The occupation of the nanny is marked by the informality of arrangements, a common feature of nanny jobs and of the child care industry as a whole (Nelson 1989), which further delegitimizes it in society’s eyes. Furthermore, child care as an industry is one that women have historically been able to enter into without formal education or training. As a result of these associations, the job of the nanny has been connected with low status and low prestige. It has been reserved for women with little to no formal education.

In this chapter I examine college educated nannies, a previously unstudied group of women in the child care industry. In doing so, I cover ten key areas related to parental use of college educated women for care. In the first section, I discuss the reasons parents selected a college educated nanny for care. In the second, I examine the notion that, in seeking an educated nanny, these parents wanted more than child care. A college degree, or the pursuit of one, signified that the nanny could provide the children with something extra. In particular, a degree represented capability, motivation, values, and “relatability,” each of which will be examined in this section. In the third section, I address the perception that educated nannies serve as “role models” for children due to their educational status. Employers appreciated that their nannies had “other things going
on,” which signified to them and their children that their employees did not aspire to be a long-term nanny. This further served to reinforce the nannies’ status as positive role models. Although employers valued nannies’ abilities beyond nanny work, both groups described the desire of employers to keep the nannies’ abilities for themselves, which is the focus of section five. In the sixth section I examine nannies’ perceptions that their employers sought out college educated women to care for their children because their employers were “image oriented.” In section seven I discuss the shifting hiring strategies of parents, which are related to the age of their children. In the final three sections of this chapter I cover scheduling conflicts that arise from the nanny’s college schedule, the pay structure of nanny work, and lastly, the exceptions to the pattern of hiring an educated nanny for care.

**The selection of a nanny**

Fourteen of the twenty-seven employers I interviewed hired nannies who, at a minimum, had attained a Bachelor’s degree. Eight employers hired a nanny who was attending college for a Bachelor’s or an Associate’s degree; only five employed a nanny who was not presently attending college and did not have a Bachelor’s degree. Of the twenty-five nannies in this sample, twelve held Bachelor’s degrees, four were enrolled in four-year colleges, and nine did not have a degree and were not presently attending college. The widespread use of educated women for care in this sample does not mean it was the intent of the employers interviewed to hire an educated nanny. In fact, a number of employers reported they opted for a nanny with a degree only after reviewing the pool of applicants, which consisted of both educated and uneducated nannies.
[LB: And what criteria if any have you used in selecting your nanny?]
… I was actually inundated with overqualified people. It was tough (laughs). There was lots of good choices using Craigslist, which was surprising. But I was looking for maturity, energy level, flexibility, and experience. Just kind of making that right connection…

[LB: Can you tell me about people being overqualified?] I just ended up getting a lot of grad students who were looking for part-time work. And so I don’t think they are necessarily going to pursue child care down the road. (Ann – employer)

“Overqualified” to Ann meant being highly educated. It did not mean the nannies had more child care experience than she required. Even so, she opted to hire a graduate student, and this chapter will explore why.

Ann’s experience is consistent with a subset of Wrigley’s (1995) sample. According to Wrigley (1995), for those who need care for fewer than forty hours per week, “college students become caregivers of choice, as many students desire part-time work and they have the cultural credentials the parents want” (57). Others specifically sought a nanny with a degree or one who attended college for various other reasons. For example, Melyssa discusses her intent of finding a college graduate as follows:

I was looking for someone who had gone to college. I wanted someone who had a degree. I preferred someone who had a background in some sort of child development field. But I was pretty flexible like if it was Psychology, or Early Childhood, or Elementary Ed or whatnot. But I definitely wanted somebody that was educated and knowledgeable about kids. (Melyssa – employer)

According to both nannies and employers, employing an educated nanny fit in with employers aspirations for their children. When employers mentioned that they liked that their nanny was educated they referenced their wish that their children would attend college. This desire was expressed by all of the parents I interviewed who hired an educated nanny. It was also reiterated by educated nannies in their accounts of their
employers’ aspirations for their children. The following statements provide evidence of
these parents’ desires:

I guess for one thing, myself having a degree and my wife as well, going through
that sort of, the college experience. And particularly… I think all the jobs and the
careers are headed in that way. So I think they have that experience. They… see
some of the values of going to college and getting degrees and what it can bring
you. And in some respects impart that to the kids as well. (Kurt – employer)

That’s a value that we’ve instilled with them that you… go to… college, graduate
school, you know you do it all. It’s like it doesn’t stop at any particular point.
Certainly college is just a given. And so the more people that they see around
them having done it, the more it’s just expected of what they’ll do as well.
(Theresa – employer)

Once you’re done with high school the next step is college, whereas in some
families it might be once you’re done with high school, you’re done. (Brian –
employer)

When I set out to conduct this study I held assumptions about the reasons
employers would seek out educated nannies for care. First, I expected that employers
would look for someone who could perform educationally oriented activities with the
children. Second, I believed that employers would want someone who had a college
degree to act as a role model for their children. Underlying this is the idea that someone
who has a college degree possesses broader career options and thus does not aspire to
work as a nanny as a long-term career goal. I assumed parents would not want their
children to see working as a nanny as a career option.

While each of my initial assumptions was confirmed in my interviews, I also
found that both nannies and employers posited a number of different reasons why parents
preferred to hire, and sought to hire, a nanny with a college degree. The following
sections cover nannies’ and employers’ perceptions of a college degree as it relates to the
job of the nanny and the benefits to the children of hiring a nanny with a degree.
Seeking something more than child care

Over the past few decades our society has witnessed the evolution of day care centers into learning centers. This shift, I argue, is part of a broader trend whereby parents are looking for people to not only watch their children during a set period of hours per week, but are also looking for someone to educate their children or provide them with additional scholastic benefits. This is strongly linked to societal pressures placed on parents to have their children excel in all areas of life. The findings from this sample indicate that a trend similar to the transition of day care centers into “learning” centers is occurring among parents who hire educated nannies. This goes hand in hand with the idea that parents seek something beyond basic child care for their children. The following quotations present evidence of parental preference for nannies who are educationally involved with their children:

She is an artist also. Um, so she does a lot of like sculpturing and ceramics. And those are the main things… So just very creative, and artsy, and just thinking of ideas. She comes with um, just projects for the kids to do. (Erin – employer)

[LB: How important is it to you that your nanny engages in educational aspects of care with your children…]
(Interrupting) Very.
[LB: Can you describe this and why?]
… She’s with them for 5 or 6 hours… And I think play is educational in and of itself but it would be nice if you know, they knew their colors. If they learned their letters, or drew… Just to make things familiar with them and comfortable with some memory games. Most of the games out there have an educational component anyway. Or the arts and crafts do also. So that’s important… They’re in school but it would be nice to continue that also. (Theresa – employer)

The employers in this sample appreciated their nannies’ talents and educational involvement with their children. The majority had faith in their nannies’ abilities and did
not feel the need to provide instruction or take formal steps to ensure that these tasks were carried out.

[LB: Do you instruct your current nanny or any of your nannies on any educational aspects of the job?]
I don’t know that I instruct them. I’ll buy the toys or something educational, that I think is educational. My kids are into art projects so I might go buy the arts and crafts and say, “Oh let’s do this art project.” And you know I’ll give it to her to do with them or something. But I don’t know that, I mean I don’t educate her on how to do it, but I might buy things for them to do. (Theresa – employer)

Neither Theresa, nor Ann told their nannies how they felt educational activities should be carried out with their children. Theresa’s nanny had a Bachelors degree. Although Theresa would buy activities and even suggest that her children and nanny do them, she would not direct her nanny on how to perform the activities. Ann, on the other hand, did not discuss these activities with her nanny at all. When I asked her how important it was that her nanny partake in educational activities with her children, she stated, “That’s important, that’s a big part of what she’s doing.” I then asked her if she ever conveyed to her nanny that she would like her to participate in activities that are educational in nature with her children. She stated:

No because, yeah I think just when we first met and I, I didn’t really need to. I think she naturally was predisposed to doing that. (Ann – employer)

Ann’s nanny held a Bachelor’s degree and was enrolled in graduate school to obtain her Master’s degree. And Ann was not the only employer to assume that having a nanny who was motivated educationally would translate into educational benefits for her children. This section will address this assumption.

The majority of employers noted that they liked that their nannies were engaged in educationally oriented activities with their children. Other employers who hired educated nannies also did not provide direction as to how educational tasks should be
executed. Only five of the employers held viewpoints that differed. All five employed a nanny who did not have formal education. One did not see education as being of utmost importance, one provided the nanny detailed instruction on how to educate her children, two saw the education of their children as an area their nanny was lacking in, and the final employer expressed that they would not allow their nanny to engage in educational activities due to their perception of her intelligence level.

Very few employers did not see education as a part of the nanny’s job. Erin was among those few. She and her husband Mark were the only employers in this sample to have a large gap in the ages of their children. As a result, they employed a nanny for their youngest children, and their older children provided a point of reference for their experience. Having witnessed the positive outcomes of her older children, Erin, who did not use child care full-time, did not feel her nanny’s work should center around education.

[LB: How important is it that she engages in educational aspects of care?] It wasn’t that important at all. I didn’t ask her to do it and she would do it a little bit with the kids but mostly she is just very creative and arty. [LB: Why wasn’t this important to you?] I think when you have kids 4 and 5 you just realize that in the first three years you want them to have fun. And that the education component will come later and I think the experience with the other girls [older children] made me realize you don’t have to push and to just let them have fun. (Erin – employer)

Unlike the other employers, Tina described having her nanny formally sit her daughter down and go through a lesson plan with her that mimicked the learning in a day care. (Her reasons for this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.) Her nanny had not attended college but had expressed an interest in doing so in the future.

I liked Holly’s ad because she said that she worked in a day care and I still wanted… that day care. I loved that Alexa would do her numbers and letters and have a little class session. We tried to set up the basement here to be in that
section mentality where there would be the reading section and the art section.
(Tina – employer)

Tina differed from the majority who just assumed that their nanny would carry out these activities to their liking. This difference is possibly partially linked to her nanny’s educational status, but Tina’s reasoning also went deeper than that. Her preference for “class sessions” was also tied to her fear that her daughter would become too attached to Holly (see Chapter 7 for further discussion).

Two other employers, Silvia and Kendra, noted this was an area in which their prior nannies were lacking. Both later hired college educated nannies.

[LB: Do you ever instruct your nannies on educational aspects of care?]
Well you know again, Tara [prior nanny] had kind of made it clear that she wasn’t really interested in it. She told me flat out that she didn’t think it was her job to do homework for example. And she thought that was the parent’s job. And I frankly didn’t push the issue because last year my son didn’t have a lot of homework. It’s like for 15 minutes a day I’m not going to make an issue of it. (Silvia – employer)

While Silvia accepted that her nanny did not help her son with his homework, she was quite surprised when, at the end of Tara’s employment, she discovered that Tara was not reading with him. The forthcoming section, *Educational status of the nanny and age of the children*, will also elaborate on Silvia’s account of her discovery.

Like it never occurred to me, for example, that she wouldn’t be reading to Jay. And then like two weeks before she left, he was reading a book and she was all surprised that he could read. You haven’t been reading? (Silvia – employer)

Although Kendra adored her nanny, who was in the process of leaving, she too saw education as an area that was in need of improvement.

[LB: Do you ever instruct your nanny on any of the educational aspects of the job?]
I think that… That’s probably been an area that we could have done better on. But again it’s the complication of two kids. When we realized that Zoe was going to be home I bought a whole bunch of art supplies. A whole bunch of those little
preschool books about connecting A to B to C to D. Um, but I think because of the mayhem of having kind of a colicky baby and Zoe, who is kinda scattered in the first place, that hasn’t worked out very well at all. So I don’t think that there’s been any sort of formal education done. I don’t know if we’re paying for it now, I was just talking to Helen [partner] about this the other day. I feel like Zoe should be kinda further along in her, you know knowing her letters and things like that. Um, but again in the big picture of things, you know, by the time she’s 18 she’s gonna know how to write her name, she’s gonna know how to read… Kids need to be outside playing and having fun… They’re going to pick it up. You know maybe that was something I could have had Jessica work more on. But in the end like I said, she’s going to read by the time she’s out of high school. (Kendra – employer)

Kendra felt that Zoe should have a broader knowledge set for a child her age, but, like Erin, she felt that in the long run Zoe would be okay.

The final employer who addressed the education of their children and raised concerns wished to remain anonymous.

I’m speaking, not necessarily off the record but anonymously right now. I think at some point my child is going to be a lot smarter than she is. I mean book wise. But right now, she’s [the nanny] perfect because she’s fun. She knows how to save their life or to do this or do that. But there’s no way I’m letting this girl teach my children math or the ABC’s or anything like that. (Anonymous – employer)

Employers who hired an educated nanny assumed they were not only hiring a caregiver, but were providing their children with an educator or tutor. At the very least, they felt this person would engage in extracurricular activities with their child. This was something the parents in this sample and the parents of the nannies I interviewed highly valued. Research shows middle and upper-class parents find extracurricular activities to be of utmost importance (Lareau 2003).

Many of the employers in this study expected more from their nannies than just watching over and caring for their children: It was expected that they educate them. Companies such as College Nannies and Tutors, founded in 2001, were created on the
premise that parents want a child care provider who can offer more than just child care.

Some of the nannies I interviewed reported that their employers located them through the use of similar agencies.

Many of the nannies also discussed the educational and extracurricular work they performed for the families they worked for. Nicole, who was attending graduate school, for a Master’s degree in education, expressed the following sentiments:

They have me teach their son phonics three times a week, twenty minutes each time. And I think that they trust my opinion about certain things with child care. I think they feel comfortable knowing that I am experienced in it and I am going to school for it. (Nicole – nanny)

Prior to nannying, Marianna, a college student, worked at a day care center that emphasized learning. Marianna noted parents’ preference for her and as a result, she was able to secure “private” babysitting jobs from her work at the center.

A lot of parents liked me because they thought I did good stuff. Like every time I’d work with the kids we’d be doing flash cards instead of them playing by themselves. Like I thought learning was important. And especially, (town) the population is really American, like white background, Caucasian… So I would teach them numbers in Spanish or even, like influence them to learn more. Because I could provide that for them. So parents started asking me to baby-sit. So I’d baby-sit privately. (Marianna – nanny)

Claire described the way her role transitioned from a nanny to a tutor/teacher for a period of time.

When the mom started working shorter hours and still like it was expected that I needed x amount of hours per week. So it was like, oh well maybe you can do art lessons or something. (Claire – nanny)

Despite the number and range of educational activities parents in this study had their nannies perform, the decision to hire nannies with a degree was rarely only about having the nanny perform educational activities with the children. This is not to say that it wasn’t a consideration for some, but for the majority of nannies and employers in this
study, employing an educated nanny tended to be about much more than simply
educating the children. The following subsections address nannies’ and employers’
perceptions of nannies’ capabilities, motivation and values as they relate to having a
degree. The final subsection addresses the ways in which a degree signifies that the
nanny and employer will be able to relate to one another.

**Capability: You’re a college graduate**

According to most parents in my sample, hiring a nanny with child care
experience was important. Beyond this, the potential nanny’s educational status served
as a proxy for the assumptions parents made about the nanny’s abilities, both related to
child care and to other areas. Both the nannies and employers I interviewed described the
capabilities of nannies. And both parties reported that a Bachelor’s degree was often
taken as an indicator of competence.

Both Stephanie and Lynn noted that their employers assumed they possessed
certain knowledge sets or abilities because they attended college. However, the abilities
Stephanie and Lynn referred to were outside the realm of nanny work.

I would be like not able to figure something out and she would be like, “You’re a
college graduate, you can figure that out.” It was their mixer; I go to her, “Is this
broken? Or how does this work?” “Well you’re a college graduate, you can
figure that out.” (Stephanie – nanny)

There have been times when we have been talking and she’s been like, “Oh well I
know you know this because obviously you went to college.” She’s said that a
couple times. But it wasn’t like anything about the actual nanny job; it was just
like a person talking to a person… like obviously I know you know that, you’re a
smart person. (Lynn – nanny)

While a college education led employers to assume that their nannies held
capabilities in areas outside of nanny work, it also led parents to believe that their nannies
were more knowledgeable about children. They appreciated that their nannies could provide advice when needed. And it is important to note, advice was well received when it was solicited.

They like that I’m, I’ve had some courses in child development. I have a better understanding of how important it is for children to be well educated and to start off doing that when they are younger. To get them... To love books, and puzzles and to have a taste of everything. So I think that they really value that because I bring some different expertise to the table. When Margie had some questions, “Do you think Harrison should be doing this now?” I can say, “Well what I learned about in some of my classes... A two year old should be able to do this kind of puzzle or these kinds of blocks,”... And just, I guess just the intelligence level of the nanny; you’re just able to handle the job better. (Nina – nanny)

Nina posited that educational attainment was related to intelligence level, which in turn equipped educated nannies to manage the job better than uneducated ones. The feedback Melyssa’s nanny gave her not only provided Melyssa with reassurance that the nanny was qualified to care for her children, but also affirmed that she was a good mother.

I like that she’s very knowledgeable. She’s very intelligent. She knows a lot about kids. So if I say, “Oh watch out because Emily is having fits lately because she can’t take no for an answer.” She’ll say, “That’s just how kids are at that age, it’s okay.” It’s nice to have that feedback. I’m glad that she has that knowledge behind her because then she can gauge what’s going on and kind of understand it a little better. (Melyssa – employer)

Melyssa’s nanny held a Bachelor’s degree in the field of education. This led Melyssa to believe that Maureen, her nanny, had experience and was qualified to make such statements. In each instance when advice was given, Nina, a nanny, and Melyssa, an employer, noted that the employer asked for the advice.

The majority of employers in this sample reported appreciating their nannies’ knowledge and talents and nannies also noted their employers liked to utilize their abilities, which were attributed to the nannies’ educational background.
An exception to this can be seen in the example of Abigail. Abigail had taken a number of child development courses at the local community college. Prior to working as a nanny, she had been employed in a day care. Despite her experience and the information she had acquired through her coursework, she felt that her employers did not consider her viewpoints on matters related to their child, of, for that matter, on life in general.

They would make comments about not finishing school… like, “Oh well, maybe if you finish school you know.” It was just the way that they worded things, it’s like they thought very highly of themselves and because I was working for them I was below them.

[LB: Can you give me an example of a time when this occurred?]

… They would be talking about something like politics… and I would say “I like this one,” and they would be like “Oh, you don’t know,” or “You haven’t been around very long. Trust us, that’s not who you would want to vote for.” Like my opinions weren’t as good as theirs. (Abigail – nanny)

Abigail was frustrated with her employer’s attitude towards her, particularly on matters concerning their child. Because of what she learned in the courses she had taken, she grew exceptionally upset with the father’s interactions with the baby.

He would throw the baby in the air, and the baby laughed. And one time I said to him, “He laughs, but his brain is being shaken right now.” And he was like “No, it’s not.”… I was trying to subtly, without insulting him, tell him that [he was] giving his baby shaking baby syndrome. Just because the baby is laughing doesn’t mean you aren’t causing damage to his brain. He’s too young to be, he would like, go like this, [demonstrating] and fake drop the baby. And that’s slamming the baby’s brain against his forehead.

She expressed her continued efforts to address this and the father’s reaction:

And when I tried to bring it up it was just, “Oh, you don’t know what you are talking about, he likes it.” (Abigail – nanny)

Despite Abigail’s employer’s lack of confidence in her knowledge, she was right and acted in the best interest of the baby she cared for. Most employers assumed as much. In
fact, every other employer and nanny I interviewed, indicated that the college degree served as a marker of status and empowerment for nannies.

Only thirty-six percent of the nannies in this sample did not have a four year degree and were not currently enrolled in college. Of this segment, Abigail was the only nanny who felt her employer looked down on her for not having a degree, although the social differences between nannies and employers did in some cases cause conflict, a phenomenon that will be explored further in Chapter 8. The following section will address the assumptions employers had about the motivation of their nanny based on the nanny’s educational attainment.

**Motivation: I’m headed somewhere**

College attendance also served to represent the motivation of the nanny. This was particularly important for employers in this sample, as many perceived nanny work to be a “dead-end.” Completing a degree symbolized drive and effort, qualities which the employers in this study and the employers of the nannies I interviewed valued.

Although Monica was caring for an infant, she reported that her employers liked that she had a Bachelor’s degree. In reference to her employer, she stated:

They liked that I was educated, I did go through that, I didn’t just stop at high-school. That I was intelligent and I would make good decisions, you know. Also… not like tutor her but give her more education maybe… I guess just because it showed motivation. (Monica – nanny)

A number of employers expressed similar ideas.

[LB: What did you like about them having a college degree?]  
Number one they had a drive and motivation to continue their education.  
(Melyssa – employer)

[LB: Is there anything in particular that you like about your nanny having a degree?]
I think for me it just; I was making the assumption that she would be more consistent and have the communication skills that I was looking for and the reliability and dedication to something.

[LB: Can you tell me about that?]
Just, assuming if you’re going to have, and this is someone who went directly… From an undergrad degree to a graduate degree. Um sort of knew exactly what she wanted early on in her educational career. And just seemed very driven academically so I sort of translate that into she’s going to be really devoted here as a, doing her job with us. As driven as she’s been. (Ann – employer)

Employers interpreted the degree as motivation, determination, and devotion to the job. Having a child care course of study, or the desire to be a teacher, signaled to some parents that their nannies were serious about working with their children, and therefore would be a good nanny.

[LB: What do you like about your nanny having a college degree?]
I guess I just feel more safe. Not to knock somebody who doesn’t have a college degree, but I do feel more safe because it just ensures her seriousness of wanting to work with kids. (Riley – employer)

Motivation was also essential because employers recognized that children learn from nannies. Over the years, Lindsay hired a number of educated nannies. She appreciated their knowledge and felt they translated it to her children.

I like that they are motivated. I am thinking that they are pretty smart. That they have some gumption. That they want to learn. That they want to grow. And they are going to be able to share some of this knowledge and impart it on my kids. And again, there at ones that I have met that are in college and don’t have the personality, so it has to be that package deal. But I think being college educated and being younger is a bonus. (Lindsay – employer)

Margaret, a nanny who was in college, reported that her employer preferred someone who, like her, was “headed somewhere.”

I just, you know she has said that she likes the fact that I’m headed somewhere. That I have a goal. That I want to be a teacher some day. So that, it’s something I’m working towards and I’m motivated to do. Yeah if that’s all that I did, then what is that really saying? This is someone that we really like, she doesn’t go to college, but you have to go to college. (Margaret – nanny)
Imparting information to children was key. Some employers drew directly on their nannies’ knowledge and had them conduct educational activities, while others relied on them to model life goals. Having motivation, especially in terms of higher education, also indicated to employers that their nannies’ values were similar to theirs.

**Their values are going to be in line with ours**

Research has uncovered the primary reason parents prefer extended family members to care for their children: Parents believe that extended family members hold similar values and will impart them to their children (Skold 1989; Hertz and Ferguson 1995; Uttal 1999). When family members are not available for care, these parents commonly seek out child care providers who are socially similar to them (Wrigley 1995; Uttal 2002). Providers who are socially and culturally similar to parents are seen as holding similar values (Wrigley 1995). “This can be particularly important to parents with professional jobs. They got their jobs through their educational credentials, and they usually hope their children will be able to do the same” (Wrigley 1995: 8). My findings are consistent with the work of Wrigley (1995). Melyssa noted nannies’ motivation in the area of education equated to values similar to those held by herself and her family.

Because it’s a pretty big focus in our family so I figured I want somebody who had the drive and the motivation to go to college because then their values are going to be inline with ours. (Melyssa – employer)

Jennifer expressed that she felt that values and morals of nannies impacted children. She also associated “values” and “morals” with social class status.

[LB: How important are these (socioeconomic) similarities or differences to you?]

…. The more important thing is the values and your, and the morals that you have, how you impact the children in that way.

[LB: And do you think any of those come with class status or do you think it’s irrelevant?]
(Pause) I think some of it comes with class status.

[LB: Can you describe that?]  
Well you know, drawing reference to the nanny that I had problems with which I had to do a couple times here, um, she seemed like she was from fairly maybe lower-middle class… She didn’t seem to have the same values in the end as some of the other girls that I’ve employed since… (Jennifer – employer)

[LB: Did this lead you to make different choices in hiring later?]  
… I tried to make a concerted effort to hire girls that were in college that um, you know I think education may have, and a desire for further education may have a bearing on… your values and your morals. (Jennifer – employer)

A negative experience with a previous nanny led Jennifer to seek out women who were socially similar and who shared her values. Susan and I spoke about her hiring women with career aspirations outside of being a nanny. The nanny she currently employs recently graduated from college, as had her more recent nannies. Recognizing that their nannies play a significant role in their children’s lives, parents sought nannies that shared their values.

[LB: Is there anything you like about them being cared for by someone with other career goals?]  
Oh yeah. I think that the children, um, are then being supervised by someone who has really similar values to us. Who is ambitious, who has a can do attitude. I think that then gets transmitted to the children and we want the kids to feel like everything’s possible. That their headed good places and I think I that being cared for by someone like that is really helpful. (Susan – employer)

It is clear that, for the parents in my study, college attendance was seen as an indicator of values and similarity. There were a number of reasons why parents reported liking that their nanny had a college degree. Nannies also presented an array of explanations as to why the parents who employed them liked that they had either graduated from, or were currently attending, college. In the section that follows, I examine the concept of “relatability.”
Relatability: Having those similar experiences

Embedded in employers’ preference for educated nannies is the feeling that the values that education engenders make those who have them more familiar with each other. Both nannies and employers assumed they were socially similar, and could relate to one another based on their educational status. Having this form of connection was of utmost importance to both parties. Wrigley (1995) writes,

“By hiring class peers, parents are minimizing distinctions between child care as they do it and as their employees do it. These caregivers operate with some authority, preparing children for a cultural world they themselves know and understand. Many of the parents who hire them see child-rearing attitudes as deeply rooted, formed by people’s own experiences growing up and by their exposure to education” (50).

Both the employers and the nannies in my study reaffirmed Wrigley’s (1995) point. Both groups reported that possessing social similarities eased their interactions with one another. Social class backgrounds, social experience, college attendance, career aspirations, and overall interests were each referenced when employers and nannies spoke of “relatability.”

One of the initial goals of this research was examining nannies’ experiences working for a stay-at-home mother. Thirteen of the twenty-five nannies I interviewed worked for a mother who was a stay-at-home mother or worked from home at least part-time. According to these nannies, the issue of “relatability” increased in importance when nannies and mothers spent large amounts of time together. Each of the nannies included in this section were employed by a stay-at-home or work-from-home mother. And for most of these nannies the college degree served as an indicator of both job competence and the potential for a high degree of relatability.

Not only is it like obviously someone’s paid for it… But there’s something I think about the more education you get, kind of like people, sometimes wrongly assume that you’ll do a better job. (Suzanne – nanny)
Nannies and employers in this sample also had similar social experiences, which allowed
them to relate to one another. Suzanne once lived abroad. She stated:

[LB: But with the other family, do you think that they wanted their child to be
exposed to someone who is cultured and educated?]… Yeah I do think that they did. I think that, I know that they were very
desperate to find someone because their au pair was coming from [Country] and
she was being delayed for some reason. And so I came along and it was like wow
not only is she, she’s got a good personality, she’s available, but she has some
things in common with us. So I think that’s huge for people. And it’s not
necessarily a bad thing.

[LB: Why do you think people like that, to have something like that in common?]… It’s just kind of like easier, things just kind of like flow. You can talk about
things that the kids can relate to, things that the parents can relate to… I learned
to cut the English way, simple things like that. That I was like them really. I
think that reassures people. (Suzanne – nanny)

Having shared experiences “reassured” employers that their nannies were like them, that
she was someone they could relate to. Nina expressed that attending college gave her a
topic of conversation to discuss with her employer, and having a consistent thing to talk
about allowed Margie to relate to her.

She’ll point out this or that about (name of college) and I’ll talk about my time at
(name of college) and we’ve talked about college things like that. So they’ve
definitely said to me, “We like the fact that you’re college educated, we like the
fact that you’re intelligent.” Plus I think just you know the parent has to be able
to get along with the nanny too, not just the kid. Having someone like me in
there, Margie and I can discuss things… We’re able to hold a conversation
between us about current events or what’s going on. And I think that she really
apprites that, being a stay-at-home mom where a lot of time she spends a lot
of time by herself. I think she values that, having someone to talk to.

[LB: Can you tell me more about that? She went to grad school, you’re going.] We’ve talked about all those things. I think it just offers another way for them to
relate to you so that they feel more comfortable leaving you with their children.
From the very first time I met Todd and Margie I felt very, very comfortable with
them…. Just having that relatability. Having those similar experiences has really
made her more comfortable with me and allowed her to get to know me in a
variety of ways so that she can confidently say, “I’m completely comfortable
leaving you with my children.” … “To be solely responsible for them sometimes.”
So I think that that is a big factor too. If you’re trying to entrust your kids to
someone you really know nothing about, you don’t know what kind of person
they are, what their background is. Whenever I have kids I want someone that I kind of have a good feel for. (Nina – nanny)

Nina’s statement provides further support for my findings that having a nanny for an employer was not entirely about whether the nanny was a competent child care provider. Particularly for stay-at-home or work-from-home mothers, being able to interact on a personal level with their nannies was of utmost importance. The commonalities between Nina and Margie also allowed Nina to feel “very comfortable” in the relationship.

Kristin also felt college attendance provided a point of connection for her and her employer:

[LB: Is there anything they like about the fact that you went to college?] I guess its just more experience about being on my own, that would be something they would like about it. But they never really said, “Oh we love that you went away to college.” But they went away to college so it connects us again… I don’t know if they would hire someone that didn’t. Debbie’s very, very well educated. She went to all private schools, her knowledge is vast, her vocabulary, she’s just very well educated. So is Bob. And my vocabulary isn’t that great, but I still went to college and I still experienced all the class work. I don’t think they would hire someone that did not go to college for the experience and for just you know their general knowledge. (Kristin – nanny)

Besides a college degree, nannies noted their employers sought someone who was “American” and “young.” They wanted someone who could carry a conversation. Each of these factors also served as indicators of “relatability.”

I got the feeling that they wanted someone who was American, who was educated and was relatable. Just because I think Margie was looking for someone that she could relate well to, that she would be comfortable having around. Someone that could hold a conversation, you know that we could talk about things. (Nina – nanny)

Hiring a college student, it’s somebody who is going to probably have more energy. There’s probably not going to be a language barrier of any sort of form… It’s going to be the first language. You’re going to be able to drive. You’re going to be able to keep up with the latest things and whatever’s going on.
Whether it be the music that’s out or what’s going on on TV. Or even the new shows for younger kids and somebody who’s older may not be as interested in keeping up with those kids. (Claire – nanny)

The grandparents of the children Lynn cared for visited frequently and discussed college with her. It provided a point of discussion for them too.

I mean they bring up [college name] all the time, where I went to school… They talk to me about it all the time, especially the grandfather. (Lynn – nanny)

Employers also discussed the importance of being able to connect with their nannies. Both Linda and Cathy hired women from local colleges that they had an affiliation with. Cathy worked from home full-time and Linda part-time.

I mean I went to (name of school) university. So I can relate to them on that level. (Cathy)

Linda did not specifically seek out a nanny with a degree; however, she noted that due to her familiarity with college students, this was a population she felt comfortable with.

[LB: Did you specifically seek out someone who has a college degree or was in college?]
It wasn’t something that we outwardly discussed as criteria, but I have to say when I looked at the applications, and I know college students so in part it’s familiarity. And it’s also having them connected. We’re hiring people that A, we don’t know. So we’re trying to screen them and get to know them so if they’re affiliated with an institution that I have a connection with it’s helpful to me. So even though we didn’t outwardly decide to do that… I’m sure that that has been, yeah I’m sure. (Linda – employer)

Cathy and Linda felt much more comfortable leaving their children in the care of someone who had a connection to an institution they were associated with. Cathy exclusively hires women who attend the same college she graduated from.

[LB: Have you used any criteria to hire the nannies you have had?]
It’s funny because, before they obviously start I interview them. I talk to them. And I just kind of feel them out… If I think I can click with this person, I can relate to this person. And you know if I know that they are smart, I can relate to them. (Cathy – employer)
Both Christina and Cathy noted college as a point of connection to their nannies.

Although Christina worked for pay outside of the home, she recognized that the career interests of the nannies she has employed built a connection between her and them:

[LB: Can you tell me about the similarities and the differences between your economic status and your nannies?]
The first nanny, she was a sophomore in college… So obviously academically she was attending college, I have attended college… She was going for (area of study). I’m a [profession]. So there was a similarity as far as she wanted to work with people and help people and she was seeking a profession to do so. The second nanny was actually a [type of] nurse, she had gotten her degree in [country] but she was a [type of] nurse there. And then, this one she’s getting her Bachelor’s in [area]. So everybody is going to be college educated. (Christina – employer)

Employers’ selection of care was related to their comfort level. Feeling as if they could relate to the nanny and as if she was socially similar to them allowed them to feel comfortable with her as a caregiver. Not only did parents feel more at ease leaving their children in the care of someone who was associated with an institution they were connected to, or who held similar occupational interests, but also, being able to relate to the nanny on a personal level was of great importance for employers. Being able to relate to their nannies also indicated to employers that their nannies would be an appropriate role model for their children, as the following section will address.

**Role model: You’re going to college**

As noted previously, many parents in this sample sought to surround their children with individuals who occupied similar social strata. In this sample, a number of employers and nannies indicated that the nanny was a positive role model for the children. Just as education signifies similarity, it also signifies role model status.
Parents sought to portray college attendance as the norm. And the nannies they employed played a large role in this process.

They talk about that I’m in college. “Claire is in college,” “Claire is in college.” The kids ask how many years do you have left in college? And years ago, you know they understood what applying to college meant. [LB: What do your employers like about this?] Because it’s emphasized, I think especially growing up around here it’s a given that you’re going to school. At least 95 percent of the time. You always have cases where some kids just really aren’t meant to be. But growing up it was ingrained in my head, you’re going to school… you’re going to college. This is going in for your college account, whatever my parents had growing up. It’s just a given these days I think. (Claire – nanny)

While Claire noted, that not everyone was “meant” for college, in the world of the children she nannied for, college was a given. Kristin also addressed a key component of being a role model, which included modeling similar experiences for the children she cared for.

When I started they knew I went to college. She [employer] talks a lot, like there will be a song on the radio, “Oh that’s from mommy’s high school.” Or “That’s mommy’s college.” So they know those words. And when they told them that I was going to go back to school to become a teacher… She said, “You know she went to college for four years just like mommy and daddy did but she was doing work for business like daddy in the city.” She always references, “Now she’s decided she wants to be a teacher because she always works with you guys in the house. And she decided she wanted to be a teacher like your Miss whatever. And so she needs to go back to college for another two years and she needs to take classes like you have your reading and you have your math.” She always references like that to explain it to him. (Kristin – nanny)

Brian, an employer, expressed that his daughter saw Maureen, his nanny, as a role model:

My daughter, I would say, thinks she’s like her best friend. Like wonder woman. She’s someone that she admires and looks up to. (Brian – employer)

Brian stated he liked being able to tell his daughter that Maureen went to college. When asked why he replied:
[LB: What do you like about that? (Being able to tell his daughter that Maureen has a degree)]

Because I know that the relationship that she has with Maureen is different than the relationship she has with myself and my wife. It’s not mommy and daddy. You know occasionally when Maureen leaves my daughters like, “Can I go with you?” Or, “Stay here.” So I know she loves Maureen. So I think to have another person in her life that she respects that she can say oh wow Maureen went to college too. Okay, this might be the thing for me. (Brian – employer)

While the employers indicated that college attendance made their nannies positive role models for their children, college graduation and attendance was also understood by nannies as something that makes them a positive role model for the children they care for.

I think he looks up to me. Just because I’m the fun babysitter who comes and plays with him. And he’s in school too. To see that I’m in school, that I have to go to school. And I try to talk it up; “I have to go to my class!”… And he seems pretty interested in wanting to know. (Margaret – nanny)

I think that I’m probably a good role model for him. Dad didn’t finish college. And mom only has a Bachelor’s degree. So I guess in a way I am a good role model of continuing education. (Nicole – nanny)

Yeah I think that they liked it because their children are older, going to middle-school, they liked the fact that someone could help them with their homework and that kind of stuff and still be kind of a role model for going on. (Vanessa – nanny)

It is clear that parents prefer to have a nanny who is a positive influence, and therefore a role model. Education was a marker for positive influence for both nannies and employers. A central component of “role model” status was that educated nannies had “other things going on.”

Other things going on

The college degree was also discussed by those in this sample in relation to possessing aspirations outside of nanny work. Alternative goals indicated role model status. Bakan and Stasiulis (1995) uncovered the preference of some Canadian parents in hiring women who did not aspire to be nannies forever. Like these individuals, the
employers in my sample appreciated having a nanny whose long-term career goal was not to work as a nanny.

Furthermore, nannies also recognized that their employers appreciated their talents outside of being a nanny.

[LB: Do your employer’s like that you have a degree?] I’m sure that they don’t want their kids to grow up to be a nanny. I think it’s them thinking, you’re just a nanny. But the fact that I have a degree, I chose to do it… But that the degree was there and something I could fall back on. (Vanessa – nanny)

Vanessa contrasted her temporary status as a nanny with someone who was forced to work as a nanny long-term. Being “just a nanny” indicated that nannies did not have “other things going on,” that they were not nannying by “choice,” that they lacked aspirations outside of nanny work and did not have other viable career options. Kristin reiterated Vanessa’s perspective. She felt her employers were eager to show their children that her working as a nanny was only temporary.

[LB: Do they [employers] like having a nanny that’s going for her masters?] Yeah I think, I think it just shows the children that you know… You have a Kris in your life. And she is working with us, but she is also doing these great things for herself. She’s not just working in our house; she’s doing other things to better her life. (Kristin – nanny)

Cynthia, an employer, discussed the progression of her nanny’s life. She appreciated that her children were able to see her nanny evolve into someone who had “other things going on” beyond nanny work.

I think that they’re watching her grow up… From a child’s perspective they’re watching someone who sat on the floor and played with them all of the time and now they see her studying for school. They didn’t used to see her do that. They see her getting dressed to go to work at her other job… They see that there’s other things going on there… I think it’s positive…

[LB: Can you tell me more about what you like about that, that she has other things going on as opposed to just her job here?]
I think that my children are at an age where they’re starting to recognize that there’s a big world around them. For a long time kids are very self centered and then they start to look around and they kind of go, “Oh!” And it’s nice for them to see that the people who are around them also have other things going on in their life. (Cynthia – employer)

When I spoke with Cynthia, her nanny, Hannah, had been working for her for three and a half years. Hannah began as a nanny without “other things going on” but, over the years, she began to have higher aspirations and as a result, nannying became a temporary profession. Cynthia, as well as the majority of employers and nannies in this sample, felt nanny work was best utilized as transitory profession. (Chapter 6 will expand on this idea.)

I look at being a nanny as being a stepping stone, and there is nothing wrong, some people maybe that is what they want to do, but.. I don’t necessarily want to hire a 35 year old nanny. Not that I wouldn’t, but I would have to meet the right one. It’s a learning experience for them. It’s a learning experience for the kids. They get to grow, like kind of together. And they are bringing in a whole new out look, a fresher take on everything because they are out there doing other things. And, I don’t want to say it’s a break… But it is just a change in pace for them so they can be a little more refreshed. Whereas if they were doing it full time or if this was all they were doing, I would have to think they were getting jaded. (Lindsay – employer)

Embedded in this statement is the idea that the parents in this sample expected their children to go on to college and did not want them to aspire to be a nanny for life. Due to the employers preference that their nannies have alternative career aspirations, some employers accepted that having these goals meant the nanny would not work for them long-term.

Susan, an employer, expressed that her most successful relationships and arrangements with nannies have been with those who have interests outside of being a nanny:
I also was going to say that I find that communication is such a key part of a successful relationship in terms of being able to communicate expectations, having them understood… In terms of being able to communicate how the work is going for the nanny and saying when things are not going as well as she would like, or would have other needs. And I think that is also something I saw being done better by someone who was better educated. And I don’t think it was the education itself. I think again, it’s a marker for the attributes that allow you to be successful in school rather than the coursework that they had. I think they go part in parcel. Like being able to articulate without emotion. You know, in a constructive way. To be able to look at things professionally… Something that I know is successful for me, is working with a nanny who I think is… quietly assertive and communicative. Someone who can, who’s a team member and has those abilities. I think it always goes better. (Susan)

In Susan’s experience, nannies who held career aspirations outside of nanny work were better able to articulate themselves and did not take criticism personally. Due to their other career goals, they did not see their job as a direct reflection of themselves. Therefore, when issues arose they were better able to act in a “professional” manner.

Riley was also willing to sacrifice longevity in order to hire a nanny who was not looking at the position as a long-term one.

[LB: The down side of (the degree) is that she could at any time get a teaching job.] You know that was always expected. She did tell us when she first started that she wasn’t looking to get a teaching job right away… So I knew that she was going to be with us for a while. But that was always the expectation, that she would get a job.

[LB: But it’s a risk you are willing to take, why?] I guess because we got comfortable with her. I would rather just kind of hold on and see what happens because she is so used to the girls. I just think at the age that they are at, two is tough and I don’t want to look for someone else. I’d rather just kind of hold on. (Riley – employer)

By “get a job,” Riley meant that her nanny would obtain a teaching position, but it also implied that nanny work was not a “job,” a notion Chapter 6 will address in more depth. Others saw education as a “double-edged sword.” When I spoke with Kendra, her nanny of almost two years was about to leave. She had recently hired a woman to care for her
children who had just graduated from college. When asked if there was anything in particular she liked about this new nanny having a degree Kendra responded:

It’s a double edge sword. You know, when you look at her resume and you see that she’s got a 3.9 GPA and she’s, you know, bright, had done interesting things. You know that you’re not going to have her for long. It’s a tradeoff. It’s like, you know it’s nice to have someone smart and bright and whatever, but on the other hand, of course they’re going to have aspirations and how long is she going to be with us? (Kendra – employer)

Employers like Riley and Kendra were willing to trade longevity for education.

Employers and nannies frequently reported employers preference to have a nanny with “other things going on.” Their explanations suggest that long-term nanny work is not a viable option for their children or the children they cared for. The section that follows, however, addresses the issues that arise when employers do not welcome their nannies’ movement onto employment outside of their home.

**Nannies: Must possess abilities, but must not act on them**

I began this study with the assumption that employers would seek college educated nannies because these nannies desired to move on to formal employment. They would be able to draw on their nannies talents for a short period of time and this aspiration would make the nannies a role model for their children. The findings from this sample however, indicate the opposite. The majority of employers, and the employers of nannies I spoke with, preferred to use their nannies talents to benefit their children for as long as possible and were in no rush for her to get a “real job.”

Employers such as Kendra and Susan were the exception. Kendra recently hired a nanny with a Bachelor’s degree and she hoped the nanny would work for her for one year. Referring to her nanny’s impending departure, she commented:
And when she decides to leave, you know I’m gonna, good for her. (Kendra – employer)

Susan also did not wish to keep her nanny’s talents for herself. But she spoke about benefiting from these skills.

[LB: Do you see this position as sort of a stepping-stone for many of the people you now hire?]
I don’t perceive it that way but I now find… having had 10 years of experience… that’s the pattern I’ve seen for success… those have been the most successful people, are people who have abilities beyond being a nanny. But that we get to borrow those abilities for a while and take advantage of them. (Susan – employer)

While it is unclear why Kendra accepted that her nanny would move on to formal employment, Susan’s willingness to have her nanny work for her temporarily stemmed from issues she had had with career nannies, which I will elaborate on in Chapter 6.

Contrary to my initial assumptions, many employers noted they would prefer to have their nannies stay with them rather than move on to pursue a “career.”

Lindsay was pleased that her nanny had graduated from college and was doing post-graduate work. As noted in the Motivation section, based on her nanny’s goals, she felt her nanny was very driven. Despite this, she expressed that she’d prefer to have her nanny caring for her children over having her nanny go to school:

[LB: Do you like being able to tell your daughter that Barbara is in school?] I would rather tell Robin that Barbara is coming over, quite honestly! But it is good, because that is important, I mean we have 529’s for both kids, it’s important; I want both my kids to go to school; it is important. (Lindsay – employer)

Nannies also found a disconnect between their employers’ expressions and actions. Many felt their employers appreciated having a nanny who was bright and motivated, but did not appear to want them to use their talents in an area outside of their home. The following demonstrates nannies’ accounts of this experience.
Meredith graduated from college and became employed in an area where the work was seasonal. Because of this, she sought out a nanny position in the off months. Her employer was fully aware that she had other career aspirations. When I asked her if she had had conversations with the mother about going into a different line of work, she replied:

No, we haven’t really talked about that at all. We don’t, like I said it’s almost like they know that I have it [college degree] but it’s just, you know I’ve had conversations with Amanda about like looking for things. One of my best friends is moving to [location] and she wants me to come… And I told Amanda about it… and so we got into a discussion about it. But then like, I told her about it and then, instantly we started talking about how expensive it is to live in New York. Almost like, I told her, “Oh well there’s all these jobs… in New York for business.”… And all of a sudden it changed to how expensive it is to live there. Like, “No, you shouldn’t go live there. It’s so expensive.” (Meredith – nanny)

Marianna experienced a situation similar to Meredith’s. When she reiterated her goal of attending graduate school to her employers, she felt her employers were mad and punished her.

I think it upsets them that I’m going to leave…. And I told her next fall I am going to move… So she knew that but then it’s like, even if I say no on the weekends you get upset with me. So you’re going to be really upset at me when I leave. And then I even mentioned to her that, I was like, “Oh yeah my internship gave me a scholarship to go here”… I’m like, “they even offered me a fulltime position, starting in May.” And then after that… I started working less hours… My hours went down. [LB: When was that?]
It was in December. Cause the week I made 700, that’s when I went to [employers vacation home] also. And then the following week I only worked like 8 hours. And then after that my hours just went down like 11, 12 and then they went back up. (Marianna – nanny)

Like Marianna, Nina aspired to attend graduate school and was upfront with her employer about her goals. Nina felt that this was something her employer could appreciate given that she had attended graduate school. I asked her how her employers felt about the fact that this was not going to be her job forever, and she stated:
I think at the beginning they didn’t think that it would be so bad. But now that I’ve started talking about it more I can really see that I think it’s starting to stress them out a little bit. Which is hard because on the one hand, you want to be there for them. You are attached to the family. But I also have to really stick to what I want. So Margie has said to me, “Is there any way that you would put off grad school for like another year?” (Nina – nanny)

Later in our discussion I asked Nina if her employers liked being able to show their children that working as a nanny was not a long-term career for her. She stated:

I feel like, they want someone that has those aspirations, but they don’t really want them to do the aspirations…. I guess it’s that they want someone who has the education, has these goals, who is this driven person, who is motivated and takes the initiative. But then they don’t really want you to do it because they want you to work for them forever. Okay, you have this great education; we want you to use it only in terms of our children. We don’t want you to use it to go to grad school. We don’t want you to use these four years that you spent at undergrad to further yourself. We just want you here doing us, but we like that you have that. We like that it contributes to who you are, but we don’t want you to actually do that. (Nina – nanny)

Situations such as this were incredibly bothersome to nannies. Their decisions to leave were complicated by their attachment to the children. (I will elaborate on this in Chapter 7). They also grew frustrated with their employers who held professional jobs and degrees. They felt their employers should respect their decisions and understand their desire to attain advanced degrees.

Nina expressed the contradiction in Margie’s statements and behaviors:

It’s a contradiction with them because they’ll say one thing and do another. Especially with Margie. You know she’ll say that she understands because she went to graduate school. She got the higher education degree, she gets it. But on the same hand she wants me there forever, all of the time, taking care of their 17 children forever… I feel like they should understand it because we have a similar background going on but I don’t know that they really do on some days. (Emphasis original) (Nina – nanny)

Employing a nanny with abilities beyond child care was essential for most employers in this study. Although the nannies I interviewed reported that their employers wanted them
to possess other abilities, they felt their employer did not want them to act on or utilize their talents. This could be quite frustrating for some of the nannies as their goal in life was not to work as a nanny forever. Some nannies felt their educational status and alternate career aspirations fed into the “image” their employers sought to create of their family life and social status.

*Image: I have the smartest nanny*

A number of nannies perceived image to be very important to their employers. This became increasingly apparent in our discussion of education. Samantha reported that Rachel, her employer liked that she had her Master’s. However, by Samantha’s account, employing a nanny with a Master’s degree was not about the information she could impart to the child; it was about Rachel, her employer, seeking to uphold her upper-middle-class lifestyle.

When she had my resume in front of her, I mean I could have had my Masters in shoveling poop. But because I came with my Master’s degree, um, oh good she’s educated. She’s not like this, you know, girl working at the grocery store or something like that. No, she’s very image oriented. (Samantha – nanny)

Like Rachel, Samantha’s employer, Marianna’s employer, Jackie, was not concerned with Marianna’s field of study.

She never looked at my resume because she has a Mac and I have Windows. So she hired me based on, I go to (college)... Because if you didn’t even look at my resume, why are you hiring me? (Marianna – nanny)

Both found their employers to be superficial and “image oriented.” Samantha and Marianna felt their employers bragged about them due to their educational attainment. In discussing what her employers liked about her attending college, Marianna stated:

I think it makes them feel better that they have someone who is educated... Like you brag about me to your friends, because I’m sure you do. And I just feel like
she’s going to be like, well after Marianna graduates, we did give her a job. Like it makes them feel better… And then even with Wendy [previous nanny] she’s like a public school teacher. So she’s like, oh yeah, like she’ll push it up there. Oh Wendy works at [city] public school and Marianna goes to [college] so I think it’s envious for everyone else to see their nannies like that. (Marianna – nanny)

When I asked Samantha to elaborate on the “image” component of her statement, she replied:

How much time do you have? It’s like she didn’t see me as a, as the loving person that I am, that I could provide for her child. She just saw me as um, just this like figure to show off to her friends… And I’m a smart figure. And yeah, as far as the Master’s degree, she was just, like uh, literally with her and all of her superficial friends, [sing song] “I have the smartest nanny.” I’m sure, was like her deal when she saw Masters’… I mean maybe the counseling aspect impressed her. But the fact that I came from working with college [students] and… High School kids. I mean if I was a mom, and looking for a nanny, I mean I guess, (laughs) I’d say, “Well do you have experience with babies?” Cause you work with a total different stage of development. (Samantha – nanny)

Both Samantha and Marianna found their employer’s priorities to be off. Marianna could not understand how her employer could hire her without looking at her resume and

Samantha felt that, after Rachel saw the word “Master’s,” she did not care that

Samantha’s experience was not with infants, but with high school and college students.

Samantha recognized that she was not the only nanny Rachel had hired in an effort to bolster her “image.”

She’s all about image. That elderly woman, she took her because she was the nanny for one of the [NFL team] players in [City]. She’s like, “Well I figured she had to be good.” I’m like that’s how you made you’re assessment in choosing the person that’s going to be with your child all day? (Samantha – nanny)

In these instances nannies felt their employers based their selection of a nanny on prestige rather than on qualifications.

While Lynn did not express her belief that her employer was superficial, she did note that her employer discussed her educational attainment with friends. This affirmed

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the nannies’ beliefs that their employers talk about them and their abilities to other
people.

I was down the street with Paul at a friend’s house... The mom asked me... What
I was doing with my life after being a nanny. I guess she just assumed that I
wasn’t doing this for the rest of my life... I said, “Well I graduated college last
year,” and she goes, “Oh, well I know that. Eliza already told me that one. I
knew that much about you.” So Eliza had conveyed to another mom that I had
gone to college. (Lynn – nanny)

College attendance was a part of some employers image oriented world. It was
also a part of the world all of the employers in this sample hoped their children would
inhabit. In the environment in which most of the educated nannies I spoke with worked,
working as a nanny as a long-term career goal was not an option for them or the children
they cared for. This worked well for many families who did not wish for long-term care
and was especially suitable for those who sought to uphold a particular image of their
family.

**Educational status of the nanny and age of the children**

Wrigley’s (1995) research uncovered that parents believed that uneducated
women were suitable to hire for care when their children were young. As their children
aged, parents often reassessed the situation and made different choices. This was true for
Silvia and Kurt as well as other parents in my study. When Silvia and Kurt initially
decided to hire a nanny, they turned to a woman who worked in the day care center their
son attended. Silvia and Kurt’s prior nanny was uneducated but possessed markers of
similarity. They paid their current nanny almost four dollars an hour more than their
previous nanny because she was a teacher and had a college degree:
And the only downside was that she was asking significantly more money than I was initially willing to pay, but we negotiated on that. Um, and my son’s going into second grade, and she’s a second grade teacher. (Silvia – employer)

Silvia was pleased with her decision to hire an educated teacher and notes the differences between the two nannies:

I had a little higher standards, and I actually have seen the difference… Tara, our previous one, she was very good with babies and younger kids and a really good nurturer… But Andrea has been much more engaged in terms of doing activities. They, they’re doing the reading program together, and she’s actively doing… All that stuff that Tara actually wouldn’t do. Um, Tara was not comfortable… And also part of is market driven, as well. You know, once she responded to my ad, and I knew her and wanted to work with her specifically… I know that as a teacher she can make significantly more tutoring. Um, not that she’d do that every hour of the day. And I knew it was just going to be for the summer, so I felt a little bit more comfortable with that price point. (Silvia – employer)

Much like the employers in Wrigley’s (1995) research, several employers in this sample followed similar trends. Eight of the twenty-seven employers I interviewed made the switch from an uneducated nanny to one with a college degree as their children aged much like the employers in Wrigley’s (1995) study, “Middle-class parents increasingly move their children into their own cultural orbit as they get older” (41). A great deal of my discussions with employers and nannies centered around cultural ideologies and parents desires for achieving social similarity between their nannies and their families. The employment of a status similar was a large part of this process.

**Scheduling: Hiring women in school**

Having an educated nanny came with a number of benefits for employers. Employers sought a caregiver who was motivated and could serve as a role model. However, role model status often led to scheduling conflicts due to the multiple roles that nannies fulfilled. The variability in college class schedules, and the fact that the women
they hired often did not reside year round in the area they attended college, led to scheduling difficulties. Most employers, however, valued the educational path that their nannies were on and were flexible regarding the sometimes inconsistent scheduling and conflicts that arose due to the shifting nature of the college schedule.

In the past couple of years it’s kind of been based upon the college schedule, so as they graduate, um, it would be like for maybe a couple years. And sometimes they are girls that may not be from the (town) area so they would be with me from semester to semester. So I do see a change really based upon that calendar or academic schedule. (Jennifer – employer)

Jennifer, a mother of three, sacrificed consistency and specifically sought college students to watch her children, while Christina worked her schedule around her nanny’s college courses.

[LB: Do you see your current arrangement as long term?] That’s up in the air. It actually depends on, so this semester she has classes twice a week which works out very well for me because she’s off Monday, Wednesday, Friday and I’ve been able to work it out with my job so that I work those days but I don’t know as far as next semester what her class schedule will entail. I would like it to be long term in that it would be great for the next year or two but it just depends on her schedule if it matches up with mine. (Christina – employer)

Margaret, a nanny, also reported that her employer preferred someone who was enrolled in school and was more than willing to accommodate her schedule.

The mother, we were actually just talking about this the other day. She said that she really likes the fact that I’m in school, that I’m headed somewhere. That I’m in classes that are somewhat pertinent to what I’m doing… I have a goal… she said that she’d much rather have someone like me, younger and… headed towards getting a degree… than an older woman who isn’t really doing much. Which is basically what she just said to me… the way she said it was just funny because she’s just so happy with the fact that I’m in school and that I’m going somewhere. Even though it might mean it’s harder to schedule hours and everything. But she prefers it, she said. It was actually when we were talking about hours for next semester, how that might work out. And she said she’d be flexible because she likes the fact that I’m in school so she’s more willing to be flexible. (Margaret – nanny)
Despite the benefits, trying to be flexible about a nanny’s schedule had a downside. When I asked Cathy to tell me about working around the schedules of so many people, she responded:

It’s very difficult. It really is. Sometimes I question if I really want to do this. But I feel that it has worked out for me… like I am on a track and I don’t feel like I want to change it and disrupt it necessarily. But there are always breaks, and they go home. They are not all from around here so then there is the one person that lives around here that I can depend on, usually comes in and is able to sit during those times which is great. It has worked out because of that… If that was not the case I don’t think I would be able to do it. (Cathy – employer)

Jennifer, Christina and Cathy each worked full-time, as did Margaret’s employer. These employers could not make plans beyond the course of a semester and as a result, their nannies’ schedules led to conflicts. Nonetheless, each expressed a preference for hiring women who were in college. This demonstrates the strong preference of employers in this sample to hire an educated nanny. This preference is also reflected in nannies’ pay.

**Paying the price for an educated nanny**

Parents who sought college educated women were willing to pay the price both in terms of scheduling and monetary compensation. Nannies with and without a degree reported receiving higher pay than the employers in this study expressed paying. But, by the accounts of both groups, college educated nannies earned more than those without a degree. Nannies’ pay ranged from $10.00 an hour to approximately $44.00 an hour. The median hourly earnings for college educated nannies was $15.00, while those without degree reported a median pay rate of $13.25 an hour. It was important to use the median to paint an accurate picture of earnings because some nannies earned hourly rates that were significantly higher than others. One nanny who had a Bachelor’s degree earned over $40.00 an hour, a rate that was more than twice as high as any other nanny in this
sample. The rate parents reported paying their nannies ranged from $8.75 an hour to $16.50 an hour. Parents in my sample who employed a nanny with a Bachelor’s degree paid a median of $12.00 an hour, while those who hired a nanny without a Bachelor’s degree paid a median of $10.00 and hour.

Although women with Bachelor’s degrees and those who were attending college were paid more than those without a degree, most employers did not acknowledge that they paid their nannies based on their education level. Linda employed two nannies, one in college and one in graduate school. She paid her nanny who was in college an hourly rate of $12.00 an hour and her nanny who was a college graduate $13.00 an hour, although she did not offer a justification for this practice. Silvia was one of the few employers who did offer an explanation for the pay differential. I asked her what she paid her present and past nanny and she said:

I paid my previous nanny 12 dollars an hour, sort of… it was actually more like 13 something an hour because she got paid for hours she wasn’t working. This one is 16.50 an hour. [LB: So quite a jump.] She’s a teacher (laughs). (Silvia – employer)

Both employers and nannies agreed, college educated nannies should receive a higher wage because of their degree. Sage discussed her hesitance in searching online for nanny work:

Like I was looking at Craigslist but you know; I’m a little leery because I know that I am college educated and I know that I do have a certain price. (Sage – nanny)

Sage’s statement is reflective of the fact that child care as an occupation is quite often underpaid, and that having a degree entitled her to a higher wage.
Kristin, a nanny who had numerous years of child care experience and was enrolled in graduate school, discussed her desire for greater pay:

I think my time is worth 20 dollars an hour… I am educated; I have 14 years experience… so I feel like I’m worth that much. (Kristin – nanny)

Sage and Kristin commanded a wage of 20 dollars an hour and 15 dollars an hour respectively. Their hourly rate was higher than the average reported by both nannies and employers.

As noted throughout this chapter, my findings are mostly consistent with Wrigley’s (1995) research. A major difference however, was found in parents’ accounts of pay. According to Wrigley (1995), parents who were physically present to supervise their caregiver “may not see a reason to pay high wages to an experienced or acculturated worker” (21). In contrast to Wrigley’s (1995) contention, employers who were stay-at-home or work-from-home parents in this sample paid their nanny an average hourly amount of $13.70. This rate was substantially higher than other employers in this sample reported.

The hiring strategy of employers in this sample serves as an additional point of departure from Wrigley’s (1995) work. Employers in this sample who were stay-at-home or work-from-home parents and did not utilize an educated nanny for care were a minority. Less than thirty percent of these employers hired an uneducated nanny. This demonstrates that hiring a socially similar person for care was of great importance for this group, not of lesser importance as Wrigley (1995) posited. I turn now to examine the exceptions to the trends I have explored in this chapter.
The exceptions: I wouldn’t hire someone with a degree

The employers who indicated that they opted not to hire or would not hire a nanny who was in college or had a degree were the minority. However, their accounts provide important insight into employers’ perceptions of nanny work. A number of the participants in my study were interested in hearing about my study and my sampling strategy. Discussions such as these were usually reserved until the conclusion of the interview. When I noted that one-half of my sample was comprised of educated nannies or employers who hired an educated nanny, Lillian stated:

I don’t think I’d want to hire someone with a college degree, because it’s like, why are you a nanny? (Lillian – employer)

Mark, who hired a nanny who was in her late forties like himself, held the same beliefs as Lillian. Mark also reported he would not hire someone who was college educated. In reference to hiring a college educated nanny, he stated:

I probably would never have thought of it. I think if I had a younger 20 to 25 year old nanny… I probably wouldn’t give them as much respect. And I’d probably enter into the situation and think of them more like a babysitter. And I’d probably be a little less trusting and it wouldn’t be as comfortable of a relationship. (Mark – employer)

This was a sentiment most employers in this sample did not express – not always because they sought an educated nanny, but simply because, after searching for a nanny, more often than not, they selected one who was educated.

Jeanne, however, described her nanny and her reasoning for hiring her, instead of a woman with a college degree:

She’s energetic and bubbly and let’s be honest, sometimes I’m just not. I’m just tired at the end of the day. My husband sometimes thinks she’s a little ditzy and she is. But you know what, she’s ditzy and energetic so who cares.

[LB: Was she the only one you interviewed?]
No, I interviewed two other people. One of them… Went to college here and met her husband. And they just moved to the area and she doesn’t need to work and her husband’s a (physician)… She said, “Well we’re not going to have kids just yet because he just started his practice, but I want to do something so I’m not bored.” I was like great, so you want to hang out with my kids so you don’t get bored… And believe me she has an excellent resume. I pulled her resume up being like, oh crap. I don’t know if she’s too smart. Like I would feel actually almost intimidated asking her, because the nanny… does the kids’ laundry. Like I’m not gonna, you know what I mean? (Emphasis original) (Jeanne – employer)

Like Lillian and Mark, Jeanne also wondered why this individual would seek out nanny work. She too wanted someone who was committed to the job. In reference to the woman she did not hire, Jeanne stated:

She didn’t need to work. She had no drive, not that she didn’t have drive but for this particular position it was just something to fill the time. And when it’s just something to fill the time you know our nanny now she makes little Blues Clues games up for the kids and hides things. I could tell that she would be someone who wouldn’t go the extra length because she doesn’t need to. (Jeanne – employer)

Jeanne contrasted her “ditzy” nanny with this candidate who was possibly “too smart.” Her perception of these two individuals reflects on nanny work as an occupation.

Jeanne’s viewpoint was that she would have difficulty delegating tasks to this individual due to her social status. Furthermore, given this person’s lack of economic need, Jeanne felt she would not be pushed to excel at her job.

The majority of participants in this study hired an educated nanny. Those who questioned why college educated women would take on nanny work were the exception. However, the viewpoints of these three employers are important to examine, especially as they relate to societal views of nanny work as an occupation, the focus of the next chapter.
Conclusion

In the world of the nannies and employers I interviewed, having a nanny was about much more than providing child care. Part of having a nanny, specifically one that is college educated or attending college, is about providing children with a particular social experience. The findings in this section are a reflection of how middle-class parents, particularly mothers, feel pressure to have their children excel in all areas of life. As recognized by the nannies and employers in this study, employing a particular type of nanny was about the kinds of knowledge and values she would impart to the children. One might reasonably assume that this would be of utmost importance to those who are not physically present with their children at the same time as the nanny, but, according to both nannies and employers, this was actually of greater importance to those employers who were stay-at-home or work-from-home parents. These employers spent a significant amount of time with their nannies. In order to have a workable relationship and to make their time together run smoothly, employers sought commonalities with their nannies.

Employers also wanted someone who was motivated, and possessed a number of capabilities, that were not always related to child care. In this study, college attendance was an indicator of these capabilities. Parents, as a whole, did not want someone who aspired to be a nanny forever. This was linked to educational status. The college educated nannies in this sample, with the exception of one nanny, did not see working as a nanny as a career goal.

Nannies and employers saw college attendance as a marker for various traits, each of which they felt made the nannies more qualified to do their job. These characteristics also made nannies more suitable as caregivers due to employers’ preference for education
and social similarity. It is clear from my discussions with nannies and employers that, when parents hired a nanny who attends college or one who has a Bachelor’s degree, it was about much more than having the nanny use her knowledge to educate the children. With the exception of Wrigley’s (1995) work, previous research has not examined women who have college degrees and work as nannies, nor has prior research studied parents who employ nannies with a college degree.

Due to their social statuses, nannies and employers in this sample held far more similar beliefs than different ones, a topic that will be a major focus of this dissertation. The hiring of college educated, socially similar nannies for care has important and interesting implications for nanny work as an occupation. Not all employers who employed a college graduate or student initially sought a person of this status. Many simply developed a preference for such an individual over time. Part of this stems from the pool of available applicants. Reasons why college students and graduates are available for and seek this line of work, as well as the features of nanny work, will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 6
THE OCCUPATION OF THE NANNY

In this chapter I explore the occupation of nanny work. The findings from my sample indicate that nannies and employers do not adequately research nanny work prior to entering into work arrangements, which has far-reaching consequences for both parties. I argue that gender norms prevail and shape nannies’ and parents’ experiences and expectations. In discussing nanny work with the nannies in my sample, it became apparent that they were conflicted over the status of their jobs. In some instances, their experience on the job contradicted society’s views of their position. Their experience was further complicated by their internalization of the dominant viewpoint, that nanny work is not labor. While the work experience of in-home child care providers has been well documented (Enarson 1990; Tuominen 2003), much less research has examined the work experience of nannies, particularly nannies with college degrees. This chapter fills this gap by providing an in-depth look at the occupation of the nanny.

This chapter will explore the following work-related themes, which emerged from my discussions with nannies and employers. First, I will examine the lack of clarity in the nanny work arrangements on the part of both nannies and employers. Second, I will explore the value or lack thereof, nannies and employers give to nanny work. I will then compare the concept of nanny work to that of a “real job.” Fourth, I will uncover the association that nannies make between their work and mothering. Fifth, I will address the belief held by nannies and employers that nanny work is, “more than just a job,” and I will explore the expectations associated with this. Sixth, will I examine the belief held by
nannies and employers that nanny work should not be “just about the money.” Finally, I will conclude with an examination of employer’s perspectives of nanny work.

**Work arrangements: A work-in-progress**

The various processes by which each of the women I interviewed followed to become a nanny were inadequately well planned out. For most of the nannies, it was not a career choice they had planned on. Many of them babysat in high school and nannying was something they “fell into,” rather than something they aspired to do. Limited by occupational opportunities, and reflecting on their previous babysitting experience as enjoyable, they sought out nanny work as a viable option. The following statements detail nannies accounts of the process by which they entered into nanny work:

[LB: Can you tell me the story of how you became a nanny?]
It’s actually not how I envisioned it. I was working for a company here in (city)… They relocated to (city and state) and I lost my job at 25. And so I fell back on my love of children, and having taken care of them ever since I was little. (Suzanne – nanny)

I guess I just kind of fell into it. You know, you always babysat in high school and that was basically to bring in some extra bucks… I just kind of, I just answered the ad and I figured, oh I could do child care. (Danielle – nanny)

So when I graduated [college], I got a job with the [name] company and it’s seasonal… So that ended… I was like I think I want to get, you know, possibly a nanny job. I think that’s something that’s under the table, I can collect my unemployment and you know it’s something that I love to do. I’ve always babysat and had like little mini nanny things. Like when I was in high school I was like one of those mother’s helpers. (Meredith – nanny)

When I moved back to [state], or actually even when I graduated from college with, I graduated college with a Psychology degree in undergrad there’s no money. So unless I wanted to do, I was looking at like office jobs, and that was, had nothing to do with what I ever wanted to do however, there was more money than in Psychology. (Sage – nanny)
As these quotes indicate, the nannies in this sample did not put considerable thought into entering into this line of work. Additionally, the nannies lacked forethought regarding the parameters of the job and this was true on the part of the employers as well.

It was apparent in my discussions with both parties that the least amount of thought was put into their first time hiring or working as a nanny. In these instances arrangements and expectations were not at all clear-cut. For some, the degree to which the job duties were fully planned and understood was connected to the number of nannies parents had employed, or to the number of nanny jobs the nannies had previously held.

Eight nannies were working in their first nanny position. Some had picked up subsequent jobs but remained with their original family. Twelve nannies were on their second nanny job, and five had held three or more nanny positions. Of the twenty-one employer and wife/husband employer pairs, eight were employing their first nanny, two were on their second, and eleven had hired three or more. Despite having experience in the field, the vast majority expressed uncertainty over the parameters of nanny work. While some nannies and employers learned from their previous mistakes, having prior experience in hiring or working did not automatically mean that each party subsequently learned to clearly delineate the arrangements of the job.

Prior to hiring a nanny, only one employer, Melyssa, described having clear expectations regarding the job and relationship. She knew exactly what she expected from a nanny prior to hiring her first one, and because of her preconceived preference, it took her “almost a full year” of searching to find the most appropriate nanny. The rest of the employers either did not know what to expect or did not have their expectations met. As a whole, the work arrangements were “very much a work-in-progress,” as one
employer, Kendra, stated. The evolving relationship between employers and nannies was either wonderful or detrimental, depending on how each party behaved.

Each of the nannies I interviewed had experience outside of working as a nanny with some having worked in day cares and most having worked in a corporate setting. Regardless of this prior work experience, many of the nannies found working as a nanny to be filled with uncertainty. Both nannies and employers lacked clear norms to follow, which detrimentally impacted their work arrangements.

Kendra found her nanny through the day care that her daughter went to, but despite having day care experience, neither party knew what to expect from the arrangement.

It worked out great, because our current nanny was kind of unhappy with the place. And we were looking for someone, and she actually quit and I said, “Hey do you want to come and be a nanny for us?” And I didn’t know what that meant, and she didn’t know what that meant. We figured we’d figure it out. (Kendra – employer)

The degree to which the parameters of the job were unclear and were in fact a “work-in-progress,” became apparent during my discussion with Monica. Monica held a Bachelor’s degree and had attended one year of Law School. She had spent the previous few years working in corporate environments, and prior to her current position, she held a full-time nanny position. Prior to our interview, she had been working part-time for one month caring for an infant and the following week she was going to switch to full-time. When asked if she had any vacation or sick time, Monica responded:

Um yeah, I think I can call in sick. I think. And vacation they said you know, they’ll be away… And so I can have that time off, or I can go with them if I wanted to, I think. And then they go to conferences in (location) and I can either have that time off, or go with them and watch the baby. [LB: And would you be paid if you had the time off?] I think so. I am pretty sure they said yeah.
[LB: Or you can go with them, and do you know if you would be paid anything else if you went with them?]
They said they would pay airfare.
[LB: Okay, and would you be paid anything extra because it would be more hours, or you don’t know?]
I don’t think so. I think probably the same amount. (Monica – nanny)

Monica’s account is filled with the statement “I think,” which indicates a high degree of uncertainty about the arrangement she entered into a month prior. Monica’s experience was characteristic of the nannies and employers in this study. Nannies regularly failed to establish the terms of their employment prior to accepting jobs and employers failed to clearly lay out the terms of their nannies’ employment.

Research has shown that the informality of arrangements, on which many child care jobs are based can cause significant problems for providers (Romero 2001). Kelly, a nanny who had worked for three years was put off by the fact that her employer did not consider sick days and other forms of paid leave at the start of her employment.

Sometimes I feel like, since she’s in HR, that she should know the rules. Like, you should get so many sick days. You should get so many vacation days, so many holidays, um, overtime, and so that kind of bothers me a little bit. (Kelly – nanny)

While Kelly faulted her employer, she herself did not think to negotiate for these benefits prior to agreeing to the job. While the casualness of these arrangements often impacts providers negatively (Romero 2001), as was the case with the nannies in my sample, employers also suffered when expectations and guidelines were not clearly established. Kendra’s nanny recently took an unexpected, extensive amount of time off. When asked if her nanny was initially given sick days, Kendra stated:

We never talked about it, which is a lesson I’ve learned for this current hire, this woman I’ve just hired. You know, I mean she just hasn’t been sick. Um and in terms of vacation days, if she’s asked to go do this or that, we’ve been, of course, absolutely. She’s never asked for consecutive days off. (Kendra – employer)
Tina also did not consider sick days, and she felt that she was now paying for this oversight.

I think every Tuesday and Thursday this month something has come up. So it’s just, it’s getting incredibly frustrating for us. And it was partly my fault. I honestly didn’t even consider sick days when I hired her… But we just didn’t think about it. Which was stupid because when you get a job, that’s one of the things you ask. Like, “How many vacation days do I have? How many sick days? How many personal days?” So we did not talk about it… So now we’re in a situation where, Joel and I are talking about it and we’re at the point where we have to talk about it. But what do we do? (Tina – employer)

While some of the nannies and employers I interviewed did not learn from their previous experiences, others sought ways to make changes in their subsequent arrangements. After her nanny’s extended leave, Kendra learned about the importance of laying out the expectations of the job up front.

But you know after I told this woman that I would like her to be our nanny, I sent her a very long email really, explicitly laying out everything. Like… putting a limit on vacation days… Your salary will include this. Here’s your hours, here’s what I expect. Um, here’s the procedures we’re going to go through in terms of how you are going to get a raise… I just wanted that in writing. (Kendra – employer)

Bad experiences lead many of the employers and nannies in this sample to set up arrangements that were more concrete. As with Kendra, an employer, Mary, a nanny learned to seek out “business” arrangements after a negative experience with a family. Her prior employer paid her under the table. Because of this, when they unexpectedly terminated her, she felt she had no recourse. As a result of this experience, Mary explained how she now does a number of things differently. (Chapter 7 will go into greater detail on her strategy).

That’s the main thing, the pay. Making sure it’s on the books so I have proof so I can go to unemployment if I had to. (Mary – nanny)
Mary was not the only nanny who had payment issues. Ironically, although Monica did not appear to have a solid understanding of her current nanny job, her previous employers had cancelled her last paycheck when they found out that she would not be returning to work for them. In this instance, Monica too felt that she did not have any recourse, because her pay was also under the table. However, unlike Mary, she did not make different decisions the second time around.

In many corporate settings, vacation and sick time, as well as the duties each employee is required to fulfill, are often clearly laid out. While these items may be flexible to a degree, employees often have a Human Resource Department to turn to if they have an issue with their direct supervisor, whereas nannies lack this protection. The issues that arose from this lack of a buffer between nannies and employers were a common theme throughout my interviews.

Overall, the job of the nanny was very much a work-in-progress for both parties, which proved to be a major source of frustration. Prior to hiring a nanny, employers did not fully contemplate what it would be like to manage someone in their home, nor did they consider how sick time, vacation time, or raises would be allotted. They were also unable to predict the various issues that would arise and how they would approach them. This lack of forethought was strongly connected to the lack of value that society accords nanny work. Nannying is not generally thought of as requiring considerable planning, as it is associated with mothering, which is seen by many as natural (Tuominen 2003) and therefore not “work.” The following section explores the value, or lack thereof that nannies and employers grant the position of the nanny.
(De)valueing the position

A reoccurring theme throughout my interviews with nannies involved the conflict between their mutually exclusive statuses of caregiver and paid employee. Nannies were conflicted over their personal views of their work because their opinions clashed with society’s perception. They struggled with wanting to give value to their position in a society that devalues it as an occupation. The messages that they received about their work came from employers, family members, and significant others who did not value their position. Not surprisingly, the value of their job was the aspect that nannies expressed the most conflict over.

The nannies’ perceptions of their professional status were tied to assessments of their job employers, society, significant others, and parents. Differences emerged in my discussions with nannies regarding whether or not they viewed their job as a professional one. The concept of a professional job was intimately tied to the low societal value that they felt was given to the position. Only nine out of the twenty-five nannies in my sample considered nannying to be a “professional job.” As evidence of her professional status, Karen stated:

[LB: Would you characterize your work as a professional job, why or why not?] Absolutely. Because you have certain standards you have to be held to… I mean I’m not saying nannies should be licensed but there should be something, I don’t know about a regulatory board. But a professional nanny looks the part, takes the part to another level. The children should always be happy. If your nanny can barely speak English, your child is not getting the appropriate amount of care because they can’t communicate with them. Making sure they don’t run out into traffic is not being a nanny; it’s being a minder. (Karen – nanny)

Danielle viewed her position as a professional one and believed her employers, past and present agree with her assessment.
I only accept the positions from the families that do. And otherwise I just won’t… it’s usually if they’re not willing to pay you anything near it and they say, “Well I paid my sitter this.” Well I’m not a sitter, and if you can’t understand that just by me… Explaining my role, then this isn’t going to work out. But I won’t take jobs anymore that don’t value me. (Danielle – nanny)

While some nannies did value their position and felt that their employers held similar views, the majority did not value their position. For nannies such as Samantha, Nina, and Mary, the perception that their job was not professional stemmed from their employers’ negative treatment.

[LB: Would you characterize your job as a nanny as a professional job and why or why not?]  
It’s not how she made me feel. She made me feel like a peon, like a peon, like I’m just a nanny. (Emphasis original) (Samantha – nanny).

[LB: Do your employers view your job as a professional job?]  
I would probably say no just because… It certainly seems sometimes they view it as someone, and not who is doing it professional, again like I said, this is my job. This is only my job. I think they view it, as this is someone who’s here to serve us, to be at our beck and call… A lot of times I do feel that they feel because they’re paying me, I should be willing to do as many hours as they want. I should be willing to cancel my plans… To switch around my life… To clean whatever, do whatever. Run whatever errands because I’m getting paid. And… Just because you’re paying me, doesn’t mean you own me. And that’s something I’ve tried to get across in a nicer way. Yes, you’re paying me. Yes, I come in and do this job, but it doesn’t mean you own my life. (Nina – nanny)

Like Samantha and Nina, the way Mary’s was treated by her employer influenced her view of her professional status. However, unlike Samantha and Nina, who felt at times that they were treated as “servants,” Mary felt a close bond with her former employer. The actions of Mary’s past employers, as well as her own perception that she was a part of the family, precluded her from thinking of herself as a professional. These two statuses, family and employee, stood in stark contrast to one another and shaped Mary’s view of her professional status.

[LB: And the past family, do you feel they treated your job as a professional job?]
Not as much because we were more like family. They were looking for, because the person they had before they had for five years. She was a Spanish lady, teaching them Spanish stuff too. She was older. And they wanted someone that was a little younger that could be like an older sister. (Mary – nanny)

While the way that nannies were treated by employers influenced their perceptions of self, perceptions of societal views of nanny work led many nannies to respond, “no” when asked if they considered their job to be professional.

Maybe because it’s like I’m watching your kids and no one considers babysitters and nannies to be professionals. (Marianna – nanny)

The position of a nanny, it’s kind of like a housekeeper. Which I mean, it sounds weird, but I mean, it’s not really a good job. It’s not, a lot of people you meet in bars will be like, “Oh yeah, I’m a nanny too so it’s fine.” But when you have to tell an adult that you are a nanny, it’s like, whatever, you’re a babysitter. I think it’s not a good position to work at. (Shanna – nanny)

When the nannies in this study spoke about their significant other’s view of their work, much like society’s view, it was negative. Both Tanya and Monica described feeling as though their significant others did not value their position as a nanny. In reference to professional status, Tanya stated:

It’s awkward, I’ve never heard anyone – my boyfriend makes fun of me. I recently bought a new car and I’m like, “what do I put down for my occupation?” He’s like, “don’t put nanny!” I’m like, “what do I put?” He’s like, “put down au pair or something like that.” I’m like okay. Like nanny sounds so bad but I don’t know what to call it, that’s what it is. I could say babysitter, like all the time. (Tanya – nanny)

Tanya’s hesitation to disclose to society that she worked as a nanny reflects her own insecurities about her job. Her opinion of her position stemmed from societal perceptions of this form of work, and this view was affirmed by her boyfriend’s statement. Monica’s significant other held an opinion of her job similar to that of Tanya’s.

[LB: Have you ever had anyone put down your line of work to you?]
My boyfriend (laughing)... Like I always think people think, like maybe I’m over thinking it... He wanted me to have a professional job with benefits and everything. And, so he definitely looks down on that and it’s a big, I think its
kind of a big issue. Like, he say’s, “Oh you’re not doing anything with your degree.” “Why don’t you do something with your degree?” “You worked so hard, got really good grades and now you’re not using it at all.” (Monica – nanny)

Tanya and Monica’s opinion of their work were influenced by a number of sources, all of which shaped their adverse view. Just as society and their significant other’s assessments shaped their views, their work as babysitters in their teens also impacted their perceptions of the professional status of their work. Because nannying involved the same type of labor as the babysitting they did when they were younger, they did not view it as hard work or skilled labor.

Not necessarily because I feel like I’ve been doing it forever. If I could do it when I was 14 and now I’m 22 like, it doesn’t really take much education for me to watch their kids. It’s just having fun with them. (Tanya – nanny)

I don’t know. I’ve been kind of struggling with that. Like, I’m not sure, like I haven’t been really telling people that I’m a nanny just because I think that the perception is that it’s not a professional job. And um, that’s what little kids do, teenagers babysit. (Monica – nanny)

Due to the association with babysitting, Vanessa also struggled with perceiving her work as a professional job.

I want to say yes just because I think it sounds more important to say yes but on the other hand where people, you’re just the nanny. Or you’re just taking care of kids. Some people just say a glamorized babysitter, which kind of I agree with but don’t really agree with because I have a college degree. I think, as professional as you can get in this area with the degree. (Vanessa – nanny)

Regardless of these nannies’ views of their professional status, the relationship between nannies and employers worked best when they shared a similar view of the position. Fifteen nannies believed that their job was not a professional one, and thirteen of these nannies stated their employers shared this view.
Two of the nannies, Chloe and Stephanie reported a mismatch between their view of their work and their employer’s perception. Neither of the nannies personally felt that their work was professional, but both had employers who felt that it was. Chloe especially struggled with her view of her work and wanted to view it professionally. Like many of the nannies, her employer influenced her understanding of her work. When I spoke with her, she was working for three families. After talking with her future employer, who viewed nannying in a professional light, she felt confident in her decision to leave the three families she worked for, in favor of working solely for one new family.

[LB: Would you characterize your job as a professional job and why or why not?] Like the woman that I applied with, that I’m going to be working for in September said to me, “I want someone who thinks of this and takes this as seriously as I do. Because motherhood is like a full-time job. And I want someone who is going to be like a second mother to her.” So, she reaffirmed to me that it was a real job. (Chloe – nanny)

Stephanie did not see her position in a professional light stating, “I mean I obviously took it because it’s easy.” However, she felt her employer’s view of her work was very different.

[LB: Do your employers view it as professional and why or why not?] I think they do because they think of my job as one that they can’t live without. They need a nanny. She [employer] genuinely thought that this job was just the toughest job, the most serious job. I mean she thought her job was serious and she didn’t even have a job! (Emphasis original) (Stephanie – nanny)

The difference in views caused problems for Stephanie in her job and this discrepancy along with other factors, led her to leave the position.

Five of the nine nannies who expressed that their position was a professional one felt their employer would agree. Three were unsure, but felt their employer held a positive view, as evidenced by the following statement:
The best I can say is that they are professional people themselves as well, so the work that I do, I guess is as professional as it can be inside of a house. (Kristin – nanny)

One nanny left her job because she felt that her employer did not treat her in a professional manner and others told similar stories of seeking out professional work relationships after having experiences that did not work out. Chapter 7 will explore this situation further.

The similarity in viewpoints that nannies report between themselves and their employers enable them to maintain workable arrangements. For many of the nannies, nanny work is a transitory job. The temporary status of their employment in this line of work influenced their perceptions, as well as their employer’s view of their work. Their views centered around the fact that nannying was not their desired career and they would one day find a “real job,” as I will explore in the section that follows.

A “real job”: Formal labor

According to Anita Garey, what is considered “real work is full-time (forty hours or more), day-shift, year-round employment in a defined occupation” (1999: 1). Several of the nannies in my sample internalized this viewpoint. Those who believed that nanny work was not a professional job compared the work that they performed to that of a “real job.” The notion of a “real job” is multifaceted, as evidenced by the statements of the nannies that I spoke with. Conceptualizing a “real job” as something that was vastly different from the labor they performed inhibited their view of nanny work as labor. Rather than being just one factor, influencing the nannies’ thinking, there were a number of competing variables, contributing to their impressions.
Much like Garey’s definition, nannies bought into the view that “real” work should be full-time and must occur within a distinct occupation. Nannies depicted “real” work as having formal policies, taxable wages, and benefits such as paid leave and retirement. They saw their employment as existing in opposition to this definition. For the nannies in this sample a “real job” was a socially valued profession in which they aspired to work long-term.

The following elements of the occupation made the nannies feel as if their labor was not a “real job.” First and foremost, the lack of formality of the job shaped the nannies’ perceptions of their work. This was true regarding the overall structure of the occupation, which included the job description, pay, time off, and procedures to follow in terms of giving notice. For some, their status as part-time workers impacted their view as did their temporary status in the position. For others, their employer’s treatment of them influenced their perceptions of the work and shaped it to be something different from a “real job.” The actual labor that they performed influenced the nannies thinking, and because they had college degrees, many of them desired to work in other fields. Finally, their perception of society’s definition of a “real job” shaped their viewpoints. The following section will explore each of these factors as they relate to nannies’ perceptions of their work.

The work arrangements of nannies was much more informal than their perception of “real” work. In the example below, Nicole explains her frustration with her employer for not providing her set hours and parameters for her work, as well as her annoyance over not knowing which of her employer’s houses she had to go to the next morning.

It makes me mad. I mean she’s not even working right now. Can I swear? Get your shit together… Treat me like the way that you would want to be treated. I
mean would you want to know five hours before you have to be into work where
you have to be? I want to know if I have to commute an hour tomorrow... I wish
that they would take those things into account.

[LB: It’s as if there are no guidelines to follow for the job. Can you tell me about
that?]

Right. It’s a more personal level, you know? It’s not like working at a corporate
job where there’s a handbook of what you can and can’t do. With something like
this, it’s more just fly by the seat of your pants type of stuff. And well, let’s see
what happens if we do this. And will she get mad if we do this? And if she
doesn’t, then I guess it’s okay. And if she does, then maybe we need to step back
and fix it. But yeah there’s no distinct guideline. (Nicole – nanny)

Chloe’s perception that taxable income was a feature of a “real job” molded her
understanding of her nanny work.

[LB: Would you characterize your job as a professional job and why/not?]  
That’s a good question. I think about that a lot. I think about that an awful lot
actually because I’m like, this isn’t a real job and that sort of thing... But a lot of
times I think about it, I’m like you know you don’t have a pay stub, it’s off the
books, you know that sort of thing... I think it all boils down to the pay stub. I
know that’s crazy but I think that’s what it is, if I had a pay stub every week then
it would be a real job. (Chloe – nanny).

The lack of structured time off was also a feature of nanny work. As discussed
previously, this was more likely to be an issue for those in their first nanny position.

Having more experience led nannies to arrange vacation and sick time upfront with their
employers. Mary’s experience surrounding time off provides further evidence of the
downside to the informal nature of nanny work.

[LB: When you needed that time off when your mom passed away did they give it
to you paid?]  
No they didn’t, it was, I had to leave early the day that I found out. They paid me
for that day, but then I took off the next day. They told me if you need it, go
ahead, we understand. And I mean it was understandable that you don’t get paid
for it. I mean, typically I think, if you’re working as a regular employee they
might compensate you, but I was okay with that. (Mary – nanny)
Mary’s perception of herself as something other than a “regular employee” led her to accept that she should not be paid for the time that she took off after the death of her mother.

Nicole’s behavior and actions indicate that she viewed her job to be different from formal employment. Her absence of taxable income and immersion into the family life of her employer led her to grapple with how to leave her position. The following statement demonstrates her predicament, which is one nannies often face due to the informality of the occupation. It also represents the downside to not treating nanny work as a “real job” for both nannies and employers. In the following statement, Nicole describes the issues of working in such an informal area,

That’s part of the struggle that I’m having now, is that, do I give them two weeks notice? Or do I just go in one day and say, “Today’s going to be my last day.” Because I feel like that’s what a lot of nannies end up doing, is just going in and saying, “Okay that’s going to be it,” or they just don’t show up anymore. [LB: Why do they do that?]
Well because you know exactly how the family’s going to react to it... I know that it’s going to be put all on me. That they did absolutely nothing wrong in the situation and that it’s all going to be put on me. And then I, I mean that will affect me, I know it will. [LB: Do you feel it’s any different from another job, because in another job you might give two weeks notice?]
Absolutely. I mean I’ve had a fair share of jobs; I’ve always given two weeks notice. I would never even think not to. But in a situation like this, it’s completely different. [LB: Tell me about that?]
Yeah it’s, you know, you’re working in an environment where there’s no job security. And not only that but if I happen to get fired I can’t get unemployment because I’m working under the table. It’s, it’s a totally different situation; it’s a more personal level where they see me as part of their family. And you know when you’re part of somebody’s family, if you choose to leave, you wouldn’t give two weeks notice. You would just up and leave. (Nicole – nanny)

Because of the intimate nature of the relationship that is formed and the private space that they work in, quitting can be taken very personally on the part of the employer and the
two weeks following their notice can be stressful. Nannies work in an area that is unprotected by formal rules and regulations and because of this they risk giving two weeks notice and being told to leave on the spot and losing two weeks’ pay. Conversely, they view not giving adequate notice as unprofessional. This predicament shapes their idea that nanny work is not “real work.” Shanna, a nanny, explained the issue she faced after giving notice to a previous employer:

So I decided to leave. It was in my best interest and she was like, “Oh I guess that happens,” you know, whatever. Then she let me go sooner than I was supposed to. She was like, “We told you when you started working to give us a month.” I was like, “I thought you were kidding, a month? How am I supposed to find another job? Oh sorry I can’t actually start working for you until a month?” I can’t stop working for you and not have another job. (Shanna – nanny)

Abigail also gave notice, but was subsequently told by her employer that she was no longer needed.

[LB: So how did you leave it when you left?] I mean, good terms. I just told them that I didn’t feel like it was working out… The commute was 40 minutes so I said you know it’s taking a toll on me, and I pretty much left it on good terms. I’m sure they’re a little mad, but you know I offered to stay for two weeks or a month while they found something else, but they said they were fine. [and told her to leave the same day] So it was pretty much a clean break. (Abigail – nanny)

The concept of a “real job” entered my discussion with Meredith, who was nannying part-time while on unemployment from her seasonal job. In the following statement she details her discussion with her employer about her pursuit of a “real job.”

I had gone on an interview… And I got to the house a little early and I was like really dressed up and when I walked in she was like, “Ooh, look at you all dressed up.” And I was like, “I had an interview.” She was like, “Oh for what?” And I told her about the job…. And she’s like well you know, and I can’t remember exactly what she said, but it was in a very calm like just talking about the interview, like oh going on it for a real job. She air quoted and then she even corrected herself. She goes, “Well not that this isn’t a real job,” but I think that she understands that this, this is temporary for me, but I do love her family, and that’s very clear. But it’s not what I would be with forever. My real job is going
to be business related. (Meredith – nanny)

Meredith related her employer’s view of her work as not being a “real job” to her temporary status as a nanny as well as to her desire to have a career in business.

Chloe’s lack of taxable income, her part-time status for multiple families, and her “surrogate” status impeded her ability to accept her work as a “career” or a “real job.”

I think if I worked for like a really, really wealthy family then it would be more of like a career. It’s hard to explain. The richer they are the more likely it’s going to be on the books, the more likely you’re going to get a pay check, have a pay stub. And that would make it a real job per say, versus this family where it’s two days here, three days there. I’m like a surrogate parent for a little while. I don’t feel like it’s necessarily a real job. (Chloe – nanny)

Suzanne’s view of her work was also multifaceted. Her perception was shaped by society’s view, her part-time status, the lack of benefits, and her mother’s statements.

Um, okay there are a few reasons why I would not consider it professional. I mean I like to think of myself as a professional, but I think our society for one, doesn’t view nanny positions as a professional job. Hence why I have doubts about putting it on my resume. And then I’m also a part-time nanny. I’m not salaried, I don’t get benefits, and that’s kind of what I view as being a requisite for being a professional. You get healthcare or you get the option to pay for healthcare. You get a 401k. I have none of that. None of that. So that doesn’t make it feel professional at all for me. So maybe if I was a full-time nanny, you know salaried, with benefits it would feel professional. But there’s still that society view on it that I’ve come to learn about that says, “Oh you’re just a nanny, that’s not a job.” Like even my own mother will say, “When you get your real job.” Using the term real is like, whoa so you don’t think I’m working? And who knows maybe my employer thinks that way too, I don’t know. (Suzanne – nanny)

While Chloe worked full-time, she pieced together hours with multiple families. At the time in which she was interviewed, she had accepted a full-time position with one family and would start in a few weeks. Meredith and Suzanne each worked part-time. For both of these women, their part-time status was not a choice and they actively sought out other positions. Both Meredith and Suzanne had Bachelor’s degrees and held other career aspirations, which also influenced their perception of their work.
Only one employer explicitly used the term “real job.” Jennifer contrasted a “real job” with nanny work. Her perception of this was impacted by her nannies’ temporary statuses in this area of work.

Just you know, um, they’ll ask me why so and so doesn’t babysit anymore and I’ll be like, “Well she’s done with college now.” “She’s got a real, a real job.” That kind of a thing. (Jennifer – employer)

It was clear for Jennifer that the women she hired were working as nannies for a short period of time. Because they were in college it was clear that this was not a position that they aspired to hold long-term. However, it is unclear if the temporary status of the nannies led Jennifer to think this way, or if her thought process was more hindered by her view that nannying was not work.

Samantha explained the concept of a “real job” in relation to her employer’s treatment of her.

[LB: Do you have an example of a time when you did not feel respected?] I was putting away the dishes in the dishwasher and she came out, it’s like the second she heard me open the dishwasher, she like buzzed out of her backroom. She’s like, “Can you just, like dab with a paper towel, make sure everything’s really dry?” And I was like, I just felt so disrespected at that point because I’m unloading, excuse my language, a fucking dishwasher. An eight year old could do that. And you’re coming out and trying, over my shoulder, and trying to tell me how to do that. And yeah, I mean, that made me feel like certainly I couldn’t handle like a “real job” if I can’t unload the dishwasher right. (Samantha – nanny)

For Samantha, it was not the task that she was required to perform that impeded her ability to see her work as a “real job,” but the instruction her employer gave her on mundane tasks that led her to think this way.

On the other hand, Chloe’s opinion of her work as “real work” was impacted by the tasks she performed on the job. The behaviors she engaged in, which reportedly were
ones that she would partake in if she had children of her own, shaped her view of her work.

I feel like it’s such, I feel like I’d do it if I had my own kids. This is what I’d do if I had my own kids. And mothers, it’s a job but it’s not you know? … And to be paid for it is like, I’m getting paid to take care of kids, which I’d do for free to be quite honest. Um, which makes me feel like it’s not a real job I guess is what it is. (Chloe – nanny)

Mary shared Chloe’s view that the activities she performed were no different from the ones that she would carry out if she had her own children. This belief also caused her to not view nanny work as a job.

I just consider it as if it was my own child. I would have to deal with the same things so that’s why I don’t consider it a job because if I had my own child I’d be doing the same thing. But except I’m watching someone else’s child and I’m getting paid for it. (Mary – nanny)

As a whole, nanny work was not viewed as a career or a professional job for the nannies in this study. According to Kristin, a nanny, nanny work has not been defined as an occupation.

In society it hasn’t been classified as a career. You don’t go to school to become a nanny. (Kristin – nanny)

Her view was shaped by the idea that a career required formal training or an educational background. Unlike Kristin, most nannies expressed that nannying was a career. However, the vast majority of the nannies in my study did not see working as a nanny as a long-term, viable career option for themselves. Those who felt this way entered into nanny work with the expectation that it would provide them temporary employment. For most of the nannies in my sample, the view that nanny work was not a career for them was influenced by their status as a college student or a college graduate.
The vast majority of the nannies in this sample, eighteen out of twenty-five, had graduated from college or were working towards a Bachelor’s degree. Nannies with a Bachelor’s degree or who were on the road toward graduation expressed that their status as a nanny was temporary and that they would seek out alternative employment in the near future. The following statements express some of the reasons nannies seek out nanny work temporarily.

[LB: Do you see working as a nanny as a career for you and why or why not?] 
No I view it as something that’s getting me through grad school. It was the same way that I viewed waitressing, where this is not something that I want to do with the rest of my life. (Nicole – nanny)

No I don’t view it as a career… It’s certainly not my long-term aspiration. That’s not why I went to college. It was simply a fallback after I lost my job. (Suzanne – nanny)

I did know going into it that I didn’t want to do it forever, just because I felt that, you know I went to college with a purpose. I went to college knowing I want to go to grad school and I don’t want to wait until I’m 70 years old to go. You know, I really do have a strong sense of what I want as a career now. (Nina – nanny)

Nina was very clear in her differentiation between working as a nanny and having a career. Samantha drew a similar distinction.

[LB: Do you view your job as a nanny as a career, and why or why not?] 
No because the, you know, it’s a golden moment in time. Because those kids are only that small for that long. So, like eventually, like my sister’s youngest is two… Once she goes to school my sister’s like what am I going to do? She wants to definitely work. That I would call like a career. I guess I separated profession or professional with having a career. (Samantha – nanny)

Educated nannies expected that their careers would be related to their degree.

[LB: You mentioned that this was not your career. What do the parents like or dislike about this?] 
I think it’s just expected because I’m going to school and I’ll be starting my own full-time career, not as a child caregiver, with my degree. And then if I go to grad school, I think it’s just a given. (Claire – nanny)
It’s only not a career for me because I’m a business student. I have a business degree. (Meredith – nanny)

Some of the nannies in this sample had nannied longer than they had worked in formal employment. Despite this, they viewed their employment in these other areas as a career, but did not see nannying as a career, as Kristin indicated.

[LB: Do you see working as a nanny as career for yourself and why or why not?] It’s funny to think about because I’ve now nannied longer than being an Event Planner but I still think but I still think Event Planning was more of a career for me.

[LB: Can you tell me about that?] I think because I had twelve years of babysitting before I became a nanny that it’s just something that I’ve always done and not that it was my career. (Kristin – nanny)

For Kristin, her view that she could do the same job in her teens shaped her view of nanny work as a career for herself.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Chloe struggled with her view of her work. She felt awkward about being paid for nanny work and did not see nannying as a profession. However, having worked in nursing, another caring profession, Chloe saw similarities between both lines of work.

[LB: On the other hand, it’s a job and you need to be paid.] Yeah exactly, and that’s what it comes down to. I had that same problem with nursing where a lot of people don’t pay you when you’re a [nurse]… They just assume you should be doing this because it’s God’s work… And I looked at it and I said, “If I’m going to do this, I’m going to do it right.” And become a nurse [type of]. Because then people look at it as a career, a profession. For some reason, people take it more seriously. You can bill insurance. (Chloe – nanny)

Chloe felt that she had to establish herself in a type of nursing that insurance would cover in order for it to be seen by society and herself as a career. Once again, we are able to see how the informality of nanny work impacts nannies’ perceptions of their labor. Claire considered formal occupations in fields such as medicine and law as being actual careers.
[LB: Is there anything they like about this not being a career for you?]
Um, I think they like it because it’s just; it’s a different kind of role model for their kids. Like you’re working towards something, you’re going to be someone. You’re going to be someone doing something that will have an impact on society. I’m not saying that working at Starbucks isn’t having an impact. But whether you’re going to be a Doctor or an Attorney, you’re going to be doing something that’s productive, that’s going to earn you an income, that’s going to make you independent. (Claire – nanny)

Only one-fifth of the twenty-five nannies aspired to long-term nanny work.

Despite holding this goal, three of the nannies, Kelly, Danielle, and Mary, did not classify nannying as a “career.” Kelly even found humor in this classification.

No it’s funny to say professional. When I think of professional, I think of a Doctor or a Lawyer, you know? It’s a little to me, it’s a little different. I think it’s because I’ve been doing it for so long now that it’s almost like fun. (Kelly – nanny)

Danielle also distinguished between a job and a career:

I told you in the beginning that this is my job. It’s not my life. I know that some people are like, “Oh my career is everything to me,” and I have never been like that. Which is probably why I will never be super rich either… I don’t know I’ve never felt anything, a drive to get into a specific career. I’ve never felt pulled to do, so I just never did and I think I’m happier. (Danielle – nanny)

By her own admission, Danielle’s lack of the drive it takes to have a “career” led her to believe that she would not make a substantial amount of money, but would ultimately be happier. The theme that you cannot be happy doing “work,” or that if you enjoy your work it is not an actual career, is one that runs throughout these interviews. Because many of the nannies enjoyed working with children, they did not see their labor as a “real job.”

Prior to working as a nanny, Monica was employed in the financial sector and was unhappy with her work. Seeking a fulfilling and rewarding line of work, Monica
sought out nanny work. In the following quote she explains why she sees working as a nanny as a career.

[LB: Do you see this as a career for you?]
Yeah I do actually because I don’t want to go back to where I was unhappy. You know, I’m really happy doing this and I can see myself doing this for a long time. And it’s more important for me to have like good mental health than good, because it was affecting my health; I was getting sick a lot. So it’s more important for me to be happy than to be making a ton of money or to be having a job that everyone’s like, “Oh that’s such a great job.” (Monica – nanny)

As previously discussed in this chapter, Monica struggled with her view of her work. She had only worked as a nanny for a very short period of time, so it is unclear whether or not this was a position that she would actually remain in. Abigail and Monica’s definitions of nannying as a career were different from the definitions of the other nannies. It is possible that longevity in a defined occupation did not shape their view of a career as it did for some of the others.

LB: Would you characterize your work as a professional job and why or why not?
Um, I think I would just because even if I stay doing small families, people have made, Joe Frost, people have made very lucrative careers out of nannying or being an expert on nannying. If I wanted to I could probably turn it into something more professional. (Abigail – nanny)

However, Abigail’s work as a nanny was something she sought to do only until she had children of her own.

LB: Do you view your job as a nanny as a long-term career?
I do because I plan on nannying until I have my own children. (Abigail – nanny)

A number of factors impeded these nannies from perceiving their position as a “real job.” Each of these women internalized society’s perception of a “real job” as one that offered a pay stub, benefits, and full-time employment in an area that they hoped to work in long-term. The structure of this job and the intimate interactions, which set nanny work apart from other occupations, hindered most nannies’ abilities to see their
work as a “real job.” These same interactions also align nannying with mothering and some nannies related nanny work to the labor performed by mothers. As Tronto writes, “insofar as domestic servants are conceived as a substitute for the wife in a traditional household, they are expected to conform to an account of their work that is only partly real ‘work.’” (2002: 37). As the following section will explore, the societal perception that mothering is not labor influenced many nannies’ perceptions of their work.

**Playing mom: Gendered expectations of care**

Wrigley writes that, “while nannies are a common sight in the parks of big cities, pushing children on swings and talking to one another, most of their work is performed out of view even of their employers. No government agencies regulate their labor or even count them” (1995:3). This issue is of particular salience to women, since considerably more women than men work in child care. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2004), 95.6 percent of child care workers are women. As a whole, caregiving is very gendered. Women are much more likely than men to take on this role (Cancian and Oliker 2000), whether it is paid or unpaid.

According to the nannies in my research, nanny work and mothering hold a number of commonalities. The gendered nature of caregiving very closely aligns nanny work with mothering (Wrigley 1995). This association, drawn both by society and nannies in my study, further shapes nannies’ understanding of their work. The labor that mothers perform is often invisible (Graham 1983; Daniels 1987), as is the work done by nannies. The nannies whom I interviewed viewed their job as an extension of the role of a mother and even referred to their work as “playing mom.” In the following statements
it is clear that when nannying is associated with mothering it loses its connection with work.

[LB: Can you tell me more about playing mom?] Playing mom means that I make sure that the kids are up and ready for school. That they have breakfast, that they’re fed dinner, that everything went okay at school, that their homework’s completed, that whatever test is coming up they’re taking. You know, that kind of thing. That’s what I’m paid for. (Claire – nanny)

Claire was not the only nanny to state that nannying was synonymous with “playing mom.” Margaret also discussed her job in these terms.

[LB: Would you characterize your work as a professional job, and why or why not?] I guess I wouldn’t necessarily consider it professional just because to me the word professional means it’s something more formal… It’s very relaxed and I’m basically just playing mom all day. I take care of the baby, we play and we roll around on the ground. I’m just silly with him all day. And the mom comes home and I just talk with her about his day and what we did. It’s not very formal at all… Basically I’m like the mother during the day because he’s awake from like 7:30 in the morning until 6 or 6:30 at night and there are nights when the mom doesn’t get home until 6:30 at night. So most of his waking hours during the day, I’m there for him for everything. (Margaret – nanny)

As they saw it, the duties that nannies performed for the children in their care in most instances were not very different from tasks that the children’s mothers engaged in.

Chloe and Nina also associated their work with mothering.

[LB: Is it hard for you not to have adult interaction?] That’s the hardest part of the job, definitely, absolutely. When you get, I find myself when I am with my friends, I find myself doing stuff that I’d be doing with the children. I’m definitely in mommy mode still (Chloe – nanny)

Margie sat in with one child and held him while they could draw the blood and I sat in with the other one, and those are the moments when you do, you really do feel like a mom. I’m holding the baby and they’ve got his little onesie pulled down so they can get blood from his arm and you’re going, oh. It hurts; you feel it like you would imagine a mother would. (Nina – nanny)

Claire, Margaret, Chloe, and Nina all described nannying in terms of “playing mom.” The connection between nannying and mothering was strongly linked to these four
women’s perceptions of professional status. Rather than viewing their work as a professional job, each felt that they were simply “playing mom.”

The societal expectation that mothers should provide care free of charge is something that many nannies struggled with, as they felt they too were expected to work for free. The activities associated with nannying along with the location of nanny work, shaped their perception and experience of work. “Caring is seen as all about the unpaid work of those who are related to each other through birth or marriage. As a result, it is difficult to identify and conceptualize forms of home-based care, which are not determined through marriage and kinship obligations. Secondly, caring is seen as all about gender” (Graham 1983: 68). The ability to care is understood to be natural and a part of women’s identities (Daniels 1987). The location in the home and the social relations, which are imbedded in kin and family (Stacey 1981), strengthens the association nannies make between their work and mothering, and enhances the space between their work and “real” work.

Research shows that mothers often feel their work is invisible. As nannying is similar to mothering in terms of the tasks performed, many nannies felt their labor was not recognized as such. Marianna reported feeling as if her work was invisible.

It’s like you are helping these kids become educated and no one sees that. It’s like the hidden gender. Like not even hidden, like women’s role or something. (Marianna – nanny)

As a whole, the duties of a mother are not recognized as work and many mothers do not see themselves as performing labor when caring for their children (Nelson 1990). The association of child care with mothering results in the view that women do not perform labor when they care for children. This idea is conflicting for many of the
nannies, especially when many of the same factors that prohibit them from thinking of nannying as work or a “real job” lead them to consider it to be “more than just a job.”

**It’s more than just a job**

Family and employment have been positioned as binary opposites for women in our society. Consequently, women are characterized as being focused on either work or family, rather than both (Garey 1999). Nanny work, which is situated in a family setting, is located in the nexus of this split. As a result, nannies often struggle to combine their mutually exclusive statuses of caregiver and paid employee.

The majority of respondents indicated that nanny work was “more than just a job.” Many of my participants felt it was cold and uncaring to view nannying as work and the vast majority of nannies in this sample were reluctant to state that nanny work was solely a job for them. Employers also expressed a desire for care of their children to be “more than just a job” for their nanny and the reasoning for this was multifaceted. The type of work that nannies perform shaped the perception of both parties. Nannies believed that caring for children was not a job, but a labor of love. They also legitimately cared about the children in their care. Finally, the role that the nanny was expected to take on in the family shaped the nannies’ and the employers’ view of nanny work as “more than just a job.” Nannies and employers both discussed the importance of the nanny communicating to the employer that nanny work was “more than just a job.” Doing so meant spending time with their employer at the end of their shift, which demonstrated that nanny work was a labor of love and that they cared about their role in
the family. Employers stated that this was important because nanny work was not a
“time clock” situation.

Because they cared about their job and the children they watched, neither Kelly
nor Monica saw their job as work.

I think people, I take it very seriously. I think people kinda sometimes look at
you like you’re a nanny, you don’t make a lot of money, you didn’t go to school
that’s probably why you’re a nanny. Um but that’s not why I did it. I love kids
and I am responsible for two human beings, for teaching them as much as they
can learn at their ages… I clean their house, and I do the shopping for them, and I
give these children unconditional love and I’m there on time every day, you
know. And I mean I feel like it’s a profession. I feel like, like you’re doing a job
but it’s not just a job, it’s more than a job. (Kelly – nanny)

I think it’s really important because you know I care a lot. It’s not like this is just
a job for me. (Monica – nanny)

The nannies in this study worked hard to convey to their employers that they cared about
the children they cared for and while they took their position seriously, they sought to
demonstrate that they did not view nannying solely as work.

**The end of the day transition**

This concept of nanny work being “more than just a job” was especially apparent
in my discussions with nannies and employers of the end of the day transition. At the end
of their shift nannies were required to remain at their job and spend extra time with the
parents and children together. This changeover was an indicator to both parties of the
nanny’s dedication to the children and the family. If the nanny behaved appropriately,
nanny work was seen as “more than just a job.” If not, the nanny was perceived as cold
and uncaring. Nannies rightfully worried about the negative impression they would give
off if they did not visit with their employers, particularly the mother, at the end of the
day. This end of the day transition was less of an issue when nannies worked for stay-at-home or work-from-home mothers.

Over one-half of the nannies, fourteen out of the twenty-five, reported spending a substantial amount of time interacting with their employer at the end of the day. The average time was twenty-five minutes. Of the eleven who did not stay after their required time, almost three-quarters, worked for a stay-at-home or work-from-home mother. The one-quarter who opted not to do so expressed a variety of reasons: One nanny had done so in her prior job, and in the end the close relationship she formed made leaving unbearable. Two nannies did not feel respected by their employers, and thus they did not feel comfortable making small talk at the end of the day. Nannies and employers alike reported that the passing of information at the end of the day was crucial.

The transfer of information at the end of the day is vital. Because families need to know what the details of their children’s lives are. We need to convey to them any issues that we have. The lines of communication need to stay open. And as far as the parents, they have to use that time to tell me what I’m expected for the next day or the next week. (Karen – nanny).

Many employers would find themselves incompatible with a nanny who did not effectively execute this transition. A nanny’s failure to go over information might lead to confusion such as the parents not knowing when a child last ate. Furthermore, the end of the day interactions went much deeper than the simple transfer of information. Nannies and employers agreed that nannies that did not handle the changeover properly were treating their position a “job.”

[LB: Do you think it would bother her [employer] if you never stuck around to talk at the end of the day?]
I think that it definitely shows that it’s more than just a job to me. Which it is, I definitely have a relationship with these people and I care about the kids so staying around to talk is kind of what I would do with a friend or something. (Margaret – nanny).

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[LB: Did you feel the need to stay and talk at the end of the day?]
(Nods) Well I always felt like if I was just like, “Okay bye,” then that would be rude. So I always tried to think of stuff that the baby did at the end of the day.
[LB: Why would you feel rude?]
Well I felt that because it’s such a personal, that I’m watching their child. If I just cut out at the end of the day like you do in an office job, it’s a little impersonal.
(Abigail – nanny)

Employers also felt that it was important that the nanny use this transition to communicate that nanny work was more than just a job.

[LB: Would you be at all put off if they were consistently ready to go?]
Yeah I would… I guess it just wouldn’t go into my whole ideal that we are close and we are more than just, you know it’s not just a working relationship; it’s a little more friendly than that. Maybe not as friendly as I would tend to say. I think it’s definitely me, I think, again part of it is me, and I think part of it might be male/female. I mean I think Eric [husband] would have no problem with being like, “Here is your money, bye.” There are times when I know he has come home and I will be like “When was he changed last?” “I have no idea.” And I am like “What?” And I have had to call them afterwards and be like, “Did the kids eat?” “Should I feed them more?” “Are they good to go to bed?” You know? It’s important for me to feel like they want to be here, because it’s different. It’s not a job where you are just typing letters, you are working with people. That is how I felt about Human Resources. When you are working with people you are investing a lot of – kids are the most important. Yeah if they wanted to run out they wouldn’t be here long. (Lindsay – employer)

Despite Lindsay’s thinking, her husband Eric, reported that he too would be put off by this.

You know I would, I think it would bother me a little bit. It’s interesting; I think it’s more from the standpoint that she would be looking at it as more of a job to a certain extent and not kind of that friend relationship. (Eric – employer)

Both Lindsay and Eric disliked the cold impression they felt from a nanny who left at the end of the day without much discussion and this impersonal feeling was associated with the nanny treating the care of their children as work.
It’s more fluid than punch in and punch out

In discussing what they did not or would not like in a nanny, parents often referenced punching a clock. To them, punching a clock felt like a task that people do at a “job.” Parents who viewed nannying as “more than just a job,” and did not want their nanny to view caring for their children as an ordinary job, spoke of nannying, as not being the kind of profession where a person could “punch in and punch out.”

[LB: Can you tell me what it is in particular what you wouldn’t like about someone coming in at 8:00 and leaving right at 4:00?]
Um, because I think being a nanny is more than, more than a job. It’s entering into a role within a family, really. A day care center is a job. You know you go to work and then you leave… If she just came in the morning and left with no conversation or no interest in what happens before or after her hours were done I would take it to be almost offensive. I don’t know, I just, I really do view her as another parental figure in our family. I do view her as part of our family and just like relatives I would expect the relationship to be more fluid than punch in and punch out. (Melyssa – employer)

Gwen stated that she would not appreciate it if her nanny did not stay and talk to her at the end of the day. When asked why she responded:

Just as I said before its not sort of a time clock situation. Especially since a couple of times she’s late by a few minutes in the morning. And you know I think you can’t just like be holding a baby and then throw her down on the floor. You’ve kind of got to finish what you started. (Gwen – employer)

For the employers in this study, caring for children was different from a job where a person would punch a time clock and leave at a regular time each day. Melyssa and Gwen were satisfied with the amount of time their nannies spent with them at the end of their shift. Julie, on the other hand, disliked the impersonal and business-like feeling she got from one of her nannies, Martha. She also used the notion of punching a clock to compare Martha to her other nanny whom she had a close relationship with.

Like they’re pals. They’re like, like she’s acting like my kids, like they’re an extension of our family. I guess that’s what I always envisioned when I found a
sitter that they’d stay with the family and really come to care about the kids, almost like a younger sibling or a niece or nephew. And I don’t get that from Martha. Like the second you come home, I can barely get my questions out, “When did they eat?” “Diapers?” And she’s like got her coat and she’s out the door. She’s just very, it’s business. It’s, she’s at work and just like she would punch out at work and go home and not BS, she’s out the door. And that’s just kind of the fundamental difference between the two. (Julie – employer)

All but one employer either appreciated that their nanny spent time with them at the end of the day, or they wished that their nanny would do this. One employer, Cynthia, was the only exception. She expressed how she wished that her nanny would leave more quickly at the end of the day. Cynthia’s children were also 7 and 10 years of age. One other employer had children who were the same age as Cynthia’s children, but 10 was the oldest age of an employer’s children in this sample. The age of her children and their ability to communicate information to her may have influenced her view.

I think sometimes you know when I come home and I’m ready for me and my kids to be together and she’s slow to get out or there’s four other children in my house… So we’ll talk about that sometimes, unless we know ahead of time I would prefer that when I get home, … that the kids be gone and you be ready to leave (laughs). So I think that’s probably the least. While Cynthia would appreciate it if the wrap-up time with her nanny was expedited, her following statement reflects the idea that her expectations shift depending on her needs.

[LB: Would you be at all put off if the situation was reversed and she would just leave in the middle of the game?] (Laughs) That’s a good question. Um, it depends… really on the day… if we had to get moving then I wouldn’t be put off, I’d be happy. If the kids were all into it and nothing was happening that night I might be. (Cynthia – employer)

Nannies, more so than employers, must strive to find a happy medium to satisfy the needs of their employer. The job of the nanny is complex because nannies must anticipate their employer’s needs and respond accordingly in order to make the relationship workable. Both parties agree, that the job of a nanny is complicated and is in fact, more than just a
job. The relationships formed between employers and nannies are deeper than those created in the average office settings. This relationship is often required, and it is complicated by the fact that nannies are expected to behave as a member of the family. Furthermore, they must operate on their employer’s terms, as Chapter 8 will explore. In the following section, I argue that the concept of nanny work as more than just a job is intimately tied to perspectives on receiving pay for care.

**Paying for care or being paid to care: It’s not just about the money**

Research shows that paying for care is a complicated process (Tuominen 2003) and the interviewees in my sample expressed similar sentiments. Both nannies and employers agreed that nannies must not be in this line of work simply for the money. When inquiring about salary, Nelson (1989) found that child care providers would preface their questions by stating that they were not in it for the money. The nannies with whom I spoke articulated a related outlook, feared that their employers might perceive them to only be interested in the job for the monetary compensation. Evidence of this can be seen in the following quote by Monica:

[LB: Can you tell me a little bit about that why you care what they think of you? (In reference to discussing leaving at the end of the day)]
Well I mean, because they’re entrusting me with their baby. And I want to make sure that they are comfortable with me and that they’re happy with me. I just, I just don’t want them to think that I’m just in it for the money, cause that’s not true.
[LB: Can you tell me more about that?] I don’t think that they would trust me as much if I was just in it for the money. They wouldn’t think that I was giving her the care that she deserves if I was just in it for the money. And I think it just gives a bad, makes them have a bad perception of me basically. (Monica – nanny)
Indicating that they were in this line of work for money made nannies feel as if their employers would hold a negative perception of them.

Although nannies and employers were in agreement that nannies should not be in this line of work for the money, they were forced to have discussions surrounding pay, which neither party was comfortable with. An additional downfall to not having a Human Resources Department or an Office Manager to turn to were the direct discussions that nannies had to have with their employers regarding their pay. Both parties vocalized discomfort surrounding conversations about compensation, which were particularly complicated for nannies. They internalized society’s view that they should not be caring for children solely for monetary compensation. Nannies also developed deep bonds with the children they cared for. This attachment, the close ties many formed with their employer’s, as well as their notions that they should be caring for children for reasons other than money, impeded their ability to discuss pay. Nannies spoke of not being paid the agreed amount and having to wait around for their pay. Both parties agreed discussions of payment were awkward. But unlike nannies, employers did not find the failure to pay the correct amount and the failure to pay on time to be problematic.

The majority of the nannies I interviewed had at least one story of not being paid the appropriate amount or having to ask their employer for their pay. Insufficient payment might also be a feature of the flexibility of the job. Almost half of the nannies, twelve out of twenty-five had considerable variation in their hours from week to week, and therefore they did not have set pay. Issues were most likely to arise when this was the case. Not being paid the correct amount was uncomfortable for the nannies who
experienced this situation. More often than not, when this was the case it was not something that they brought to the attention of their employers.

One time they did [not pay the correct amount] and the following week they gave me an extra 40 dollars, they gave me the back pay and an extra 40 to make up for it.

[LB: Did you have to say, “I wasn’t paid the right amount?”]
No I didn’t actually say anything to them because I don’t handle money well. (Shannon – nanny)

I worked a whole bunch of hours and my check was like 144 and I was like, “This isn’t right.” So she’s like, “Oh I’m sorry.” So then she re-added it. And… couldn’t find where I was adding the extra four hours. I was like, “The four from today.” So then she just made another check and she’s like, “Oh, silly me.”

[LB: And how did you feel when you had to say that to her?]
I felt embarrassed, because I shouldn’t be charging you for my money. You should know… I feel bad charging. And maybe it’s because I don’t want you to think I’m so desperate for my money. But obviously I’m working because I need it. (Marianna – nanny)

It wasn’t a tremendous amount. It was about four extra hours and um it ended up where she paid me the $600. And um there was supposed to be like $40 added on there and there wasn’t. I figured there was a misunderstanding. I didn’t say anything right away. The next week they added in $40, so I was like okay.

[LB: Can you tell me why you didn’t say anything right away?]
I feel weird asking. I feel really, I don’t know why but I feel like, they pay me an awful lot. I mean they are rich, but I still feel weird about asking for money. I do. (Chloe – nanny)

Shannon, Marianna, and Chloe each described feeling uncomfortable correcting their employers and asking for the money that they were owed. This discomfort stemmed from feeling uncomfortable discussing money in general, as well as the feeling that they should not have to tell their employer that they were owed money.

Like Chloe, who decided not to address forgotten back pay with her employers, Mary felt her employers compensated her in non-monetary ways for her work. This indirect compensation impacted her ability to address the overtime she was owed each week.
From the beginning, we actually had an agreement because they were supposed to pay me, they said, “We’ll work out the hours and if you work more hours in the week… and then whatever hours you worked over we’ll give you.” But I never got paid for it.

[LB: And did they ever bring it up again?]
No, and I was too, I just loved the kids so much that it was like whatever, not a big deal. And I mean they brought me out to dinner so many times and they treated me to a vacation. So in a sense too like, I didn’t want to be selfish because they did so much for me. Which is in a sense why I hated it too because then you’re conflicted. Like they don’t pay you but at the same time they spend all this money on you. (Mary – nanny)

Because of her attachment to the children and her fear of appearing selfish, Mary refused to ask her employer for the pay she was owed. My findings confirm the work of Bakan and Stasiulis (1995), who found that employers viewed nannies as being greedy when they made requests for overtime compensation. Research also shows that employers view direct discussions of pay to be a sign that the nanny should not be trusted (Wrigley 1995). Several of the nannies in this sample internalized the perception that asking for their pay or for raises was rude. Kristin faced a situation similar to Mary. Because of her attachment to the family that she had spent the past two years nannying for, she struggled with asking her employer for a raise.

I want to ask for 20 dollars an hour but I don’t know how to do that because they’ve been so giving to me. I think my time is worth 20 dollars an hour and any new family that I work for; I will not work for less than 20 dollars an hour…. [LB: Has your pay ever changed?]
No, because it was a one year commitment and I was leaving them for (city) I felt guilty. [She returned after time away]… And because I was part of the family and they treated me so nicely I didn’t feel like I needed to ask at that time for the extra 5 dollars an hour. Now I feel like I’m in even more, even deeper now. (Kristin – nanny)

Having to remind their employers to pay them was equally as uncomfortable for the nannies as requesting a raise. Over one-half of the nannies, reported experiencing this
situation. Several noted that they just let it slide because they were uncomfortable asking or did not know how to handle the situation.

The dad is kind of like cheap I feel like. I haven’t said anything to them yet but last week when they gave me the check, they wrote out, it wasn’t like a normal business check, she wrote it from like a credit check… I took it to my bank and they were like we can’t accept this, it’s a credit card check. I’m like, what do I do? I need the money. So they went ahead and put it in but I don’t even get to see the money for like two weeks. So I’m like do I say something to the parents? (Tanya – nanny)

In discussing the difference between nanny work and other forms of labor, Shanna maintained that with any other job she would not have to request payment. Shanna viewed her work as a job, and she relied on the income. The failure to recognize this on the part of her employer and a family she baby-sat for upset her.

The morning one, usually she is so preoccupied with putting Mia to bed that I have to be like “excuse me, you have to pay me.” And she is like “oh yeah.” And I actually I was just baby-sitting for someone once and they were like “oh you don’t work for free for us?” It was a joke but I don’t think that it was very appropriate.

[LB: Can you tell me about that?]
It puts me in an awkward situation, like, yes I love your kids but I am not going to work for free, it’s my job.

[LB: So it was like at the end of the night and you had to ask them to pay you?] Yeah so, and in most situations as a nanny you feel awkward saying anything like that.

[LB: Can you tell me about that?] I don’t think you should have to. At any other job you would get paid no matter what. And if you are employing someone you should kind of have it in the back of your mind, like this is how much per hour, you should kind of have things set out. (Shanna – nanny)

Some nannies described having to wait around at the end of the day, or return to their jobs after having left, for their pay. This disorganization on the part of employers was very aggravating for the nannies.

That is a huge source of frustration. Because I, although it’s kind of as I said before, not on the books, this is like my job. And even if it’s a little bit of hours and even when it was 30 plus hours during the [event] time, I was still expected to
go over on another day if the grandmother wasn’t around or didn’t have “time.” You know like she was home, she had a check book but she was busy. So she didn’t want to write the check… That makes me feel really taken advantage of… They need to be prepared enough that when my week ends, for instance this week ends on a Thursday, I expect to be paid on a Thursday. I haven’t come to the point yet where I’ve actually said something… Actually one time I said, “I don’t want to make an extra trip, I’ll just get my paycheck next week.” But now with the fewer hours I’m, you know people say that they live paycheck to paycheck. I can’t even live paycheck to paycheck. It’s not enough money. (Suzanne – nanny)

Suzanne interpreted her employers’ behavior as a sign of disrespect, as if they were “taking advantage of her.” She would wait until the next week to be paid which was bothersome to her on a number of levels, including the fact that she lived “paycheck to paycheck” and could not make ends meet without the money. She also felt that her employer should be more organized and ready to pay her.

Despite nannying being the only, or primary source of income for each of the nannies in this study, a number of nannies I spoke with stated that nannying was, “more than just a job” to them. This factor provided an additional complication for them and impeded their ability to tell their employers that they needed the money.

Yeah I mean I feel a little awkward about asking for money and I mean technically it is a job; I am there to make money. But it still, it’s more than that. (Monica – nanny)

This concept appears to be twofold. On the one hand, nannies must contend with the social expectation that women who care for children for pay must be in the position for more than just the money. On the other hand, they truly care about the children they care for, and thus, their position a nanny becomes “more than just a job.” The problem here is that at the end of the day, this was their job and they needed be paid for it.

It is kind of weird to take money for caring for someone.
[LB: Why is that?] Um (sigh) I guess because it’s like a maternal thing. It’s like a basic nature, you know. It’s not that common, you know number one, and um, it’s not like a typical
job at all. It’s not like, it’s not like you’re doing it for the money. You’re doing it because you care, because you love children. (Monica – nanny)

Nelson’s (1989) research on family child care providers uncovered the confusion that providers felt over payment. Research shows that parents are often skeptical of providers whom they perceive as performing child care largely for pay (Uttal’s 2002). As the nannies and employers in my study reported feelings and experiences that were similar to one another, it is interesting to see the way in which nannies and employers tend to hold more similar beliefs than different ideas in this area.

The nannies in my study work because they need to be paid; yet many of them fundamentally resist the idea that they are working solely for pay. Employers too felt more comfortable when they felt that their nanny entered into this line of work for reasons beyond monetary compensation.

[LB: You said it raised it to more of a professional level when you paid on the books. Can you tell me about that?] I think that um, it felt like there was a more, I guess implicit in that it feels like there is more of a long-term commitment, because you don’t pay as you go. There’s a payment either weekly or monthly. We’ve done all depending on the individual’s preferences. And I think in that then, it’s not only about the money then. The focus is more on the job satisfaction. From my end I get the feeling then that means that people are going to be around, and want to be around, and invest in the experience to go well. (Susan – employer)

Employers like Susan appreciated feeling as if their nanny was caring for their children for reasons that were not limited to pay. Julie did not like to think of money as the driving factor behind her nanny’s relationship with her children.

[LB: Why did you want someone who was an extension of the family?] Because if they came to care more about the kids it wouldn’t, even though I take care of them financially, it wouldn’t just be about the money… With Elise it’s kind of like, hey I’ll give you 40 bucks to watch my kids tonight. A prearranged negotiation but you’re doing it not necessarily, the money helps but its not necessarily cause of the money, it’s kind of like a favor. (Julie – employer)
Much like Julie, her husband Kyle appreciated that one of their nannies was not interested in compensation and had a personal relationship with them.

Leigh didn’t even care about the money really. It was just more of you know, you have more of a personal relationship with the person. And that makes it a lot easier too. (Kyle – employer)

Employers appreciated knowing that their nanny was personally invested in their children, which made them feel as if she were nannying for altruistic reasons rather than for pay.

Much like the nannies whom I interviewed, employers found the act of paying to be awkward and they took steps to lessen their discomfort.

Usually what Mark would do is just get an envelope and just put the money in an envelope and put it in a certain place so she could pick it up when she was done on Friday. (Erin – employer)

[LB: Can you tell me what it is you dislike about your position as an employer?] The financial part of the transaction… it is uncomfortable. I think that’s part of the reason why, you’ll notice the folder’s on the table, the check is in there. I don’t actually typically hand them cash or a check… The money part of it is a little awkward. (Linda – employer)

Part of Linda’s discomfort stemmed from her perception, which was similar to Susan’s, that this line of work was not high paying. Linda saw nanny work and child care as underpaid. Linda was not comfortable in her role as an employer, which also shaped this experience for her. (See Chapter 8 for more discussion).

The nannies and employers in my sample overwhelmingly held similar beliefs and viewpoints on nanny work. However, the one area of opinion where the two groups differed was in their perceptions of forgetting to pay the nanny. While nannies were ill at ease with this situation, employers did not see this lapse in judgment as intentional or awkward.
One time the girl did not remind me and so when she came back again she said, “Oh you know you need to pay me for the other day too.” Another time the girl did remind me and I said, “Oh gosh.” And one time I short changed a girl and she goes “I think it was,” and I was like “Oh my gosh I hope you know I am not trying to short change you.” (Cathy – employer)

[LB: Has your nanny ever had to remind you to pay her?]
Yeah. I’ve actually, I think it was last week I paid her on Thursday and we pay her on Friday. I was just saying how I forget all the time so I put tomorrow’s date on it, here you go. But she has, usually I remember… If it’s up to me usually I remember sometime during Friday and I just write it and give it to her but she has like twice, I think and said, “Oh yeah and my check.” Or maybe three times. (Joel – employer)

Gwen explained both accidentally and knowingly not paying her nanny in full.

[LB: Have you ever not paid her the full amount you were supposed to?]  
Yes, my husband once paid her and did not pay the correct amount and she told me about it.  
[LB: How did she tell you?]  
She, she stuck up for herself I was proud of her. She handled it well.  
[LB: Did she call you or did she wait until Monday?]  
She waited until Monday. And there have been times when I’ve paid her if I’m two dollars short, I tell her, “I’m two dollars short. I’ll give you two dollars next week.”  
[LB: And you remember?]  
Yeah. (Gwen – employer)

In an occupation with set structures and guidelines, this would be less likely to happen.

The situation Gwen places her nanny in is an interesting one. By her own admission, the amount owed is only two dollars. Yet from the perspective of the nannies in this sample, it was not acceptable to shortchange your nanny. Moreover, it is unlikely that Gwen’s nanny would speak up if Gwen forgot to pay her the money, given that most of the nannies in this sample did not correct their employer in instances such as this. These employers would likely be displeased if their bosses forgot to pay them or did not pay them the proper amount and they were placed in a position where they had to address this.
The lack of a formal structure to this occupation, the work being performed, and the relationships formed all shaped nannies’ and employers’ experiences and perceptions of pay. As a whole, pay was an awkward subject for both parties. The major difference existed between nannies and employers regarding perceptions of shortchanging or forgetting to pay the nanny. Nannies absorbed the message that they should not be in this line of work for the money, which shaped their inability to confront their employers about their pay. According to employers, the pay structure of the occupation as a whole was low. Many employers could not understand how their nanny could survive on the pay, and this combined with other factors shaped employers perception of nanny work.

**Employers’ perceptions of nanny work**

Much like the nannies I interviewed, employers held similar negative views of nanny work. The few employers who spoke of nanny work in a positive light stated that they felt their nanny found working with their children to be rewarding. While this was likely true, parents also wanted to believe that their nanny truly enjoyed spending time with their children and deeply cared for them. Beyond perceiving their nanny to find nannying to be personally fulfilling, employers held negative views of nanny work for the very reasons that nannies looked down on their work. Both parties shared the opinion that nanny work was not a good occupation to work in. Just as nannies did not consider it to be a viable long-term option, the employers in this sample were equally as likely not to view nannying as a sustainable long-term career goal for young women. The key difference between nannies’ perceptions and those of employers, was that while nannies spoke of embarrassment at society’s, and employers’ negative perceptions of the job, employers spoke of nanny work more from an occupational standpoint. Employers
discussed their views of nanny work as it related to advancement, or a lack thereof, in the occupation as a whole. Interestingly, even the employers who worked in occupations which lacked a fixed work schedule did not have a better understanding or appreciation of their nanny’s work. As a whole, employers agreed that nanny work was best used as temporary work employment.

Theresa, a stay-at-home mother of four children, employed a few nannies over the years. During our discussion, Theresa spoke of a nanny she interviewed who sought this line of work as a career. Prior to meeting this nanny, she stated that she has never considered nannying to be a career.

We interviewed a nanny who was very clear that this was her profession. And you know, it was the first person that we met (laughing). Most people that we had interviewed, as I said they were younger or had had some experience, but it, you know; I doubted that it was going to be their career. But this was really a career and she made it very clear that this was her career. *I hadn’t really thought of it even that way.* There was something nice about it because she took it very seriously and this was her job. I mean she wanted benefits and she wanted a car and all these things. Um, but there was a *part of me that felt like it was a little too serious, and a little too much,* because I didn’t know what I’d need in a year. And as I said, as the girls get older I don’t know that I need a full-time nanny, or things might change about what the job is and what I’m going to need. So it’s not, it was nice that she again, she had like a Masters, she had been an English teacher. She basically expected from like 8 to 8 to work with the kids, and working parents and she would be the mom. But, that wasn’t necessarily what we needed. (emphasis added) (Theresa – employer)

Theresa stated that this career nanny felt “a little too serious, and a little too much” to her. This perception was based on her lack of need for years of child care, but it was also grounded in the fact that, prior to meeting this nanny, Theresa had never thought of nannying as a career. Her view of nanny work bears on the field of child care as a whole, which is not largely socially acceptable as a career, especially for college graduates.
Nanny work as a whole, which is performed in the absence of other adults and nannies, lacks structural arrangements, which shape employers thinking.

Most employers felt that it was good for their nanny to have adult interaction at points during the day. Mark, however, held an opposite view.

Actually if she did have contact with nannies, I’d be a little bit worried. Well because I’m not hiring her because she’s part of some nanny clique. And I guess I might have a little status problem with that… I don’t know for some reason I just kind of view negatively somebody who has a network. What does that mean that they’re planning on becoming a professional nanny? And what does somebody who becomes a professional nanny… What does that mean about them? It’s kind of a dead-end. If you’re a nanny you’re being paid the same wage your whole life. You don’t have any benefits. (Mark – employer)

Although Mark’s nanny was in her forties and had worked as a nanny for years, he resisted the idea that nanny work could be a career for some people. Mark held a negative opinion about networks of individuals sharing job experiences and interests in nanny work. He also examined nanny work from a structural perspective of lacking advancement and benefits, which shaped his view of nanny work as dead-end. Susan shared Mark’s view of the occupation with the lack of opportunities for advancement influencing her thinking.

[LB: Do you view working as a nanny as a career for your nannies?]
It has been but I don’t… Think it’s a great career… I think, in general it doesn’t pay well. It doesn’t have good benefits. By definition, there’s no advancement, because the individual family just can’t afford it… I don’t know how a family can afford more. And so how can you advance? You know, like in a usual job you get paid more. I actually had the nanny in [state] tell me that once, and it was someone I liked very much, and I was a little taken aback. It was the second year and she said… “I’m really upset with you because we didn’t discuss a raise. When I worked at the day care center we got a ten percent raise every year.” And I’m like; “Well we certainly can do that.” It just didn’t occur to me. I’m not like, you know we’re a family. I said, “We’re a family; it’s not something that’s in our rubric to be thinking that we’ve met the one-year mark.” It’s not like; we’re not set up to professionally develop this person… I think it’s… most successful when it’s used more as a transition opportunity. The other person that I could see that it would be very useful for is someone who um, could, who had young children of
their own and could nanny at the same time but that’s not someone I’d hire. (Susan – employer)

Susan notes the issue of not being able to financially afford to advance the nanny, but she also provides an example of a time when she did not consider changing her nanny’s pay.

Susan stated that she had the mentality that she was running a family, not a business. Additionally, she “liked” this nanny, which shaped her view that this was not a business relationship. Because of this, she did not consider providing her nanny with a raise.

Although both she and Mark valued the labor that their respective nannies provided for them, they did not view the job as a professional position. Imbedded in each of their statements was the notion that this line of work is a different sort of job.

Tina, an employer, was frustrated with her child care arrangement, but despite this, she expressed much more so than the other employers that she had considered the job from her nanny’s point of view. Tina could not understand why her nanny would chose nanny work.

I feel like I’ve been complaining a lot. I am very frustrated. I have thought about this a lot from the nanny’s perspective. I don’t know how they do it. It’s great if you love kids and you are with them all day… I don’t know how she survives. I felt badly telling her that we, even though I told her in the beginning when we hired her that we were interested in day care long term… Because, then it’s like what do you do? To have to find another family… I don’t know how they do it and they’ve got to get screwed a lot when you think about being in a situation where you end up not getting paid as much as you should. I don’t know. But I appreciate the job, and that I think makes it harder to be an employer of someone I don’t understand how or why they do the job. (Tina – employer)

Each of these employers understood the downsides to nanny work. They recognized that the position as a whole was not highly paid and that it neither lead to advancement nor, offered stability. Each of these components stand in contrast to their view of a “good” job.
Employers spoke of nanny work as both underpaid and undervalued. While they required the labor that their nanny provided, several employers questioned how long a person could work as a nanny. They also questioned what a person could do for work after having nannied.

In reference to college educated women working as nannies, Mark stated:

I think it’s just something you fall into. And then you have that resume and you’re kind of stuck with it. Because what do you do if you want a high level job and you have three years experience being a nanny? You label, sending a signal that there’s something wrong. (Mark – employer)

When I asked Kendra if there was anything in particular that she liked about the nanny she had just hired having a college degree she stated:

We’ve talked a lot about that you know, I was like, “you know you’re smart, why are you doing this?” (Kendra – employer)

Because this individual was smart, had recently graduated college, and had hopes of attending graduate school, Kendra saw her as intelligent and questioned why she would want to nanny. She recognized the downsides to and limitations of nanny work.

Imbedded in the employers’ discussions of nanny work was the concept that nanny work was best used as a temporary status. This idea was not one-dimensional. First off, employers did not need child care beyond a set number of years, and therefore they would not be able to employ a nanny for longer than a few years. Secondly, they did not see nanny work as an acceptable area to work in long term. Thirdly, considering the job in negative terms made employers feel as if it was not their fault that they would not be employing their nanny beyond a short period of time. This also allowed them to treat the employment, of their nanny as something other than standard employment with raises, benefits, and paid time off. The following chapter explores the attachments that
nannies form with the children in their care, which serves as an additional complication to their work.

**Conclusion**

The job of the nanny is complicated as is the process of employing a nanny. In my study, nannies and employers held very similar viewpoints on the occupation of nanny work. Both groups saw nanny work as an occupation that was devalued by society, and they consequently, did not value it very highly. Each party agreed that the occupation of nanny work lacks clear guidelines, which create issues for both groups. My interviewees considered this line of work to be best suited for those not seeking nanny work as a career. The implications of nannies not seeing their labor as work, and of employers not viewing themselves as employers, are significant for the occupation of nanny work. When this is the case, employers and nannies are not likely to provide or seek out structure to the position, and they are more apt to let pay and raises slide. In these instances, the turnover rates are high and neither party has much incentive to alter their behavior. The intense relationships formed between nannies and their employers limit the possibility for discussions surrounding areas where nannies and employers might improve. Frustrations tend to present themselves at the conclusion of relationships, rather than emerging over time in a professional manner. These factors trap nannies and employers in a cycle of work relationships where neither party is fully able to get what they desire out of the relationship. As a result of these patterns, the occupation as a whole never improves.

The nannies in this sample did not set out to work as a nanny from an early age. Some turned to nanny work to earn money while in college, while others sought this
work out after being laid off or unable to find formal employment. The general pattern was that these women had babysat when they were younger, and thus they turned to caring for children when they were in need of pay, which proved to be both a blessing and a curse for them. On the one hand nanny work provided them with pay when they were in need of it. On the other hand, it trapped them in a cycle of low paying jobs, hindering their ability to find formal employment. After having nannied, these women were left with a skill set in an area that society does not value. The women in this study became limited occupationally and their inability to place the title “nanny” on their resume hurt their chances of future employment. Suzanne summed up this issue nicely:

“At the same time I can only blame so much on the economy but I can’t find a position that I like or they want me because I have been out of “the game” for over a year since the company relocated and people are like… you [put] nanny on your resume after you went to college and you’ve done other things and you’ve done Corporate and so people are weary of that. I learned that from someone at [agency], a temp to hire agency. And its’ like with the nanny thing I don’t even know what to say on my resume regarding it. So it’s um, it’s been a source of income but actually it’s a hindrance as well. (Suzanne – nanny)

As a whole, the nannies in this study sought to work in formal employment in the future and many questioned how they would be able to move on to other types of employment after working as a nanny. The issue of whether or not to list nanny work on their resume is reflective of the fact that our society does not highly value this job, nor do many people consider it work that is suitable to appear on a resume. In reference to nannying and her aspiration to return to college to obtain a professional position, Shanna stated, “I could do this forever and time will pass and I won’t have anything.”

Very few of the employers, only two out of the nineteen employer and wife/husband employer pairs, saw nanny work as a career for their nanny. They held views of the occupation that were very similar to the nannies. Most employers felt that
the pay for nannying was low. The pay structure of nanny work was further limited by
the transitory status of the nannies in this study. Like the nannies in this study, employers
as a whole felt that nanny work should be more highly valued. And similar to the
nannies, employers expressed that nannies could become stuck in this line of work. Mark,
an employer expressed the following sentiments:

I think it’s just something you fall into. And then you have that resume and
you’re kind of stuck with it. Because what do you do if you want a high level job
and you have three years experience being a nanny? You label, sending a signal
that there’s something wrong. (Mark – employer)

By and large, nannies and employers did not view nanny work as a “job.” Employers
exhibited this viewpoint in many more ways than the nannies did. Employers were
unlikely to implement a set pay schedule, structured vacation or sick time, or raises.
They had much less incentive than the nannies to set up structure to the position, as most
employers only needed care for a period of a few years. Seventeen of the twenty-seven
employers relied on a nanny for fewer than forty hours per week. Employers’ poor
treatment of their nanny in terms of not providing benefits such as sick time, vacation
time and raises was in effect justified by their viewpoint that it was not a job and they
were a family rather than a business. The most obvious circumstances in which nannies
did not treat their labor as a “job,” was when they gave notice and grappled with whether
or not to give two weeks notice, which is customary in the paid labor force.

Regardless of the viewpoints held by nannies and employers of the professional
status of the job, the arrangements worked best when those in the relationship held the
same viewpoint. Conflict was less likely to occur in these situations because they did not
clash over their perspectives and they came to accept each other’s treatment of the
position. This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8. In the next chapter, I
suggest that nanny work is more complicated than the jobs of those who engage in formal employment. The fact that nannies are expected to care about children and the fact that they actually do care complicates their work immensely.
Chapter 7
THE NANNY-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

In this chapter, I examine the role of attachments in the experiences of employers and nannies. Parents, particularly mothers especially varied on whether or not they liked the close bond that their nannies and children formed. As a whole, while some mothers struggled with this connection, parents generally valued the relationship. The first section of this chapter will cover the value that mothers place on their children’s attachment to their nanny. The second section will address the concerns of mothers who struggle with this. The third will illustrate the nannies’ perspectives on instances where the children in their care express greater preference for them than their employer. The final section addresses the impact these attachments have on the nannies’ work experience.

Valuing the attachment

As with all forms of paid child care, nanny work involves demonstrating love and care for children, while doing so only on a level that mothers are comfortable with. (Nelson 1990). Employers who appreciated the attachment their children had with their nannies had made peace with their need for child care, and the fact that they were not always going to be the primary caregiver. As a whole, the employers in this sample admired their nannies’ emotional investment in the relationship and valued the bond she shared with their children.

Cynthia described her nanny’s relationship with her children as “positive, loving.” When asked her if her nanny was emotionally involved with her children, she replied:
Yes and that’s good. I think one of the strongest points and the biggest comforts that I have, is that she’s emotionally involved with my children.

[LB: Are your children emotionally involved with her and if so, how do you feel about this?]

Yes and that’s also, that’s a good thing. It’s good that they are excited to see her and they want to spend time with her. If, you know, we’ve been away on vacation or something, then they’re all excited to see her and tell her about it.

[LB: Has she ever shown too much affection or attachment?]

No. (pause) And I’m good with it. If there’s been a period of time, like when she couldn’t work for us, she would you know, send me a text or give me a call, “Can I come see the kids for a little while?” “I really miss them.” And you know just to come play. So she really cares and I think that’s really good. (Cynthia – employer)

Cynthia was content with the level of involvement that her nanny had in her children’s lives and she valued her nanny’s demonstrations of care for her children. Melyssa also accepted and cherished her nanny’s attachment and place in her family.

She’s definitely their second mother. She’s very loving. It’s nice to hear that they act the same way around her that they do around me. So they’re bratty (laughs) with her just like me. She’s a little bit more lenient with them than I am. She’s definitely more of a parent figure than a friend figure. She… has a good boundary with them. (Melyssa – employer)

Melyssa felt comfortable knowing that her children behaved the same way around her nanny as they did around her, even when their behavior was less than perfect.

[LB: Do your children ever ask about her when she’s not at work?] Yeah, you know they’ll ask if they can call her. They’ll ask if she’s coming to different events. They’ve never asked for her in place of me. It’s never been like you’re the mean mommy, I want Maureen, that kind of thing. (Melyssa – employer)

Although the majority of employers I interviewed expressed that they respected and appreciated the attachment that their nannies formed with their children, Melyssa addressed a key point, that her children did not ask for Maureen, “in place of” her. These boundaries enabled her to achieve a comfortable balance with the relationship, which was difficult for some mothers to attain. Melyssa was able to feel like Maureen was her
children’s second mother, but that Maureen’s presence in their lives did not challenge her status. Furthermore, she did not feel like her children preferred Maureen over her. As with Cynthia, Melyssa was not threatened by this attachment.

Most employers also stated that their nannies showed adequate affection for, and attachment to, their children. This of course, was related to their level of comfort. What was acceptable to one employer, was not for another. Those who valued this attachment between nannies and children felt good about their choice in having replacement care for their children. Both Erin and Kendra felt more secure leaving their children with their nanny because of the deep attachment that had formed.

She loves the boys; you can see that the boys love her. And just to see someone that’s so attached to the boys and the boys are so attached to her, it’s great for us because we know that they are in such good care when we are away. (Erin – employer)

Those girls love her. They’ve been together two years and … I don’t even have to, I never call home during the day. (Kendra – employer)

For Erin and Kendra, this attachment indicated that they would not have to worry about their children when they were gone. Kendra also discussed a recent situation in which her children had turned to her nanny, rather than to her, for comfort when they were ill. Kendra was completely at ease with this:

They were throwing up so much the other day and I came home… There were moments in the day that the kids definitely preferred to be with her than with me. You know after they threw up, sometimes Lexie would rather be held by Jessica, or Zoë would rather be held by Jessica. That’s great, I think that’s wonderful. (Kendra – employer)

As these quotes illustrate, most employers expected their nanny to bond with their children and vice versa. Similar to Kendra, Ann accepted a time when her children expressed a preference for her nanny, as opposed to her.
There was one day where the kids told my husband that they wanted Victoria to be their mom. But I sort of interpreted it in a good way… I interpreted it as, they’re feeling real comfortable and safe with her.  

[LB: Did you feel at all upset about that?]  
No. No I mean that’s what, I think my husband was, he said it in a way like, “I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but.” And I think he felt bad conveying it. To me, it just meant that there was some attachment, which was really important. 

(Ann – employer)

Attachment was required by most employers, however, employers varied on their level of comfort with and acceptance of attachment. Situations such as those noted by Kendra and Ann would be unbearable for many mothers I interviewed. However, both saw the positive in these instances. The parents in this study who valued the bond formed between their children and their nannies accepted their decision to work for pay and to have their nanny play a large role in their children’s lives. In valuing the connection they formed, mothers felt as if they had made a good choice in their selection of care.

Expressions of love and attachment served as an indicator of this for the parents. Now that I have explored the perspectives of parents who accept the attachments formed between their children and nannies, I will move on to discuss the mothers who had difficulty accepting their children’s relationship with their nannies.

**Mothers’ struggles with attachment**

Only three of the nineteen mothers admitted to struggling with the attachment between their children and their nannies, though they indicated that they felt their concerns to be unfounded and even “irrational.” As a result, attachment may be something mothers struggle with but are reluctant to admit. Jeanne had a hard time dealing with relinquishing her role as primary caregiver to another person. She stated that she had finally acknowledged and approved of the role of Kendall, her nanny, in her
family life. However, this was not an easy process for Jeanne who said she needed to “get over” herself and accept that she wouldn’t always be “number one” to her children. She described her progress and her path toward acceptance of her children’s relationship with Kendall, her nanny as follows:

At first it really bothered me. When he first went pee on the potty and he said that he wanted to call Miss Kendall I was not pleased… it was me needing to get over myself basically. And I think that’s the best way to put it. I just needed to accept that there is another primary caregiver that’s not myself or my husband. But like it really hurt my feelings that like, but it shouldn’t, there’s no rationale for this but it was upsetting that he thought so much of her. (Jeanne – employer)

Jeanne went on to say:

Now I’m like, “Hey do you wanna call Miss Kendall?” And I’m okay with it but it’s a lot of you know, getting over yourself and accepting, you’re not always going to be number one. I’m not working because I want to, I’m working because I have to and I just need to accept that that’s what happens. (Jeanne – employer)

Part of Jeanne’s feelings of guilt stemmed from having to work, while preferring to be home with her children. Acknowledging that she must work enabled her to accept her child care arrangement and the relationships that her children formed with the nanny.

Tina, whom we met in the previous chapter, struggled with her children spending the vast majority of their day with “another woman.”

[LB: Can you tell me about what you mean when you say, “substitute mother”?] It’s still traumatic. It’s the idea that someone else is seeing my kids more than me… But when it’s another woman, alone with them, all day long, it’s a substitute mom. I mean there’s no comparison, they love me. But Alexa will say to her, “I love you Holly.” She’ll want to tell Holly her stories. The most telling thing is that when I worked at (office)... One of the ladies said that she was so grateful that she had such a great nanny and she said, “I know she’s such a great nanny because the kids love her so much.” [Tina continued to repeat the story her coworker told] “For example, the other night my daughter woke up in the middle of the night sick, and she cried and cried for my nanny.” Because she loved her so much. The day that that happens, and my kids wake up crying for the nanny, is the day that I quit. I just couldn’t, psychologically, I just can’t handle that. (Tina – nanny)
As discussed previously, Melyssa happily bestowed her nanny with “second mother” status. Tina, however, was bothered by the notion that her nanny served as a “substitute mother” to her children. The story that a coworker told her affirmed for her that it was possible for children to become more attached to their nanny than to their own mother. This story heightened her fear that this would occur for her own children. Her discomfort also stemmed from her preference for day care and from feeling that she should be home for her children more often than she was. As she stated, “Holly sees them fifty-five hours a week, she sees them more than I do, awake time.” Mothers who had the hardest time accepting the intimate role of their nannies in their family, and the attachment their children formed with them, felt like they should be the primary caregivers.

I think it’s like the working mom complex that you, you can’t be there for everything. And I love working, I’ve got to say you know ideally I’d work three days a week, 8 to 4:30 but I can’t. And I really like what I do, and I like the money that I make, but it’s hard … you miss that kind of stuff. (Tina – employer)

Both Jeanne and Tina felt guilt over having to work outside of the home for pay. They also felt remorse for harboring feelings of resentment about their children’s attachment to their nannies. The mothers who struggled the most with this expressed the belief that their feelings were unfounded. Jeanne conceded that there was “no rationale” for her thinking, which allowed her to accept and even encourage her children’s loving relationship with the nanny. Unlike Jeanne, Tina did not fully accept this attachment, nor did she accept her nanny’s role in her family life. Despite this, however, she described her feelings as “irrational.” Because of her perception that her feelings were not normal, she expressed that she had difficulty giving directions to her nanny. In reference to a discussion that she had with her husband over this, Tina stated:
I’ll complain about it later and he’ll say, “She’s working for us and she’s taking care of our kids, you’ve just got to say it.” And he’s so good about that. He has his way of conveying it to her, but I know, see part of the problem is that I know it’s irrational. (Tina – employer)

Tina and Cathy were the only two mothers to admit directly to attempting to minimize the attachment formed between their children and their nanny. Both were employed full-time. Tina worked in an office outside of her home, and Cathy worked from home. Their stories highlight the difficulty that some mothers had watching their children bond closely with their nanny.

Prior to hiring her nanny, Tina had placed her daughter in a day care center. Following the birth of her second child, and her relocation for work, Tina was unable to find a day care that could accommodate both of her children. This forced her to hire a nanny. Referring to day care as school and the employees as teachers, Tina explains why she used day care previously:

I liked the idea, it was totally selfish, but at a day care center you have teachers, but your focus is on the kids. Really, like you are playing with the other kids. With a nanny, it’s like a substitute mom and I just could not handle, at the time I couldn’t handle the idea of a substitute mother figure… Emotionally I was not ready to have a nanny so she went into school. (Tina – employer)

Tina further describes the reasons behind her discomfort and her preference for day care.

You kind of don’t like your teacher because they’re forcing you to learn. You know it’s not the same. You might like them, and you care about them, but you don’t love them like a mother. It’s probably also one of the reasons that I was really interested in setting up the day like a day care schedule. I wanted her to teach her class. I wanted them to have projects and a set schedule, because Alexa I knew would not like, I mean it’s good for her to do it, but it’s not like she’s just playing with her all day long. And it still bothers me; I still don’t like the idea that another woman is with them more than I am. (Tina – employer)

To help address her concern over Alexa’s potential attachment to Holly, Tina created a space in her home that resembled a classroom similar to the one that Alexa had at day
care. She wanted Holly to teach Alexa and to have “class” which stemmed from her
daughter’s love of day care. However, this also grew out of Tina’s desire to emphasize
the role of her nanny as a teacher who in Tina’s view, was someone who could not
replace her as a mother. Uncomfortable with the similarities between nannying and
mothering, she sought to minimize this association. As Chapter 5 addressed, Tina was
one of the few parents who took steps to ensure that learning was occurring throughout
the day. This was not entirely about her nanny’s lack of education, but about her need to
ensure that her daughter did not form too strong of an emotional attachment to Holly.

Despite her efforts at minimizing attachments, Tina continued to struggle with her
arrangement. She said that she would be grief-stricken if her daughter outwardly
expressed a preference for Holly over herself. However, she also reported that her
strategy thus far had been effective.

[LB: If you are both present does Alexa ever pick her [nanny] over you?]
No, and I’m secretly very glad about it! (laughing)... the big part of it is that I
think Alexa misses day care. And she’s old enough to know the difference. And
she doesn’t like having a babysitter. And she also misses me a lot at work. So
when I’m home, she’s really excited to see me. And part of it is I think that
there’s not that much overlap. When I come home Holly leaves... And then in
the morning, Alexa’s usually not awake, but when she is she’s usually saying
goodbye to me. So not really, but if it ever happens I’d be devastated. (Tina –
employer)

While Cathy had also never experienced her children’s overt preference for their
nanny over her, she too stated that she would be significantly hurt if this were to occur.
Much like Tina, Cathy utilized a strategy to minimize the likelihood of this occurrence,
and she felt that her efforts were successful. First, working from home allowed Cathy to
feel as if she was the only stabilizing force in her children’s lives.

[LB: The time you and the nanny are together; is that confusing for your
daughter?]
Well it’s funny, cause my daughter does call my nanny “mommy” sometimes. Will never call me any of my nannies names… It’s just like you are the person that is the main person, right here, right now… (pause) It would really hurt my feelings if my daughter fell and she chose to go to my nanny over me. I think that would really hurt my feelings. But she never does. It’s a good relationship you know… I like the fact that she stays connected to these people. But I think it would hurt my feelings a lot if I was not the primary caregiver in most of the situations. (Cathy – employer)

Second, hiring a variety of nannies helped ensure for Cathy, that her children would not become too attached to any single nanny to an uncomfortable degree. Her nannies were also college students, and thus had a high turnover rate.

[LB: How do you feel when she says mommy or daddy?]

I just know that she is getting confused. I don’t feel like this person is a substitute for me. I think the situation that I have kind of fosters that. My comfort level that I have, that I am always there, and I am the only constant in her life. A lot sitters come and go but I am always there. So that helps me, I think and helps her to help me. (Cathy – employer)

Cathy admitted that her arrangement was based on her level of “comfort,” and she stated that the relationship between her daughter and her nannies was “good” because her comfort level was not threatened. Cathy wanted to strike a balance between her children having a connection to her nannies without explicitly preferring them over her. In contrast to Tina, Cathy felt like she had achieved a level of harmony in her relationship that she could live with.

[LB: Can you tell me more about that, that she has this connection with these people but that this connection is not so overpowering?]

That’s just it. I want her to love these people, and respect them, and care about them. And you know, like them, obviously. I would feel very uncomfortable if she ever chose them over me in a situation, or if I was home and they said, “Oh well I wish Alana was here.” Or, “I wish any of the other sitters were here.” I don’t want that to happen… That is also part of the reason why I have so many girls coming in and out… I don’t want that one on one, like this is the other person in my life kind of thing. I guess she gets a lot of different things… I want to be that one constant in her life. (Cathy – employer)
The mothers in this sample varied on their views of their children’s attachment to their nannies. While some valued this attachment, others struggled with it daily. Those who valued the attachment felt that it signaled that the children were well cared for, and thus were comfortable in the arrangement. Those who worried feared that the nanny would become a replacement for their status as a mother. None of the fathers with whom I spoke expressed concern over this. The nannies’ perspectives on this issue will now be examined.

*Looking for comfort: Children turning to the nanny*

The times when the children favored the nannies over the parents was equally uncomfortable for the nannies as it was for the parents. Most nannies felt awkward in these instances, and while some of them felt a degree of sympathy for the parents, others did not. Such lack of compassion evolved from their perceptions of their employers as poor parents. Finally, to minimize discomfort and to preserve their jobs, some nannies attempted to emphasize the bond of the child to the mother.

Karen described a situation she encountered with her previous employers. The parents worked long hours and were rarely home for the children.

Elizabeth got to the point that when Ruth would come home she would scream, “No mommy I want Karen!” I’m like, “I did not tell her to say that,” it’s so uncomfortable. I could not wait to get out of there when they were doing that. (Karen – nanny)

In addition to feeling uncomfortable, nannies generally felt empathy for their employers. In these instances, compassion was expressed by nannies only when they were satisfied with their employers as parents. Being a good parent signaled to the
nannies that their employer wanted to spend time with their children but were limited in their ability to do so because of their need to work for pay. Tanya provides an example in which the child she cared for was injured and sought her over the mother.

I feel really bad about, the other day we were outside. And Marcus was out there, and his mom was out there… And he fell and scraped his knee. I’m like what do I do? Usually I go over to him, but the mom’s here. So I waited a few minutes. And he stands up, and starts crying, and looks at me, and comes running to me. I look at the mom, I’m like, I felt terrible because he came to me before her and I could tell she noticed too. I picked him up; I’m trying to make him go to her. Finally she’s like, “I’ll get some paper towels.” He’s young and I’m there all the time. I feel like he doesn’t, I feel bad. (Tanya – nanny)

Tanya was hesitant to comfort Marcus immediately because she did not want to make the situation worse for her employer. When asked why she felt bad for the mother, Tanya replied:

Because that’s his mom. Even though she knows she’s not there, I’m sure she wants to be. You want your kid to come to you. (Emphasis added) (Tanya – nanny)

Tanya perceived her employer as wanting to be home with her children, as she was loving and caring toward the children to a point that Tanya found acceptable. She thought that the mother was a good mother, and therefore she felt sympathy for her employer when Marcus chose her over his mother.

Kelly described a situation similar to Tanya’s:

Today he kind of ran away from his dad and wanted me to pick him up. That’s because I’m there eleven hours of the day and he doesn’t see his dad as much. [LB: How did the dad react?]

“Oh, Zack! What did I do to you?” Like, you know, just kind of joking about it. And I just kind of, I don’t want to make him feel bad. So, I don’t pick Zack up, or I don’t pick Jessica up. And I try and let him pick them up, because I don’t want them to think that kids like, you know, me more than him. [LB: Why do you feel that way?]

Because it’s their dad you know, and I’m just the nanny. I mean I know I’m here all day but it’s the dad. I mean you want the kids to go to the mom and the dad,
and not want to go to the nanny or the grandmother, before the parents. (Kelly – nanny)

As with Tanya’s experience, Kelly did not want to demonstrate concern for the child and make the situation more awkward for her employer. Like Kelly, she believed that children should “want” to go to their parents. Kelly’s impressions were also affected by her perception that the father was a good parent. She described what she believed were the father’s efforts to spend more time with the children as follows:

I really think that she’s a good mom you can tell that she really loves her kids and same with that dad that he really loves them, you know? They’re a little more attached to their mom, I think, than their dad because I think they see their mom a little bit more than their dad. But I’m thinking that that’s maybe the reason that he’s going to be coming home an hour earlier. (Kelly – nanny)

Unlike Tanya and Kelly, some nannies did not have compassion for their employers in similar situations. The stories that follow echo the accounts of nannies’ in Cheever’s (2003) research, in which some nannies felt this attachment was the inevitable result of the parents’ absence and their significant presence in the children’s lives. Similarly, the nannies who expressed these sentiments in my sample felt that it was natural and unavoidable for children to become attached to whoever was their primary caregiver.

Well like Brooke, her first word was “Shanna,” instead of “mommy.” And um Courtney, when she was upset she would cry for me, instead of crying for her mom. Like when she got hurt she would run to me. Like if her dad was home occasionally, early from work then she wouldn’t go to him. I don’t know, you take care of them so much, you do everything for them. (Shanna – nanny)

Because Shanna saw herself as the children’s primary caregiver, she felt their preference for her was inevitable and did not see it as problematic. The ways in which nannies perceived such situations highly influenced by their view of the parents as parents. While some nannies did not view the children opting for them over the parents as entirely
problematic, nannies who lacked empathy did so when they judged their employers to be inadequate parents in one way or another. In adequacies took the form of the parents’ failure to demonstrate “enough” love for their children or a lack of involvement in their children’s lives at a level that the nannies found acceptable.

Eve called me “mama” in front of her a couple times. So that’s where my fear started, or I guess stemmed from, in not showing her as much affection. I didn’t want Rachel to feel threatened or anything. Or like I was trying to like steal her baby or anything. You know it’s very uncomfortable.

[LB: How did she react when she heard her baby call you that?]
Oh it was awful. She’s like, “Did she just?” I’m like, “I think she said Nana.”
And um she’s like, “Oh yeah she calls my mom Nana. That’s what she was trying say nan,” you know?… And it was plain as day one time… I’m like oh my gosh, go back to your office, you know. We were both doing her pigtails and she said it again. And I was like, “Oh she’s asking for you.” And she was clearly looking right at me, and toward me. So I was like, “Oh she wants you mom.” And she was like, “Oh I’m here honey, I’m here honey, I’m here honey.” Like that so, it was just, I felt bad for her, but then at the same time I didn’t. (Samantha – nanny)

Samantha’s feelings in this situation were mixed. She did not feel entirely sympathetic to Rachel because of her perception that Rachel treated Eve as if she were a “doll to dress up”:

I did pigtails in her hair one day and mom came in and was like, “Oh I kind of like them to be up there.”… She wanted me to take it out, Eve’s screaming and she’s taking her hair and yanking on it really hard to fix it the way she wanted it to be. So I’m like, oh my gosh, the more time I’m with her, the better. Stop pulling on her just to go away… she was really like a doll to dress up… I just felt like she lacked the real love that a baby needs. (Emphasis added) (Samantha – nanny)

Due to her view that she was a better influence on Eve than Rachel was, Samantha attempted to minimize the time Rachel spent with Eve. In addition, she did not want Rachel to become threatened by Eve’s preference for her, out of fear that Rachel would become jealous and not allow her to be a part of Eve’s life any longer.
Marianna felt that her employer, Chris, should spend more time with his children, a viewpoint which shaped her opinion of the following situation:

I think, if it’s not Jackie, it’s me. It’s never the dad. So one day, dad came home and they didn’t acknowledge him… [then] I was supposed to work and she was like, “Oh Chris doesn’t want to go out anymore because he wants to spend time with the kids.”… I’m at their house at like 8:00 on Saturday, so like, so they can go to the gym and they don’t come back until like 12… I just feel like, yeah Chris you’re a little jealous because I spend so much time with your kids. But I just feel like Saturday morning, why don’t you just stay with them? (Marianna – nanny)

Both Samantha and Marianna felt that their employers should be parenting differently than they were and because they saw significant room for improvement, they lacked sympathy for their employers in the instances where the children expressed a preference for them.

As I noted in the above example of Samantha, many nannies spoke of the need to maintain their employers’ level of comfort. In the following section I explore the nannies’ attempts to maintain and even heighten the bond formed between the mother and child.

**Minimizing affection and emphasizing the mother-child bond**

Previous research has found that the jobs of childcare providers are dependent on sustaining the bond between the mother and her children (Nelson 1990; Macdonald 1996; Uttal 2002). For the most part, nannies in this research were comfortable with their arrangements and with their employers. The majority of them did not express withholding affection or feeling the need to stress the parent-child relationship. The general consensus was that expressions of affection and attachment to the children was a job requirement, a viewpoint reflected in Chloe’s statement. When I asked her if she ever
had an issue with parents perceiving her to be too attached to the children, or vice versa, she replied:

   No, I think if I wasn’t as attached as I am that they would think there was something wrong. Um, they still love their parents more than me of course. But um, I think I’m almost like an aunt to them probably. I think that’s how the family sees me. (Chloe – nanny)

While attachment and expressions of affection were job requirements, so too was the condition that the children love “their parents more.” As long as the children demonstrated that they were always happy to see their parents, and as long as nannies operated within their employer’s comfort zone, nannies did not worry about their employer’s perceptions of their attachment or affection.

   Nannies also followed their employer’s lead in determining how to behave toward the children in their care and how much affection to express. In response to whether or not they worried about showing too much physical affection for the children, two nannies responded as follows:

   The parents ask them to come and give me a hug at the end of the day or give me a kiss at the end of the say so, definitely not. (Kelly – nanny)

   I take my cues from the parents. If they were really stiff and not physically affectionate I would try and hold it back myself. (Abigail – nanny)

The nannies’ perceptions of their employers’ feelings and behavior were central to their own behavior. Those who felt that their employers encouraged displays of affection lived up to this expectation and when the parents were not overly affectionate, nannies withheld obvious expressions of love, particularly in their employer’s presence.

   Kelly and Abigail monitored their employers’ behavior to determine how they should act towards the children. Monica and Margaret did the same. However, in
response to this same question they stated that they withheld affection toward the 
children when the children’s parents were present:

   I think that I’m definitely more affectionate to the baby when the mother isn’t 
around. It’s not that I don’t, you know but like he’ll run over and he’ll hug me and 
I’ll hug him or I’ll kiss him on the cheek or kiss him on the forehead… But I 
probably would hesitate to do that with her around just because I don’t know if 
its, I don’t know what she would think. (Margaret – nanny)

   A little bit. Because I don’t want the parents to get jealous or anything. Like oh 
she’s spent the whole day with her, she’s treating her like it’s her baby… And if 
I’m with her you know 8 hours a day then if I wasn’t affectionate at all she would 
be lacking in affection, you know.
[LB: Have you ever had a parent get jealous of this or have you ever seen this?] 
No it’s just something that I think like if I was a parent and there was somebody 
with the child like the whole day and she got more attached to the nanny than to me, I would be jealous. (Monica – nanny)

Like many child care providers, Monica employed the strategy of “detached attachment” 
(Nelson 1990), whereby she engaged in a caring relationship with the baby but did not 
infringe on the mother’s position as the primary caregiver. Whereas Margaret and 
Monica’s employers did not give them reason to believe that they would be jealous, 
nonetheless, they took their employers’ feelings into consideration. Both also reported 
liking the mothers, which shaped their strategy.

   More often than not, nannies expressed that reserving displays of affection for 
when they were alone with children was not something that they felt the need to do. 
Expressions of affection may be related to the age of the children in their care. Many 
nannies noted that they provided small children with a good deal of affection. Most 
nannies also did not feel the need to emphasize the relationship between parent and child. 
In the following statements, Stephanie and Chloe describe why they did not feel it was 
necessary to emphasize the bond between their parents and the children.
Not really because the mom was around enough, I mean that even made it more awkward for me because the mom was around all the time. (Stephanie – nanny)

I don’t think it’s come to that point with the twins but I think if I was staying with them it would be [an issue]. Um, the other’s [families] no because their mothers are home a lot of the time, most of the time, so it’s like, it’s good. I think their bond is really good. Same thing with the dad’s. Yeah I don’t think so, but I think if I stayed with the family in [city], yeah it would be [important to stress the bond between the parents and the children]. (Chloe – nanny)

Stephanie, who worked for a stay-at-home mother, felt that the mother was present “enough.” Chloe explained that the relationship between the children for which she cared and their parents was strong. However, in one of her positions that she was in the process of leaving, she expressed that the need to stress this bond would eventually arise if she was to remain with the family. In this instance, Chloe felt that the children needed to spend more time with their mother. The interaction between employers and their children was key for nannies. Employers had to be around “enough,” but not too much, as the following examples will detail.

Only one-fifth of the nannies stated that they felt the need to withhold or reduce the amount of affection they expressed to the children in front of their employers. However, these nannies were acutely aware that the children’s attachment to them might become an issue for their employer. In an effort to reduce awkward encounters, and to preserve the feelings of their employers, some nannies sought to draw attention to the connection between the children and their parents. Some nannies also limited their amount of affection toward the children in the parents’ presence. This occurred regardless of the employment status of the parents or the location of the parents work. This also tended to take place when the nanny worried that their employer would become jealous over the children’s attachment to the nanny.
I asked Abigail if she ever felt the need to emphasize the bond or relationship between her employer and the children she nannied for, she replied:

Well that was kind of a given with both families. I was always very; “Oh look Mommy’s here! Daddy’s here! Let’s show Mommy what we did today, let’s show Daddy this.”… Because after the first job I did know that it was probably going to happen that if I was there long enough the baby was going to get really attached. (Abigail – nanny)

Abigail explained why she felt her actions were warranted:

If he did something, like if he rolled over for the first time I did not tell them. Then that weekend or the next day, they would tell me. And I was like “Oh, that’s so great! He hasn’t done that for me yet.” So I would really try to play up that it was special from them. I kind of had a feeling that she knew though. He did this thing where he would like grab your shirt and put his head on your shoulder. And she would be like “Oh, he does that with you too? He does that after I breast-feed him.” And you know, I’m like, “sorry.” I’m not breast-feeding him, but I am with him for eight hours a day. (Abigail – nanny)

Recognizing that her employer was disappointed when she found that certain behaviors were not reserved solely for her, Abigail attempted to conceal her having witnessed the baby’s first times performing certain actions, in order to avoid hurting her employer’s feelings.

Although Samantha did not agree with Rachel’s parenting strategies, Rachel worked from home and Samantha had to spend a significant amount of time with her. Because the time they spent together with the baby was awkward, especially when the baby chose Samantha over Rachel, Samantha sought to emphasize the bond between Eve and Rachel.

“Are you going in to see your mama?” … I’m like, “Rachel; she just loves you so much.” I would say things like that. I’m like, “she knows when you’re not in there.” Cause when Rachel goes to the spa or whatever the hell she does in the afternoon, she’ll, she’ll crawl in and then look at me. She does pull like a where is she? I’m like, “She knows when you’re not home, she really misses you.” I mean not really, she’s just wondering where’s the woman in the back room in my opinion. (Samantha – nanny)
While Abigail and Samantha sought to call attention to the bond between their employer and the children, Nina sought to draw a clear distinction between her status and the status of the mother, in an effort to help preserve this bond.

[LB: Have they ever called you mom in front of her?]
No, surprisingly enough they’ve never ever done that… We played with a little boy who, his nanny was actually trying to get him to call her mommy. …. And Margie talked to the mom, and got the whole story, and was like freaking out. I was like, “I would never!” I’m very clear about who mommy is and who is not. There have been times when Harrison will say that and I’ll be like, “I’m not your mommy” and we’ll turn it into a joke. He’s still pretty attached to her so usually he runs to her. He’s very happy to see her… And I try to make him excited. You know I’ll say, “Mommy’s coming back in a few minutes!” Or, “Mommy’s coming home soon!” Because I never want to come into, between their relationship. I don’t want to be a replacement mom. That’s not my goal at all… He isn’t talking yet but there have been times where I have worried, oh god what if his first word is Nina instead of mom? That’s something that, I don’t know what would happen with that. (Nina – nanny)

Abigail, Samantha and Nina each worked for families in which one parent was present for significant periods of time while they were working. Their understanding of the danger of the parent’s jealousy was likely heightened by the lengthy and frequent interactions they had together.

The majority of nannies believed that their employers were comfortable with their relationship with the children. When nannies perceived their employers’ discomfort, most took steps to ensure that it subsided. However, not all of the nannies who saw the potential for issues arising tried to minimize their role, playing up the connection between the parents and the children. As we saw in the previous section, Marianna recognized her employer’s jealousy over her relationship with his children. However, because she believed he brought this upon himself, she did not take steps to downplay her status and
improve his relationship with his children. Similarly, Shanna noted the refusal of her prior employer to recognize that her child’s first word was “Shanna.”

I told them about it and they were like, “Oh well she was probably just mumbling something.”…

[LB: How long was it until she said mom or…] (interrupting) A few weeks but she would say, “Anna, anna,” so you know, I think they heard it differently, because they didn’t want to hear it. (Shanna – nanny)

As she expressed in the previous section, Shanna felt that these situations resulted directly from the extensive time she spent with the children. She recognized her employer’s discomfort over her children’s preference for her, but this did not bother her. When asked if she ever felt the need to stress the bond between the parents and the children she replied simply “no.”

The attachment of the children cost Mary her last job, which will be covered in further detail in *Children’s attachment*. Despite this, when I asked Mary if she ever felt the need to stress the bond between the parents and the children, she stated:

With the other family I hung around a lot too so. But I never pushed the kids away to go toward their mom. I think if the mother wants their child they should be influencing them to want to be there. (Mary – nanny)

Much like Marianna, Mary felt that her employer should make the effort to form an attachment to her own children. She did not see this as her role, and she felt was perturbed by the mother’s lack of effort.

As the experience of mothers and nannies have indicated, the discomfort and fear some nannies felt about the children overtly favoring them in front of the parents was warranted. Not only could these instances be awkward, but they could also lead to the end of the work relationship. I now turn to discuss instances in which this occurred.
Children’s attachment: the demise of the relationship

Abigail worked as a nanny for a family for two years prior to her most recent job and the intense attachment she shared with the children led to her termination. As she describes, a trip to the doctor’s office, where she accompanied the mother and the children, served as the breaking point for her employer:

The twins became very attached to me and they would scream when I left. They would you know; flip out if the mother came downstairs because they thought I was leaving. And for their second birthday we had taken the twins to the doctor’s office and the twins didn’t want to go to her. They only wanted to go to me… So she kinda had flipped out and told her husband that she wanted to do it on her own. She was going to be their mother, which is fantastic for the twins.

[LB: Do you think the doctor’s appointment was the final straw?] Yeah.
[LB: And so how did that make you feel?] I took it really hard. I lost about fifteen pounds in the first like three weeks. I cried for days. Because it went from working twelve hour days to not seeing them… It was really hard; it was like I lost my own children. (Abigail – nanny)

According to Abigail, the children’s obvious preference for her became too difficult for her employer to handle. Although she was initially devastated by her loss, she did experience some relief after her employment was terminated. While nannying for the twins, she worried immensely about the children when she was not present and she felt that the mother medicated the children to make them more manageable. Despite caring deeply for the baby in her subsequent nanny position, she contrasted the two positions:

But she [employer] literally went through bottles, and bottles, and bottles of this stuff to the point where she would tell me, “Oh can you give them Tylenol like a half an hour before I come downstairs?”… It genuinely worried me. So with the second baby, I was genuinely thrilled that I felt that it was a job. And I could leave at 4:30 and leave it all behind me… I knew he was fine. (Abigail – nanny)

Her ability to leave at the end of the day and not worry about the baby in her second position made her feel as if this position was a “job.” This is not to say that she did not
become attached to the baby, but that she worried less and became less emotionally invested after her prior experience.

Mary told a story similar to Abigail’s. The children in her previous position also became very attached to her. As a consequence of her termination, which also resulted from her employer’s jealousy of her attachment to the children, Mary sought to treat subsequent nanny positions as jobs rather than becoming emotionally invested in the family. She discussed her feelings of the end of her previous relationship:

So the first family I worked for, it was three kids, and when the father decided to work from home it was devastating. (Mary – nanny)

As a result of her prior experience, Mary worried about showing too much affection to the children in her present job. Mary felt this led to the demise of her previous nanny job and to the father’s decision to work from home.

[LB: Do you ever worry about showing too much physical affection towards the children that you care for?]
As meaning like, if I were to leave one day and they’d come running up to me and hug me and the mom would be like, what the heck is that?
[LB: Yeah.]
I am a little worried because the last family. I think one of the reasons the father decided to be home, was because the mom was getting very jealous. So yeah, I would have to say it’s definitely a big worry. Because you don’t want, it’s not toward the father, but my belief is when you get two women together and they’re loving this child and it’s kind of like a puppy, who’s it going to choose? And if the mother sees that puppy goes to not her, the jealousy, and that could risk your job, which is why I think I lost my last job. (Mary – nanny)

While nannies did tell stories of fathers being put off that the children were more attached to the nanny than to them, none of the nannies I interviewed discussed being overly worried about the father’s perception of the children’s attachment to them.

Despite her opinion of her prior employers shortcomings, Abigail was happy that the mother had decided to take a more active role in her children’s lives. She described
this decision as “fantastic” and felt that it was in the babies’ best interest to have a relationship with their mother. Mary, on the other hand, continued to hold a negative view of the mother she used to work for.

She showed her kids no love. When she was home she was on the computer, she was on her I, whatever blackberry thing… Because they loved the father. You could see it. The father would come in and they’d come running and jump on the father. The mother would come in and it was like she didn’t even exist. There was one time when I was playing with the three-year-old on the floor and she was laughing so hard. And the grandmother and the mother were sitting on the couch and we’re like, “Wow, I haven’t heard her laugh like that in such a long time.” And here I’m thinking in my head, when was the last time you got on the floor and played a game with her? (Mary – nanny)

Mary was very upset by the fact that she did not see her prior employer make any effort to have a better relationship with her children. Unlike Abigail, she did not feel that her termination would benefit the children in any way, because she believed that her prior employer would not adjust her behavior to play a larger role in the children’s lives.

The attachment of nannies to children and vice versa has been noted as both the most rewarding aspect of the job and the most dangerous (Cheever 2003). Attachment was the factor that led to the termination of Abigail’s and Mary’s employment. However, as the following section will explore, attachment was also the component that kept nannies in jobs that they would have otherwise left.

**Attachments: the nannies’ experience**

Nanny jobs were certainly not difficult to come by for the participants in this sample. Abigail stated, “there’s always nanny jobs, so it’s not like I would be out of work for that long.” The nannies who participated in this study were also not as limited occupationally as some in prior research (see for example, Wrigley 1995; Romero 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Hochschild 2003; Cheever 2003), which examined women
who, as a result of their immigrant status, were forced to take on nanny work or domestic jobs. Seventy-six percent of this sample were college educated or attending college, and every nanny had work experience outside of being a nanny.

I heard a number of stories about being underpaid, having inconsistent schedules, parents arriving late, sexually harassment, and overall tales of inhospitable work environments. So why was it that nannies remained in arrangements that were less than ideal for them? For almost every negative situation a nanny encountered, they had a positive one that stemmed from their deep attachment to the children in their care.

Previous studies have examined the role of attachment in child care providers’ decisions to remain with the family they care for. Hochschild’s (2003) research found that due to geographical constraints, immigrant nannies transferred the care they were unable to offer their own children to the children they were paid to care for. She writes, “First World parents welcome and even invite nannies to redirect their love in this manner” (Hochschild 2003: 23). The attachment formed by immigrant nannies is also likely heightened due to their great distance from close friends and family members. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) uncovered the isolation experienced by live-in nannies. Isolation is of greatest concern for nannies who are both immigrants and live-in (Romero 2003). As a result of their social statuses, these women lack other readily available employment opportunities. Based on this research, I assumed that the providers in prior studies would become attached to the children in their care partially due to their lack of other immediate relationships.

The women in this sample were significantly different socially from those in previous research (see for exception Wrigley’s 1995 work. College students and
graduates were a small segment of her sample). Only four out of the twenty-five nannies I interviewed hoped to make a career out of nannying. Because the majority of the nannies from this sample had other marketable job skills and career aspirations, I was surprised to find that large numbers of women in this sample remained in their jobs, either present or prior, due to the attachment they formed. The remaining subsections in this chapter will explore the role of attachments in tying nannies to positions. I will also cover the strategies used by nannies to prevent themselves from deeply attaching to children in an effort to be able to move more easily out of the relationship. This chapter will close with a discussion of nannies who expressed the fear that if they left, the children would suffer.

**Why they stay: The role of attachment in remaining in unsatisfactory positions**

In this sample, one-half of the nannies reported that they had considered leaving but had chosen to remain in their current or prior position due to the attachment they formed with the children. Reasons for contemplating leaving included needing to earn more money, disliking their employer’s parenting style, and overall difficulty with their employer. The grounds for contemplating leaving were always related to their employer’s behavior, rather than the behavior of the children. Two-thirds of the nannies who stated that they had not considered leaving their position reported having a positive relationship with their employer. Thus, the relationship with their employer was the largest determinant in forcing nannies to consider leaving.

Like many of the nannies, Tanya graduated college with a Bachelor’s degree but unable to locate permanent employment in an area related to her degree, she sought out nanny work. Tanya’s background in web design led to her arrangement to create a
website for her employer. She described this and the issues it created for her in her nanny work.

Since I’m a [website] designer and I do a website for the dad which was kind of a big mistake… And he’s just been a pain since the beginning, picking everything apart… he hasn’t paid me. And a couple weeks ago he wrote me a really nasty email about it. And I told my boyfriend, I’m not going into work tomorrow like I don’t even want to see this guy. I’m looking for a new job, I don’t care if I have to not have a job for two weeks. And he made me go, and I’m still there. I love the kids, and I love the mom, but every time I see the dad, ugh I just don’t want to deal with him. (Tanya – nanny)

While her boyfriend pushed her to return to work, she also notes that her deep attachment to the children had pulled her back:

[LB: Why have you chosen to stay?]
It’s hard because the kids… They are very attached to me already and I’ve only been with them four months. I probably see them more than their parents do a week. I just feel bad. Like every day the little girl will be like, “I love you.” And I’m like, gosh I can’t leave them. (Tanya – nanny)

In addition to her strong bond, Tanya was aware that the children had a very close relationship with their prior nanny, and she was hesitant to disrupt their life again.

The mom had to beg the girl to come back once a week because the kids were attached to her, to kind of wean them off of her. And now, recently the girl quit altogether. But as far as, I don’t know, I just feel like for the kid’s sake, I feel bad. They’re not going to understand. Oh, “How come she’s not coming back?”… I feel like it will be hard on the kids. They are young; they don’t have anything to do with the way their father acts. (Tanya – nanny)

As with many of the nannies from this sample, Tanya’s feelings for the children led her to try to overlook the other negative features of the job. She was able to separate her pessimistic feelings for her employer from her love for the children. Sage described a nanny position that she remained in for similar reasons:

The dynamics of the family, the children were great. The parents, I don’t think got along. And obviously had a filtering effect on the kids. And again, I didn’t leave because I got attached to the kids. That was hard. Like I don’t have to
really deal with the parents as much as I did with the kids. It was hard to leave the kids based on just the parents.

She continued on to express why she stayed:

Because the kids meant a lot more to me than just the parents. You know, any problems that they had. (Sage – nanny)

Abigail also expressed conflict with her employer, though in her case, this took the form of sexual harassment.

I really was very uncomfortable with the Father, because he worked from home three days a week. Uncomfortable. Like he would ask me very inappropriate questions, he would put his hands on me in very inappropriate ways. (emphasis original) (Abigail – nanny)

Abigail spoke of wanting to leave on a number of occasions. I asked her why she decided to stay. She replied:

I truly fell in love with the baby. I had a really strong bond with him… You know it was just really hard to leave a baby. You know you really fall in love with them. (Tearing up) (Abigail – nanny)

Tanya, Sage, and Abigail were not the only nannies to withstand negative interactions with their employers for their love of the children. Samantha differed from her employer Rachel, entirely on parenting ideals, ranging from how close Rachel allowed Eve to get to harsh cleaning products, to the type of food she permitted Eve to eat. When I asked her why she continued to work for Rachel, she responded:

I had this like guilty feeling like, as I would be done with my day with Eve and then I’d be like looking online, or walking up and down the street and be like, oh they’re hiring, they’re hiring. What am I going to do, leave Eve? I really didn’t want to leave her with mom, her own mom. That’s horrible. But I just felt like I was giving her so much real love and that’s what she needed… You know I felt like a strong responsibility to continue to love her and that aside, that’s like the primary thing. But the reality was, that was our source of income… [she found another work opportunity] I stopped in and I interviewed… And I was like I could do this!... Then I just had this guilty feeling, not even, selfish feeling I should say. But I want to hold Eve. I just want to be with my baby. And I hope that doesn’t sound, but I called her mine. (emphasis original) (Samantha – nanny)
References to the children as “mine,” or “my own” were especially apparent in discussions about the reasons nannies stayed in their jobs.

[LB: Have you ever considered leaving this arrangement and then decided against it?]
Yeah, you know, doing things for maybe more money. Because, I mean, I make fourteen an hour, I don’t make a lot… And some things bother me like they ask me to do a lot, or they get home at say 5:45, and I don’t leave there until 6:30. Why can’t I go yet? It’s just a long day, and I’m like, do I really want to do this? And I think, you know, what? I love these kids, and the parents know that I love these kids too… I just feel like they’re my own and I’m very attached so it would be hard for me. (Kelly – nanny)

I find myself talking about the kids a lot. Like Marcus did this today or Natalie was so cute. Little things like that. Like they’re my own kids and I’m like oh my gosh what am I saying, I’m so attached to them. (Tanya – nanny)

As a result of my sampling strategy, I assumed that the nannies with whom I spoke, for the most part, would be more willing to leave their positions and would have an easier time separating themselves from the attachments they formed than nannies in previous research. This was based on the idea that nanny work was not the long-term career goal for the majority (eighty-four percent). It also stemmed from the possession of other marketable job skills for the nannies in this sample. However, as my findings indicate, my assumptions were incorrect and this was not the case. As a whole, the nannies I interviewed formed deep attachments with the children in their care. This served as the largest factor in their decision to continue their nanny work for these particular children. As nannies gained more nanny work experience, some described learning to create an emotional space between themselves and the children. This was part of their effort to create an easier transition out of these relationships, should the need arise.
“Blocking off a bit:” Distancing strategies of nannies

Prior to her present nannying job, Danielle held a position that was supposed to be long-term, but due to a change in the family’s financial situation she was unexpectedly laid off. Danielle explains how she allows herself to become attached in long-term positions, while holding back in shorter term positions:

That was supposed to be long-term. And I had twin girls and I was very attached to them because I thought it was going to be long-term. And I guess you are more open when you think that it’s going to be a long-term situation, than if you’re not because then you kind of just block off a bit. (Danielle – nanny)

This strategy was of utmost importance for Danielle, who aspired to nanny long-term.

When you go in with the knowledge of this is going to be years and you spend that much time, I had my mind prepped a different way so it was just a shame that it didn’t continue. (Danielle – nanny)

Chloe had spent the past year nannying for two families and recently, she picked up a third position. With the knowledge that her new position was temporary, Chloe explained her distancing strategy.

I don’t know that I feel the same attachment to them that I do with my other two families. It’s been, I don’t know, I think I’ve kept more of a boundary with them. Instead of making them more my family, it is more a job. Which I hate to say that but it is. It is definitely more a job than part of my family. [LB: Can you tell me why you’ve made it more of a job than part of your family?] … I really did not want to move to [city] and I knew they would eventually ask me to do that. And I knew if I, with the twins, newborns, if you become attached to them, that’s it. I mean they’d be, they’d be mine almost. You know? In a weird way. With nannies, when you become a full-time, with the other families I’m working two days here, three days there. The mothers are the primary care givers. (Chloe – nanny)

Central to the strategy of “blocking off” was treating the position as “a job” rather than as a role within a family. As we saw in the section, Children’s attachment, both Abigail and Mary felt the need to utilize this strategy after being devastated by the loss of their prior position, but the strategy of “blocking off” was difficult to fully employ. Evidence of this
can be found in Abigail’s discussion of dealing with the loss of the children and remaining in her subsequent position due to becoming attached again.

Nicole described the need to utilize this distancing strategy in her current position.

There are times that I put him down for a nap and he asks me to lay with him and I will. And he’ll just touch my face and say, “I just love you so much.” And it kind of breaks your heart. And then um, I just feel like I’ve had to kind of separate myself from the situation. I’ve learned with experience, I mean when I was teaching preschool I taught at the same preschool for three years and I mean I only stayed for the kids. I stayed because I did not want to leave those children and I was so emotionally invested in all of it that I didn’t want to leave. And then when I lost the last nannying job I was devastated for months because I had grown so attached to those kids. And I can honestly say that if they called me tonight and told me that I did not have to come back to work I’d be completely fine with it. I have completely detached myself emotionally from my job. (Nicole – nanny)

Unlike some nannies who struggled to do this, Nicole felt as if she had successfully distanced herself from her job and the relationships she formed. When asked why she detached herself, Nicole replied:

I didn’t want to end up staying if it went sour. I didn’t want to end up staying because I felt bad leaving the kids. (Nicole – nanny)

She further described her reasoning for detaching and her method for doing so:

I feel like I have to in order to keep sane. Which is why if they invite me to stay for dinner, or they tell me that I can stay at the lake house, I don’t want to. I, I need to look at it as a job. It’s my job. It’s what I do forty hours a week, and when I leave like anybody else in any other job, you don’t want to think about it. (Nicole – nanny)

Nicole sought to avoid familial interactions in an effort to separate herself.

Recognizing that the attachments that they formed with the children had become an issue, tying them to work arrangements long past the point at which they should have left, some nannies sought to distance themselves. Detaching oneself from the children and the position involved treating nanny work “like a job.” This strategy was in direct
contrast to the familial feeling that many nannies received from their nanny work. In the next section, I explore an added dimension to the reasons that nannies in this sample remained in positions that they wished to leave.

If not me then whom?

In addition to the attachment and the relationships formed, many of the nannies felt that they were a positive influence in the lives of the children they cared for, and some felt they were even more of a positive influence than the parents themselves. The driving force behind this theme emerged in an interview with Chloe who cared for children in three different families throughout the week. One of these jobs involved nighttime care for newborn twins from the hours of 11pm until 7am. Chloe felt that since she assumed primary care for the twins during the night, that both the mother and the children were missing out on bonding time with one another. Chloe held very strong views on the care of children and the roles of mothers. Although she preferred to work day time hours, her desire to provide care for these children on a level which she found acceptable compelled her to continue her work in this position.

> It’s just, it’s hard doing the nighttime job to be quite honest. Overnights are difficult and um, sometimes I feel like these kids are losing out on something like bonding with their parents.

[LB: Can you tell me more about that?]

I just feel, I feel bad about it but I’m like, if not me then who? Um, so I, it’s almost like I wish the mom, not that I can’t handle it or I resent having to do it, but that she could get up to just see them when they smile at night or something cool that they do. I almost wish she was there for it. You know, whereas the other families I feel like they’re going to work. It’s not like they’re, it’s almost like a luxury to have me versus the families during the day where it’s a necessity.

(Chloe – nanny)

Chloe felt that if she was not there to care for these children and bond with them, then they would miss out on this experience altogether. In the daytime families, the mothers
worked, as she saw it, out of need. The mother in the nighttime position, however, stayed home. This shaped Chloe’s viewpoint of the situation. She perceived her daytime mothers as wanting to be there for their children. On the other hand, she perceived the mother in her nighttime position to be opting out of this role. Absent from Chloe’s story was a discussion of the children’s father. While she held negative opinions of the mother for missing out, she assumed that the father would have to miss such events. Moreover, she felt that the mother should express more of a connection to the children in ways that she did not expect the father to. After my discussion with Chloe I started to probe this idea in future interviews and look for this theme in past interviews.

Only two of the nannies whom I interviewed were overly concerned for the safety and welfare of the children when they were not present. However, many felt that they were a better influence on the children than their parents were or than another nanny would be. In these instances, the nannies felt that without their involvement, the children would not receive the same level of care. Sara explained this:

I took this job because of a series of things and I honestly felt that I could do a great deal for the kids however, lately I have been questioning what I could do whatsoever because I started looking again… the middle child is clearly autistic and the other two are on the end of the spectrum. I feel that I could be of some benefit to these children. They need that in their life. They need someone who genuinely is educated and will do the research that will benefit them, and if I don’t then who will? (Sara – nanny)

Sara did not feel that her employers were adequately addressing their child’s autism and she also felt, as many nannies I spoke with did, that her employers’ expectations regarding their children’s capabilities were not well founded. My discussion with Sara was interesting because unlike the other nannies who shared this view, Sara felt that her
employers expectations lower than they should be. Additionally, Sara did not feel that 
other providers would put in the same amount of effort she did.

[LB: Can you tell me about that, “If I don’t then who will?”]
Well for example, they could easily find someone else who would work for less, 
who would you know work longer hours do this or that. However, it’s very 
difficult to work with special needs and then no matter how mainstream and then 
it’s a matter of fitting in between where my expectations lay for the children and 
where the parents are and where they should be… The parents actually use it as 
an excuse on a regular basis for her. “Well she can’t do that, it’s not her fault. 
She has a disability, she can’t possibly.” And I’m like there’s a difference 
between what she can and can’t do and what she will and won’t do. And if you 
don’t expect anything ever then she won’t be able to do it. But if you ask her to 
or ask her to try and it’s expected on a regular basis then it will become habit and 
she will actually become mainstream. (Sara – nanny)

Nina also felt that the expectations her employers held for their children were not 
on par with the children’s abilities and she found them to be impractical, given that she 
nannied for a two year old and a baby. Consistent with Sara’s experience, she questioned 
where the children would be without her.

I don’t know how to word this without making it sound like they are bad parents. 
They really are good people and they really are good parents. I just feel like 
sometimes they don’t have realistic expectations of what it means to have a child. 
You know, I feel like sometimes they don’t realize that kids aren’t something that 
you can neatly package away and then go do what you want to do… So I guess 
all the times that it got really frustrating and I’d be like this is ridiculous, I should 
just quit, I should just quit, I’d always kind of think, where would the kids be left 
if I wasn’t there? If I wasn’t there to get things calmed down in the morning from 
whatever’s going on, to be a calming force, to give them a good routine, to give 
them some stability, I feel like they would have a lot more frustrations going on. I 
feel like they might be worse off. So I guess every time that I thought this is 
ridiculous when I’d come back from my fourth time trying to pick out fish, going 
this is ridiculous I graduated from college with honors, this is a waste of my life, 
it would always come back to what would the kids be doing if I wasn’t there? 
And that kind of would keep me with it. And I tell myself it’s only for two years, 
it’s only for this amount of time. (Nina – nanny)
Nina was frustrated with her employers’ treatment of their children and their behavior toward her, yet her fear that the children’s lives would be too chaotic without her outweighed her frustrations and led her to remain with them.

A strong component of the sentiment “if not me then whom?” was nannies’ perceptions that their employers treated the children as if they were for show. They also felt that their employers were too concerned with their personal image. In an effort to minimize the amount of time that the children were treated in this manner, nannies sought to be present as often as possible.

Another reason why I’ve decided to stick with it is because I feel like I’m one of the few people that is actually asking him, what do you want?... If he wants to read an Elmo book then I read an Elmo book with him. It’s not going to kill him, stuff like that. So that’s been frustrating sometimes. I feel like they want them to be well dressed, and well behaved, and to come to these events and then play nicely with others. And then come back when mommy and daddy are ready to leave. And that’s not always the way it is. (Nina – nanny)

Samantha too expressed that her employer treated the child she cared for in a manner that appeared as if the child was an item to be put on display.

I figured the more time I spent with her, the less time Eve would be treated like, not even a doll to dress up for fun but something like this, (referring to a flower arrangement), to take out and be like, isn’t this a beautiful arrangement, this flower right here, like isn’t that, hold on sweetie. (Samantha – nanny)

In regards to her employers, Nicole said:

I don’t feel like she’s really in it to be a mom. I feel like it’s all for show. There are times that I see glimpses of affection but it’s usually when they are sitting and watching TV together. I’ve never seen any interactive play with either of the parents and it’s mostly if she’s doing something with her son, it’s taking him to the toy store to get him a toy or taking him out to lunch to get him ice cream. And it’s all material. There’s no deeply rooted affection for either of the kids.

Despite reporting that she had separated herself, Nicole expressed sadness and concern:

I feel bad leaving the kids there. I mean sometimes I feel like I care for the kids more than the parent. (Nicole – nanny)
Some nannies felt that they were the only people in the children’s lives who actually cared about the children and their needs. These nannies shared similar goals of making life easier and better for the children in their care. While attachment was a factor in shaping these nannies feelings when they considered leaving the families that they worked for, their concern for the children in the event of their leaving was equally as significant of a factor.

**Conclusion**

Prior research has attributed the attachments formed between child care providers and the children in their care to the type of labor being performed (Nelson 1990; Himmelweit 1999; Macdonald and Merrell 2002). Research has also suggested that social isolation is heightened for live-in nannies and immigrant nannies (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Romero 2003). The experience of attachment has been studied extensively for both of these groups but no research to date has examined the role of attachments in nanny work, and relationships between employers and nannies who are more socially similar, as my research has done.

As this research has uncovered, attachment is not limited to nannies’ relationships with children and mothers perceptions of attachment but rather it is multifaceted. My findings suggest that the attachments that the nannies who participated in my study formed with children, regardless of their educational status or career aspirations, were strong enough to tie many nannies to their positions. Attachment played the largest role in keeping nannies in jobs when children were young (under the age of five) and were greatest when the children were very young (two years of age or younger.) Future
research should examine the role that the age of children plays in nannies’ formation of attachments.

Parents in this sample fell into three categories in relation to their view of their children’s attachment to their nanny. One, the majority of parents would not have been satisfied with the relationship if their nanny had not expressed a strong connection with the children. Two, a minority of parents expressed struggling with this connection. And three, some mothers confessed to minimizing the bond that their children formed with their nanny.

While parents expressed the fear that their children would rebuff them for their nanny, some nannies also noted dread that this would occur. In these instances, nannies sought to limit the likelihood of this, and some reported that this led to their employer’s decision to fire them. However, some nannies did not alter their behavior to avoid the children’s overt preference for them over the parents and this often occurred when they had a strained relationship with their employer and did not see them as a good parent.

The job of the nannies in this sample was quite complicated due to the vast and often conflicting job requirements. Emotional labor was required of them, and much like prior research on emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), the nannies had difficulty distancing themselves from their jobs and their feelings once they left work. Much like prior research, many nannies in this sample remained in positions due to the attachment they formed. They also employed distancing strategies to allow themselves to move out of positions if the need arose. Finally, I presented data which exemplifies nannies’ concerns that the children would be disadvantaged without them. This finding also tied nannies to positions and is in further need of exploration. In the next chapter I explore
the relationships between nannies and employers and their reasons for developing relationships that are either personal or work. I also explore the impact these relationships have on nannies perceptions of their work as well as the ways these relationships impact employers’ experiences of employing a nanny.
Chapter 8
THE NANNY-EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIP

The personal and work relationships between child care providers and employers are complex. Uttal and Tuominen (1999) describe these relationships as “tenuous,” and they have been found to be one of the most complicated aspect of child care work (Macdonald 1998; Nelson 1989; Uttal 1996; 2002; Wrigley 1995). In this chapter I cover five important topics regarding the perceived role of nannies in the nanny-employer relationship. First, I explore employers’ and nannies’ perceptions of their relationships as familial or businesslike and address the ways these statuses become blurred. I then illustrate nannies viewpoints of situations where their employers increase their workload or ask them to perform duties outside the realm of their job description. Third, I examine employer’s perspectives and strategies of managing their nannies. I then examine the ways in which nanny/employer interactions are gendered and explore the explanations and consequences of non-work related interactions between employers and nannies. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of nannies experiences in working for stay-at-home and work-from-home mothers; a previously unexamined group.

The role of the nanny: Employer’s perspectives

Child care arrangements bring individuals together in relationships that are intense and personal and unite people who, due to their social locations, would not be intimately involved in one another’s life under other circumstances. A consistent theme in prior research has been a focus on relationships between employers and child care providers who were not socially similar (Wrigley 1995; Macdonald 1996; 1998; Uttal 2002). At the center of this research has been the use of various forms of child care by
employed mothers (Macdonald 1996; Macdonald 1998; Uttal 2002). Macdonald’s research included interviews with live-in nannies (1996) and nannies and au pairs (1998), whereas Uttal’s (2002) focus was on employed mothers who relied on a number of forms of paid child care. Wrigley’s (1995) research was perhaps the most diverse. She examined the ways in which parents seek social similarity and differences in their caregivers. As I will now discuss, each of these hiring strategies shaped the relationships formed between caregivers and employers.

Macdonald (1996) uncovered the confusion experienced by employed mothers over the place of child care providers, within the parameters of their family. Uttal (2002) found that employed mothers frequently used the metaphor of family to explain their relationships with the child care providers but were far less likely to describe this relationship. Macdonald (1998) found that it was common for mothers to refer to their nanny as part of the family, particularly when the nanny lived with the family. However, she found a disconnect between the ways mothers spoke about the nanny (as part of the family) and the manifestation of these attitudes into actual behaviors (Macdonald 1996). Uttal (2002) similarly found the language of “family” relationships to be misleading as neither nannies nor employers translated that language into “family relationship” behaviors. On the other hand, Wrigley (1995) found that many employers of caregivers who were college students or college bound practiced “a family-incorporation strategy” (49). Wrigley (1995) concluded that this attempt at actual behavioral incorporation into the family may be explained by the fact that many of these nannies were very young and away from their parents for the first time. Moreover, they were social class peers, which shaped the willingness of employers to adopt them into their family.
Although the findings from my research support many of these previous findings, my research also diverges from these previous studies because I focus on relationships between employers and nannies from similar class backgrounds and I more fully examine the relationships between nannies and stay-at-home and work-from-home mothers. As we saw in Chapter 5 and Chapter 9 will uncover, social similarity has been a recurring theme throughout this study. For employers, shared social locations had a significant impact on their relationship with their nannies. The choice to define their relationship as family or friendship versus employer/employee centered on their level of comfort in these relationships, which stemmed from their interpretations of social similarities and differences.

Throughout the course of my study I found that the nanny-employer relationship is multifaceted and sometimes very complicated. I found that employers viewed their nannies in one of three ways: 1) a friend or family member, 2) an employee, or 3) as having no relationship at all. Employers’ perceptions of their relationship were also multifaceted and were derived from a number of areas. The relationships they formed came from their initial intentions, evolving interactions with the nanny, their perceptions of past experiences with nannies, and from their nannies treatment of them.

**Nanny as a friend or family member**

Contrary to findings from the research cited above (Macdonald 1996; 1998; Uttal 2002; Wrigley 1995), I have found that employers in my sample were more likely to view their nannies as friends or to have a more familial relationship with their nannies. For example, sixteen of the twenty-seven employers I interviewed stated that their nanny was either a close friend or a family member. One explanation of this may be because the
employers in my sample often minimized the social differences between themselves and their care providers, whereas employers in other samples sought to emphasized these dissimilarities (Uttal 2002; Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Wrigley 1995), potentially making it easier to maintain an employer/employee relationship. Over seventy-five percent of the employers who categorized their nanny as a friend or family member classified her as being socially similar to them. These employers sought to reduce the number of social differences between themselves and their nanny both directly and indirectly. Minimizing these differences allowed them to forge personal relationships.

As Wrigley (1995) noted, a degree of social space between both parties is a feature of many employer/employee relationships. Employers in my sample noted that this space was lacking. Only three of the employers who reported not being socially similar to their nanny defined their relationship with her as a friendship. One of these employers, Gwen, employed a nanny with a Bachelor’s degree while Mark and Erin’s nanny’s connection to their social circle led to the assumption that she would “fit in” with their lifestyle.

Ryan explained his perception as to why personal relationships are formed between employer/employee in nanny positions.

[LB: Why do you think these relationships are more likely to be friendships?] I guess what I am getting to is that it’s, the relationship is conducted in that language and in those forms. A more, even like a familial relationship and I think that probably because it’s more comfortable to everyone. Because employees don’t like to be treated like their employed and employers probably the same. So… it reverts to family. A, because it’s child care that’s being provided… But I think that it’s less disturbing to think about. (Ryan – employer)

Due to the type of labor being performed, Ryan expressed, the idea that treating the nanny as a family member was more comfortable for both parties. As I previously noted
in Chapter 6, and will further explore in this chapter, employers felt that their nannies should be motivated to work as a nanny for reasons beyond monetary compensation. Those who expressed this stance felt that their nanny was or should be a friend or family member were bothered when she behaved as an employee.

In most employers’ accounts, the status of a nanny as a friend or a family member was an evolving process. Employers cited their children’s relationship with their nanny as a starting point for their friendship. They also referenced commonalities between themselves and their nanny as indicators of the basis for their personal relationship.

For two employers, Cynthia and Mark, the bond their nanny shared with their children linked them together as family.

Well I think the um, the relationship with my children is very strong and when someone is very close to your children you look at them differently and you’re more open to them. So you know in that way I view her as a part of the family because she’s very important in my kid’s lives. (Cynthia – employer)

We share a common love. We’re both concerned about the little guys so you automatically I think just become friends. And she’s a very open person, she’ll talk to us about her you know her family background… so you end up just sharing those things. And she sees my family or Erin’s family come through and she hears our stories. You know you just spend that much time at somebody’s house, you know, yeah I think you just develop that closeness. (Mark – employer)

The ability to have encounters and personal discussions, which transcended child care and the children, also shaped some employer’s views of their relationship as a friendship.

I guess you know coming to family gatherings… We talk about things other than the kids… So that kind of shows more of a friendship level. Um she buys, like my mom had surgery over the summer, she bought my mom a get well soon card. And the same thing with her mom… we send them notes and cards… So I think in those ways its more of a friendship than a professional relationship. (Melyssa – employer)
She’s become a friend. A friend and just coincidentally she’s in a similar field. So it’s evolved from strictly taking care of the kids and communicating about the kids to we really share a lot. And I’m seen as sort of a mentor I guess for her. (Ann – employer)

Having similar career goals and interests allowed Ann to form a bond with her nanny that transcended her nanny’s job as a caregiver to her children.

Although the majority of the employers I interviewed expressed their relationship in friendship or family terms, only three of the nineteen mothers stated that they initially expected their nanny to become a part of their family. Melyssa explained her view of the job of the nanny:

I think being a nanny is more than, more than a job. It’s entering into a role within a family, really. (Melyssa – employer)

Because of this view she expressed that prior to hiring her nanny she expected the person she found would become a part of her family.

I wanted what I have. In my job description when I put the ad up I specifically wrote in there that I wanted somebody that would become part of our family, not just somebody who would watch my kids during the day. I wanted somebody that was willing to do those things like come to birthday parties… somebody that would be involved in my kids lives regardless. You know like I expect with her that even when she stops working with us that she would continue to have a relationship with my children. (Melyssa – employer)

Lindsay held similar views to Melyssa. She explained her view of her relationship with her nanny as follows:

I would like to think close. I kind of think of her as a younger sister… She stayed here, and slept here, and took care of our dogs while we were away for a week. And again, that is something that my own actual younger sister, I wouldn’t have felt as comfortable with her… it comes down to the gut feeling, the comfort… I truly feel like we would be in her life for a long time even when she is not sitting with the kids. And I would like to think that. (Lindsay – employer)
Previous research found that employers would speak about their caregivers in familial or friendship terms but not engage in family-like or friendship behaviors with them. Moreover, they reserved some aspects of care only for family members (Uttal 2002). Contrary to these findings, Lindsay’s statements illustrate the idea that her nanny is both valued and treated as a family member.

Both Melyssa and Lindsay expressed the hope that their relationships with their nannies would persist beyond the duration of time she spent caring for their children. Despite this hope for future connection, prior research has found only a minority of employers actually stayed in touch with their caregivers after the conclusion of the work relationship (Macdonald 1998). While it is impossible to determine whether or not mothers in this sample will actually maintain ties to their nannies past their child care relationship, fifteen out of the nineteen mothers stated that they hoped to do so, and six noted that they were currently in contact with past nannies. These parents expected and welcomed that their nanny would move on to formal employment, but hoped that she would stay on with them for the years to come in a familial or close friend capacity. This desire may be related to the role model status many nannies took on. I found that nannies often took on this status as a result of their educational aspirations.

The first one, Monique, was 21 and she was a senior at [college] when I hired her. And she graduated and is working in [city] and we still keep in touch. (Lindsay – employer)

You know like we keep in touch with them, their very dear to us. One of our nannies visits us every year just as one of her vacations because she just finds it really nice to… she likes spending time with us. (Susan – employer)

And I know girls that graduated, they still keep in touch with me and they write and they stop by. Every once in a while they will send gifts for Carolina’s birthday. (Cathy – employer)
Other key differences emerged between my findings and prior research. Macdonald (1998) and Uttal (2002) described the end of the nanny’s workday as marking the start of “family time.” As they explained, the firm end time clearly distinguished between family and non-family members. Mothers expected providers to physically leave the residence in order to signal the end of her day to their children. Conversely, the mothers in my sample were much less likely than those in prior research to view their nanny in strictly employer/employee terms. They also did not seek to firmly enforce the boundary between their family and their nanny as an employee. In fact, as I covered in Chapter 6, employers did not appreciate it when their nanny was quick to leave their house at the end of her shift. The nannies I interviewed reported similar experiences and some were even frustrated over the lack of a clear end time to their work. The absence of a clear boundary between work and family was also reflective of the expectations of employers in this sample and in nannies’ perceptions of their employers expectations that they behave as family members. Despite the feeling among many employers in my sample that their nannies were like friends or family members, there were also parents who viewed their nannies as strictly employees. I now turn to discuss that group.

She’s an employee

Many employers hired more than one nanny. Two of these employers saw themselves as having a personal relationship with one of their nannies and a business relationship with the other. This demonstrates that these relationships are based significantly on nanny-employer interactions. Six employers stated they viewed their nanny as an employee. Half the employers who defined their relationships as employer/employee stated their nanny held social locations to them. As a result of
becoming emotionally invested with a prior nanny, three of the six employers expressed that they held back and avoided developing a personal relationship this time around.

Having a friendship with her first nanny, led to problems for Silvia. She described these problems with Tara and her efforts at maintaining an employer/employee relationship with her new nanny, Andrea.

Well Andrea I would say… she’s an employee… I’m trying to treat her like a professional… Tara it was the same, I just think with the added kind of the boundary issues. That… we were and are friends. (Silvia – employer)

Susan also discussed her attempt to keep her relationship as professional rather than personal with her nannies. She employed approximately ten nannies over the past ten years and tried to learn from her previous errors.

I think that there is a temptation because their working in your house and you learn a lot about their personal lives, to get invested in them personally. And I think that then becomes a problem because the discussions you have about work related things have an overlay of the personal relationship which can make the conversation more complicated… it’s hard to be totally distant about it…. So I tried this summer and I think that worked better… I think that makes the other interactions better. But I don’t know don’t know if it’s possible to tell you the truth, I don’t know if it’s possible for me personally. (Susan – employer)

In an effort to avoid becoming very personally involved with her nanny Susan hired a nanny who was only available for the summer, followed by her current hire that was only working for one year while applying to graduate school. The fact that these individuals were not looking for long-term employment may have helped Susan maintain her distance. However, the social similarities between herself and her more recent nannies may make it more difficult to maintain this stance.

Having hired a total of six nannies over the past three years Lillian was also able to learn what worked best for her from prior relationships. In reference to her present relationship she stated:
I think we have a good relationship we’re not, my husband’s more buddies with her. I’m more cautious because I’ve gone through getting to be friends with these people who leave me so I’m a little more hesitant. (Lillian – employer)

Lillian’s connection to her previous nanny made it difficult for her when the nanny left. This led to her current decision to withhold a bit more as she had done previously.

The last one I saw as a friend. Which made it really bad. And the other ones I just saw them more as a nanny. Like someone who worked for us, not that we didn’t like them they just weren’t in my thoughts all day.

[LB: What about last one made you think of her more as a friend?]
She was really chatty. Like she pulled me out more of being a quiet person whereas, and she wasn’t, I don’t think she felt there were boundaries. She just kind of said whatever, asked whatever. I guess I just responded to it where normally I’m quiet and they feed off of that. (Lillian – employer)

Employers, like Lillian often followed their nannies lead regarding communication. While Lillian described her past nanny as drawing her out of her shell, others followed their nannies’ lead and had a relationship with them that was not personal. Two of the six (Theresa and Christina) who viewed their nanny as an employee, followed the cues their nannies gave off and formed an employer/employee relationship with them.

[LB: Do you have a personal relationship with your nanny?]
I’m going to say no because my kids know more about her social life than (laughing) I do. My 6 year old just today was like “Oh yeah she broke up with Shane and now she’s seeing Jacob.” And I’m like oh okay, I didn’t even know that she was seeing someone new. So I would say no. (Theresa – employer)

[LB: Can you tell me how you would define your relationship?] I guess businesslike. So it’s again, she doesn’t open up very well, whereas the first nanny, she and I would talk about her family. I do with this one but… it doesn’t flow as easily… we’ll make the small chit chat or whatever but then basically… it doesn’t get beyond the small chit chat. (Christina – employer)

Not having knowledge of intimate details of their nanny’s life or any in-depth personal discussions gave Theresa and Christina the feeling that their nannies were behaving in a
manner that was businesslike. When employers spoke of lacking a personal relationship, they were quick to classify it as businesslike or employer/employee.

While Christina reported that her nanny was socially similar to her due to her pursuit of a college degree, Theresa reported being “surprised” by the disparities between her nanny’s economic status and her own.

Well it surprises me sometimes, the discrepancies, because her parents you know both are well educated… and successful people and when she describes her growing up it was this big house and all that. But yet theirs like a, she’s not that sophisticated and it sort of surprises me given her background… there are just certain things she doesn’t always know or places she hasn’t been… So that I see as a discrepancy that I notice because it surprises me. (Theresa – employer)

Theresa went on to state that while she was confused by the differences, they did not cause a problem. I asked if these differences influenced her children in any way. She stated:

No because they’re kids. They’re not really that sophisticated either. They’re not reading Shakespeare yet or I don’t expect them to get all the literary references I might make. (Theresa – employer)

Theresa spent a significant part of her day interacting with her children. Therefore, these differences may not have been a major focus for her. It is possible that the social differences she discovered after she hired her nanny were significant enough that it prevented them from developing a personal relationship.

Tina was the sixth and final employer to define her relationship with her nanny as employer/employee. She was the only wife in a wife/husband employer pair to characterize the relationship in this manner while her husband labeled it a friendship. Due to his ability to work from home part-time, her husband, Joel, interacted more frequently with their nanny. Most of our conversation centered on Tina’s discomfort with her child care arrangement which shaped her view of the relationship and Tina did
not speak to the social status of her nanny. Her discomfort was not because she did not perceive her nanny to be a fit caregiver, but because she felt guilt over not being present for her children (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). She felt that she became too emotional in interactions, and therefore sought to distance herself and maintain a professional relationship. At the time I spoke with Tina, her nanny had worked for her only for seven months. While many employers had formed intense personal relationships in a matter of weeks, Tina distanced herself and saw her nanny as an employee.

She hasn’t worked for us that long so she’s still kind of like a stranger. She’s, we obviously trust her and we talk to her about her life, I do consider her like an employee kind of thing. (Tina – employer)

The employers who defined their relationships in business terms did so for multiple reasons. Some adopted this definition as a result of the issues becoming personally involved with their nanny had caused, their nanny’s distant behavior towards them. Finally, some employers were not comfortable with their arrangement. I now turn to employers who were unable to define any relationship between themselves and their nannies.

I don’t really have any relationship

Three of the eight fathers stated that they did not have a relationship with their nanny. In each case, it was their wife who primarily interacted with their nanny. Ryan and his wife hired two nannies to accommodate her work schedule. Therefore, he was rarely present when they cared for his child. At the time of our interview, his nannies had been working for his family for six months. He had only interacted briefly with one nanny and had not yet met the other.

[LB: What do you like the most about relationship with your nanny?]
Well to the extent that I have one, I have one with Deborah. I haven’t even met the other nanny so… I’ve interacted with Deborah for about a grand total of 30 minutes since we hired her… usually it’s she’s leaving and I’m taking over so I don’t really know. I don’t really have a good relationship, I don’t really have any relationship with either one of them to be honest. (Ryan – nanny)

All three of these men left the selection and supervision of the nanny up to their wives. Ryan did so due to his schedule, and Kurt and Ryan opted out of interactions completely.

In reference to his interactions with his nanny, Kurt stated:

I think Silvia deals with most of that stuff anyway. (Kurt – employer)

Silvia, his wife reiterated Kurt’s perception.

He doesn’t really have a relationship with them. (Sylvia – employer)

Much like Ryan and Kurt, Gregg let his wife manage the nanny and defined his relationship with his nanny as:

Brief and awkward in two words. (Gregg – employer)

Jeanne, Gregg’s wife expressed frustration over his lack of involvement with their nanny:

I would think the biggest difficulty with having a nanny is lack of support from my husband. It’s really frustrating. (Jeanne – employer)

I elaborate more on father’s interactions with nannies in a later section, *The role of fathers in nanny work*.

Regardless of the type of relationship (family/friendship, employer/employee, or non-defined), the majority of employers were satisfied with their relationships with their nannies. Those who were not, sought to limit their involvement or have their spouse interact with the nanny. In these instances, their dissatisfaction did not necessarily stem from the nanny, but from their discomfort with having a nanny as a whole. The vast majority did not indicate they were looking to end the relationship. However, these
relationships were not always easy. Some employers expressed difficulty in navigating the boundary between their employer and friend statuses.

**Blurred boundaries**

Nanny-employer relationships were not entirely cut and dry. Some employers explained how the boundaries between work and personal relationships with their nanny were easily blurred. For most, this had not caused major problems, but it had complicated the relationship for some employers. Lindsay expected to have a personal relationship with her nannies and had difficulty accepting when one of her nannies sought to enforce the divide between being a close friend and an employee.

Let me tell you about the wedding. Yeah I was hurt, again because I do get attached easily… So I had said something at one point to her, I had really thought that we would have been invited… I just kind of assumed that… and it was met with really awkward silence… it did hurt and I felt it put a wrench in our relationship and if I had not needed her in the future, but because Barbara’s [other nanny] orientation schedule and a couple of things we have used her. (Lindsay – employer)

Lindsay admitted that this situation would have led to the end of their relationship had she not needed her nanny for future dates. I asked her to elaborate on why she was hurt by this situation.

It just seems that when she was here with the kids and interacting with them they were so close… I just guess I thought we were closer than we were. So it suddenly felt like okay, we are not friends, we are a working relationship, which I understand but again that is not how I operate. It was harder for me to accept. (Lindsay – employer)

Lindsay’s statement represents the difficulty in combining the two statuses, of “friendships” and “working relationships.” For Lindsay, like many of the employers, not being friends automatically meant they had an employer/employee relationship.

Instances such as the one Lindsay described have the potential to lead to conflict between
nannies and employers. Having their child cared for was incredibly personal for someone like Lindsay. She did not like feeling as if it was a financial transaction. Her nanny however, took the opposite approach and treated their relationship as employer/employee. In nanny work relationships, the boundaries between work and personal relationship were easily blurred.

Lindsay was not the only employer that had difficulty navigating the divide between these statuses. Silvia stated that she viewed her nanny as a close friend or family member, but she also saw her as an employee. She spoke to the downside of their close bond from an employer/employee standpoint.

The fact that she’s viewed herself as part of the family, led to, I think some boundary issues… she was a big forwarder of emails… she would forward sexually explicit stuff to my friends, but not to me. So someone commented on that and she said, “oh well I would never send those to Sylvia.” And I said, “Yeah well that makes sense, I wouldn’t think of doing something like that to my boss.” And she actually got offended by that. She said, “I don’t really view you as my boss.” Well okay, I kind of am. But it’s like that sort of, on the one hand… she is comfortable and responsible and views herself as part of the family. But at the same time, the negative part is she views herself as part of the family and feels like she can talk to everyone and has no, she actually… made a comment and one of my friends was almost not speaking to her for a month because my friends son… was using a pacifier… And she made a comment to my friend’s husband about it and so he took the pacifier away and then went away for the weekend. So my friend was left dealing with this all weekend. She’s like, “it’s all because Tara said something!” (Sylvia – employer)

For Silvia, Tara’s perception of herself as a family member was a blessing and a curse. Silvia valued the positives which were that Tara was trustworthy but felt that with this family member status came a level of invasiveness that she would not expect from an employee. This led to her treatment of her present nanny as an employee.
The statements made by Lindsay and Silvia demonstrate the fluidity of nanny-employer relationships. Silvia also resented feeling pressured to involved Tara in some of their family events.

I felt like it was a nice thing to do to include her… she would comment on how she didn’t really have a lot to do socially and I felt like it was the nice thing to do to include her… I wasn’t crazy about feeling obligated… and I feel like I have to include you and my parents don’t even live around here and they’re not involved in this. So somewhat annoyed but mostly like gee, it’s the nice thing to do and it’s nice she is involved in the kid’s lives. (Silvia – employer)

Silvia’s stance on the inclusion of Tara in family events was in contradiction to Lindsay’s. Lindsay was very socially similar to her nannies (see Chapter 9 for further discussion). Silvia described Tara’s socioeconomic status as an “interesting story” and characterized her upbringing as “comfortable.” Tara had received a substantial inheritance and Silvia stated:

I never had the impression that she ever was hurting for money and she certainly had indicated that she wasn’t really; she seemed concerned with what she was getting paid because it was a reflection on what she was worth. But she didn’t seem to really need the money to have money. (Silvia – employer)

The fact that Tara did not appear to “really need the money” may have influenced her interactions with Silvia. Viewing herself on par socially and economically may have impacted her decision to behave as a family member would and to subsequently be insulted when Silvia noted she was her boss.

One father, Mark, spoke to the downside of having both a personal and business relationship and with his nanny:

The one thing that’s bothered me sometimes is she has another family that… they use her to watch the kids… she’s supposed to work for us until 4 and she’ll just suddenly, like that week, she’ll just say, “oh I’m watching the [name] this week so I have to leave at 3:30.” And it’s just kind of like, wait a minute, you have an arrangement with us. I’ve never really brought it up with her… and it’s really
pissed me off…. And that’s one of the problems with it being such a personal relationship and she has a personal relationship with us. (Mark – employer)

Mark described how his relationship with his nanny had kept him from directly telling her this bothered him. Yet through his in-direct behavior, he sought to enforce his status as her employer.

[LB: Do you think your personal relationship is part of the reason why you haven’t said anything?]
Yeah, I do… On the other hand, I do kind of let her know because a lot of times I’ll come home at like 3:55 and I’ll say, “you know you’re working.” We kind of tease about it but I’ll say, “you know I’ve got 5 more minutes of something to do.” And you know she’ll say, “it’s 3:59!” And I’ll say, “you’ve got one more minute.”… and it’s kind of my way of letting her know that she is expected to work until 4. (Mark – employer)

Conversely, Mark also attempted to convey to his nanny that he cared about her on a personal level:

There’s really kind of two sides to it because she does work for me… because I think she views us as kind of being part of her larger sphere. So I’ve gone out of my way to make sure that she knows I feel the same way too… And I’ll talk to her just about things in her life or in my life so I’ve tried to kind of build that relationship. (Mark – employer)

Mark’s account represents the predicament of many employers in this study. Mark cared about his nanny and wanted to express this to her. He also felt it was acceptable for him to push the boundary of the employer/employee relationship but resisted when she did the same. I further elaborate on the difficulty employers experienced in this role in a later section, *Employing and managing a nanny*. I will now examine nannies perspectives of their relationships.

**Nannies’ perceptions of their relationships with employers**

Similar to the employers, nannies also classified their relationships as familial or employer/employee relationships. When nannies spoke of their relationship with their
employer, the majority referenced the mother as their employer. Similar to the employers in this sample, most nannies classified their relationship as a familial one. However, several indicated that while they held the status of family member, there were instances where they felt they were an employee. For the nannies, the boundary between their status as an employee and their relationship with their employers was easily blurred. The characterization of their relationship was strongly connected to their view of their employer. If they liked her and felt the relationship was positive, they saw themselves as a member of the family or a close friend. Those who saw themselves as an employee often disagreed with their employer’s treatment of them. Furthermore, the view nannies held of their relationship with their employers influenced their thinking about the additional work they were asked to do.

_They treat you like you are family_

The majority of nannies, fifteen out of the twenty-five, saw themselves as being a part of the family. They also expressed that this feeling was shared by their employer. Regardless of the view of the type of relationship held, relationships worked best for nannies when they and their employer were in agreement on the type of the relationship they shared. All but two of the nannies who liked their employer stated they had a family relationship.

Sage describes her relationship with her employer:

_We go out for dinner all the time. You know it’s a more loving, caring thing. Or we went to the [location] last weekend and they got me like a hotel room. You know like they’re very, very generous and caring and they’re very supportive. They send card’s… like they treat you like you are family, you know and that’s how we look at each other. (Sage – nanny)_
Much like the employers in this sample, the nannies who were happy in their arrangements were very likely to state that they would remain in contact with their employer and the children they cared for long after their work arrangement came to an end. Sage also expressed that her relationship with the family she worked for would surpass the time she spent caring for their children. For Sage, this provided further support for her viewpoint that she was a part of the family.

I really feel that they will be in my life forever, not necessarily, I mean I’m not going to be babysitting them when the youngest is 20 years old. But more as, like an additional family member. (Sage – nanny)

When nannies spoke of their relationships in friendship or familial terms, it was very common for them to do so by contrasting their status as an employee. This contrast reinforces the viewpoint that family members and employees have very different statuses in the eyes of my participants. Personal relationships were categorized as familial relationships or friendships whereas impersonal interactions were labeled businesslike or employer/employee.

It’s not really just like; I don’t see it, as like employer/employee, it’s more of a member of the family basically. (Monica – nanny)

I don’t feel… like an employee or like a worker. Just because of the way that we communicate, the way that we do things, and the way that we talk… it’s just more of a close… when it’s just you and the parents and your taking care of something that they love more than life itself, you know, that’s, that’s a connection… At least with them… they treat me like family, they don’t treat me like an employee. (Meredith – nanny)

She’ll ask me, how was my weekend? What did I do?... or something more personal than just anything work related. So, which I like because it becomes more like a friendship than it is just a work relationship, which is nice. (Margaret – nanny)

Each of the nannies that stated they had a friendship or familial relationship with their employer liked their employer. The perceptions of their employers, the mothers,
especially, were key in determining their view of the relationship. Friendships transpired when nannies felt their employers treated them as if they were on equal footing. This also occurred when they did not feel there was a large space between them socially. Nannies’ reasoning for viewing their status as an employee, rather than as a family member will be the focus of the next section.

_It’s very businesslike_

Ten of the twenty-five nannies expressed their relationship with their employer was an employer/employee relationship. Their reasons for holding this view were much more complex than those expressed by nannies who saw their relationship as a familial one. However, much like those who saw their relationship as a familial one, their employer’s treatment of them shaped their viewpoint. Although the fifteen nannies who had family relationships were pleased with their status and reported liking their employer, less than one half of those who categorized themselves as “employees” accepted this status and their relationship with their employer.

Two nannies sought a business relationship after experiencing difficulty with their previous employer. Therefore, they were satisfied with their present employer/employee relationship. Two other nannies felt their relationships were cordial, but they were not deeply involved in one another’s life the way family members would be. The amicable interactions made them appreciate the relationship, but the boundary between personal and professional led to their characterization of their status as an employee. Finally, five of the nine did not appreciate their employer’s treatment of them and their classification of their relationship in employer/employee terms emerged from this disrespectful
treatment. As a whole, similar to nannies that had attained family member status, nannies’ view of their status came from their employers’ treatment.

Marianna reported her relationship with her employer as strained and stated that neither she nor her employer knew much about one another.

I think it’s a, I work for you and you pay me. And since I pay you, like it’s one of those. I don’t really know how to describe it. It’s just like a, I don’t know about your life and you don’t know about mine and stuff like that. (Marianna – nanny)

After the termination of their prior nanny positions, Mary and Abigail sought out an employer/employee work relationship. I asked Mary to elaborate on why she felt like an employee in her present work arrangement. While her employer’s need to have lengthy conversations about issues she found to be insignificant will be examined later in this chapter, she states that they discuss issues in a “proper” way, which she appreciates.

With the family I work for now because if there’s any little mistake they bring it up, we all sit down and we discuss it properly, more in a businesslike manner. (Mary – nanny)

Despite holding the status of a family member in her prior nanny job, in the following statement Abigail addresses the fluidity of these relationships. Employers could fall back on their identity as such far more easily than nannies could on their status as an employee. In both her past and present positions she stated:

When I didn’t complete my duties I was no longer part of the family regardless of which family it was. If I didn’t clean to their liking, or do something I usually did, it was always like suddenly there was this space between us, that I was an employee and I was a bad one. (Abigail – nanny).

Although Abigail did not appreciate her employer’s negative treatment, and Mary did not like her employer’s inability to briefly address issues, as the section, *The role of fathers in nanny work* covers, both welcomed being treated as an employee rather than a family member.
The second family, they treat me more as an employee, which I thought, was nice because it had separated me from the problems that I had had with the first job. (Abigail – nanny)

While Mary and Abigail’s relationships with their employers were not entirely ideal, as they were preferable to their prior experiences.

Like Mary and Abigail, both Lynn and Vanessa classified their relationships with their employers as employer/employee. However, unlike Mary and Abigail, they liked their employers and approved of their treatment. They felt their work relationships were pleasant but did not extend far beyond this status.

I don’t know how personal it is. I don’t think so; I mean it’s like a good employer relationship. I wouldn’t say I would call her one day to say “hi.” (Lynn – nanny)

I’d still say employer, although I feel really comfortable going to her, I would still say employer. She seems to really walk that fine line where she’s very sure about, she knows exactly where the boundary is between friendship and employer and she walks it very, very well. But I guess that leads to me feeling comfortable but she knows that she still is the employer and if anything went wrong she would have no problem firing me or doing something else. (Vanessa – nanny)

Whereas Mary and Abigail did not have college degrees and hoped to be career nannies, both Lynn and Vanessa held bachelor’s degrees. Vanessa described her economic status as “completely different” from her employers.

In my family and only my dad worked, my mom worked when she needed to. So it’s definitely kind of middle-class, and the current family is the extreme. (Vanessa – nanny)

Her current employer was a stay-at-home mother who had the ability to pay her over $70,000 per year. Lynn cited age as the factor that separated her from her employer and kept their relationship from developing into a personal one.

Their definitely more wealthy but I also feel like socially we’re very similar. Like … I would be friends with her if she was my age. (Lynn – nanny)
Aside from Vanessa and Lynn, the nannies that characterized their statuses as an employee, regardless of social status, felt their employer treated them as an employee, which, by their accounts, was attributed to their employer’s negative treatment of them.

Employer’s impersonal treatment of nannies led them to feel as if their relationship was a business one. Feeling as if their employer “bossed” them around also shaped this view. The five nannies that expressed having a businesslike relationship felt their employers treated them this way.

I feel like she’s very business like. I feel like she views me as an employee. I’m somebody that she can boss around for 40 hours a week. (Nicole – nanny)

For Stephanie, her prior experience and her employer’s supervision impacted her view of her present relationship.

[LB: How would you define your relationship with your employer?] I’d say employer and employee. Like that’s why it’s strange because growing up I did a lot of babysitting but it was such a friendly relationship. Like I would become like another daughter to all the moms. It’s weird. I guess I just became used to, I was there to watch their kids while they were gone, not there to like, I don’t know, serve them when the mom was home. So her being home all the time I just felt like was really strange and annoying… I felt like she was watching me and telling me what to do. (Stephanie – nanny)

As evidence of the employer/employee relationship, nannies cited being asked to perform a service for their employer that their employer would not do themselves, or that their employer may have felt was “beneath them.” When asked to provide an example of a time she felt she was treated as an employee Sara stated:

I clean up the kitchen constantly… I had cleaned up, brought the youngest up to bathe, read him stories, and put him a bed and called it a night. I set it up so I could leave… she knocks on the door and is like, “I’ll read with him.” And I am like “ok well that’s fine, have a nice night.” “Actually can you go clean up the kitchen?” And so I go to the kitchen thinking there is nothing in the kitchen and apparently she had decided to have a snack and like it was a disaster. And I was like, oh so what you meant was can I go clean up after you. (Sara – nanny)
Each of the nannies in this sample had a clear conception of the status of their relationship with their employer. However, this does not mean that the divide between family and non-family or employee was not crossed. Many nannies who reported having family relationships described times where they were treated as an employee. Nannies reported much more boundary crossing on the part of employers than employers did of nannies. When nannies recalled a time when they did not feel as if they were a part of the family, the discussion often revolved around compensation or a conflict with an employer. This was also true of the employers. Both parties appeared to contrast “family” with “work.” This reiterates the point that a number of researchers have made that love and money are quite difficult to combine (Folbre and Nelson 2000; Nelson 1989; Nelson 1999). Additionally, the roles of employer and employee are difficult to combine with familial feelings.

Nina felt she had a friendship with her employer. She felt their shared social experiences allowed their relationship to go beyond strictly employer and employee. Despite their commonalities and shared social status, Nina also spoke to the flexible nature of these relationships. She also noted how her employer shifted to employer status when asking Nina to carry out chores. These requests and the way her employer, Margie, spoke to her exemplified her changing statuses.

[LB: Has there ever been a time when you felt you were treated as an employee or worker?] Definitely with some of the cleaning stuff. Like Margie will want me to come over to a certain area and she’ll really point out you know, “this is what you need to do. I want this cleaned just like this.” And that definitely makes me feel like, okay you think that I’m an employee. You would never say this to a family member, you would never say this to a friend, you would never say this to someone that was on the same footing as you. You wouldn’t say, “okay I want this floor washed this way; I want this clothing done this way.” (Nina – nanny)
Karen, who also felt she had a familial relationship with her employers, noted:

You know, when you sit down and you talk about the financial stuff that’s when you really feel like not a member of the family. (Karen – nanny)

Regardless of the status of their relationship, being asked to complete tasks their employer would not ask a status equal to do and having discussions surrounding monetary compensation for care reiterated the status of the nanny as an employee.

[LB: Can you tell me of a time when you felt like an employee?]
Um, any time there’s a discussion about money. It’s, yeah it’s absolutely like, “I’m your boss and no, that’s not going to happen.” (Nicole - nanny)

While nannies were sometimes bothered by their employer’s treatment of them; all but two of the nannies who identified themselves as having employee status felt their employers would agree with their classification. Both Sage and Samantha did not feel as if they were a part of the family they worked for, however, they believed their perception conflicted with the view their employer held of their relationship.

Samantha’s initial perception of her job was that she would be a member of the family. This expectation was based on her relationship with a prior family for whom she nannied, as well as an email she received from her employer at the start of her job.

Samantha described the email Rachel sent her when they were working out the logistics of her job:

I committed to the job via email… she was like; we’re so looking forward to you being a part of our family. And I was so touched because that’s, with the [family], that’s how it was. I was like a big sister to them, you know, the kids I nannied for that summer. (Samantha – nanny)

Notwithstanding Rachel’s statement, Samantha expressed that she did not feel she was actually a part of the family.

Every day I just felt like I was there to serve like Luis (the cleaner). I felt like I was like Luis. I felt like I belonged to Eve (the baby), I didn’t feel like I belonged
to them as a family. But then again I didn’t feel when I looked at Rachel, Patrick, and Eve I didn’t see a wholesome family to begin with. I didn’t feel like there was a family there to even belong to. So no, I never felt that way. (Samantha – nanny)

Samantha continued to note the ways she was treated as an employee and expressed confusion over her employer’s initial statement that she would “be a part of” their family.

I mean any time she tweaked what I did. Like, “can you get that?” “If you don’t mind doing that.” “Can you not put as much; you know dishwasher fluid in the dishwasher?” Yeah all those ways I felt like an employee, not part of her family. Like that line in the first email I got, it’s like, I don’t even know why she wrote it. No idea. (Samantha – nanny)

Suzanne’s experience was similar to Samantha’s. Her employer’s treatment of her indicated employee status, but this contradicted statements made by her employer.

Initially she used to say things like, “I don’t want you to think of us as your employer but as your friends.” And I don’t know, maybe I gave a subconscious like, “What?! I can’t believe you’re saying this!” (Suzanne – nanny)

Suzanne’s impression of these statements was impacted by her account of the following situation:

They like to joke around that I’m part of the family especially when the whole Mary Poppins thing was coming about. And everyone was saying, “Oh you’re Mary Poppins.” Oftentimes they’ll say, “Why don’t you just move in with us?” And again it’s like well that’s sweet, but can you imagine how it would be if I actually lived with this family? I mean they want me to hang around for maintenance men when I’m not living there. I mean I can’t imagine the types of things I’d be asked to do if I was living there. (Suzanne – nanny)

Aside from Samantha and Suzanne, nannies that felt they were employees reported that their employers shared their view of the relationship. For the majority of the nannies in this study, their views of their status were based entirely by their perceptions of their employer’s treatment of them. Nannies’ perceptions of their statuses were strongly related to their opinion on the extra tasks that their employers asked them to perform.
Adding on extra tasks: Nannies perceptions of an increase in workload

Nannies frequently noted their employer’s practice of adding on additional chores to their list of tasks. Research shows this is a feature of in-home labor (Romero 2001). The increase in duties evolved in two ways. Either the employer asked the nanny to do a chore directly, and then it became expected or, the nanny offered to perform a task, and then it later became required of them. Chores related to cleaning commonly increased or cropped up. It also was not uncommon for employers to ask nannies to house or pet-sit or to assume daily responsibility for a new pet.

For some nannies, the fluidity of their job requirements posed a challenge to them, and they were bothered by the addition of non-childcare related tasks. However, I was most surprised by the majority of nannies who were not upset by their employers’ requests of them to provide extra services. My expectations were influenced by Macdonald’s (1996) work, which discussed the difficulty nannies had in drawing the line on their mounting job requirements. My beliefs were also based on the assumption that employees would not appreciate an increase in workload that was unaccompanied by a raise. Nannies views of these additions were intertwined with the feelings they held for their employers.

Although they were critical of their employer’s characterization of “light” household cleaning, both enjoyed the activities that took them out of the house. For example, it got them and the children away from their employer. The downside to the indoor tasks was that they could interfere with their ability to provide adequate child care, which bothered them.
She’d be like, “well why aren’t the floors done today?” I’d be like, “well the baby’s teething and he wouldn’t let me put him down.” And I’m not about to vacuum your whole house holding a 16, 17 pound kid in one arm. He’s crying, he’s cranky and he wants to be cuddled. And she’s like mad that I didn’t get the cleaning done. (Abigail – nanny)

I clean all day and it was so much cleaning that it left me stressed because I wasn’t focusing on Eve as much as I wanted. (Samantha – nanny)

Both Abigail and Samantha were less bothered by the chores they had to perform than they were by the time the tasks took away from their care of the children.

Like Abigail and Samantha, Stephanie and Marianna were very close with the children for whom they cared, but disliked their employers. Given their feelings toward their employer, I was quite surprised by their willingness to take on these duties. Stephanie and Marianna were able to appreciate the benefits of being asked to take on duties that earned them time away from their employers.

They actually got a dog. Once they got it I was in charge of walking it whenever it needed to be walked.

[LB: How did you feel about being in charge of the dog?]
I actually kind of appreciated having more responsibility because it gave me something to do. I was just bored out of my mind. And then when I would get bored, I was like I’ll take the dog out. (Stephanie – nanny)

Stephanie felt she did not have enough to do throughout the day, and she spent hours waiting around for her employer. She also enjoyed time that she did not have to spend interacting with her. Marianna expressed feelings similar to Stephanie.

[LB: You’re job for them is babysitting or being a nanny, how do you feel when they ask you to do extra things like watch the cat, does this bother you and why or why not?]
No not at all.
[LB: Why not?]
Because I don’t have to interact with anyone. (Marianna – nanny)
The time Marianna spent with her employers was awkward, and she appreciated the time that she did not have to interact with them. Cat-sitting meant that they were out of town, which she welcomed.

Aside from Abigail and Mary who sought out employee status, Stephanie and Marianna were the only nannies who believed their employers saw them as employees and were not bothered by their employers’ additional requests. Both Samantha and Suzanne felt “used” by their employers.

Samantha described her employer’s request that she house-sit while they were away.

[LB: The house sitting, how did that come about?] (exaggerated) “Question, how would you and Ian like to stay here when we’re in (Country)?” I was like, yeah I’ll definitely talk to him about it. I was like, listen babe were not getting paid that week, why don’t we just suck it up?… Yeah so, she like again made it sound, she was in a pinch too, “plus you know how to like water the flowers.” So I was like yeah, so I, water the flowers and watched her house. (Samantha – nanny)

Samantha further continued to express her perception that her employer thought she was doing Samantha a favor by allowing her to stay in such an amazing house.

I thought I was going to be compensated a little bit for. But I think she just thought her house was so great that, she thought, I think she just looked at us as these basement dwellers. My husband and I were living in um, but the most gorgeous neighborhood, these houses are like half a million dollar houses… We were living in someone’s basement in that neighborhood… Well she lived in one of those… she made it seem like, “lucky you… you get to stay at my house!”… that week while she was gone I didn’t get paid (laughing) but I watched her house. She got me I think, I don’t know like chocolate or something. I was like what! You know, because Ian’s like we’ll go out to eat and celebrate the first night back with whatever she gives you… But certainly I just expected. (emphasis original)

[LB: Did she leave food for you to eat?] No. She completely, Ian’s like she totally took advantage of us, like 100 percent. (Samantha – nanny)
Unlike Samantha, Suzanne was paid for the extras she did for her employer, but much like Samantha, she also felt exploited. Suzanne described a situation where her employer had to attend an event and requested Suzanne stay in her house to oversee a repairperson.

I realize that I’m there to do my job but you know, once the baby leaves the house and I’m there waiting around for the maintenance man to finish up… I don’t know how comfortable I would be in their shoes leaving somebody in my house, checking up on the maintenance man when god knows what could happen. (Suzanne – nanny)

Suzanne continued to explain the situation. Similar to Samantha, her significant other also pointed out that she was being exploited. She also felt this experience contradicted her employer’s prior statements of how they considered her to be a family member.

They even told me, “Invite your fiancé over. Help yourself to whatever is in the fridge,” which is a joke because there’s never anything… And my fiancé said you know, “You’re clearly being used here.” And so the fact that if I recognize it but I don’t want to kind of let myself know and then… someone who is close to me actually says, “hey you’re being used. This is pretty ridiculous.”… So that’s definitely one time that it was very clear your not part of the family, your not coming with us. You’re here to not even take care of the baby, you’re here to do us a favor and stay with the maintenance guy. (Suzanne – nanny)

The nannies in this sample who felt used by their employers were the minority. However, their stories highlight the downside to nanny work relationships and the difficulties nannies can experience when their employers cross the divide between family and work relationships. As a whole, when the nannies in this sample liked their employers and felt they were treated fairly, these supplemental tasks did not bother them. They viewed their employers as family members, did not hesitate when asked to help them.
I interviewed Sage at a time when her employer was away and she was house and pet-sitting for them. In regards to her feelings for the family that employed her she reported:

I love, the family that I’ve been working for the last two year’s, I love them. They truly treat me like family and I love their children as if they were my own. (Sage – nanny)

I asked how her house and pet sitting arrangement came about.

She just asked me if I’d ever be interested. And she said, “We’re going away, would you ever be interested in house-sitting?” And I said “sure.” (Sage – nanny)

In reference to her employer’s view of their nannies, Karen stated:

We look at our nannies as a niece. Someone that’s around, we care for them, and I think that’s pretty much how it’s been with all of my families. (Karen – nanny)

Much like Sage, who viewed her employers as family, Karen held the same opinion of her employers. She felt appreciated by them and did not view providing extra services as a hardship. In reference to pet-sitting for her prior employer, I asked if she was compensated extra for providing this service. She responded:

No, because I was paid my full salary for the week. So it was just like hey Karen you’re going to be at home, would you mind feeding the cats? (Karen – nanny)

Having a personal relationship minimized status distinctions, and the nannies who happily accepted extra duties felt good about being able to help out a friend or family member.

Actually, just last week, they were on vacation… instead of getting paid… 600 dollars or something like that a week. I got paid 160 for the dog sitting. [LB: How many times did the dog need to be let out?]
[I stayed there overnight.]
[LB: Did that inconvenience you?]
No. (Kelly – nanny)
Kelly did not express even the slightest amount of dissatisfaction with the situation. I asked Kelly if she had ever watched the children overnight. She described the pay structure for the overnight care:

> When the kids were sleeping like I had them pay me nothing because I feel like… they’re sleeping, why pay me? I’m sleeping too but again, I feel like I’m more family with them now so I kind of feel like I was cutting them a deal. (Kelly – nanny)

Kelly’s status as a family member led her to provide supplemental care at a reduced rate for her employers. Like Kelly, Claire described being socioeconomically similar to her employer. Claire watched her employer’s dog while they were away, and she had to ask for a raise.

> [LB: The pay change, you had to say….] (Interrupting) Because why would they want to, you know pay more money than they have to… She is, again it was more of the part that I became part of their family so I don’t really feel funny that she wouldn’t think of it. (Claire– nanny)

Claire was not bothered by the fact that her employer did not automatically increase her pay over the years when she watched over the dog. She attributed her employer’s failure to initiate a raise to their close relationship. When nannies felt valued by their employers, they did not feel burdened by these additional requests. Rather, they felt honored that they were included as a loved one.

The majority of nannies in this sample reported they viewed their employers to be “family” or “friends” and noted their employers shared this outlook. Aside from those who sought time away from their employer, nannies who readily accepted additional tasks did so because of this status. In these instances, they did not view these extras as burdens, but saw them as something they were more than willing to do to help out their loved ones. Their agreement on status helped them feel as if they were doing a favor as
opposed to providing a paid service. In the next section I uncover the issues employers faced in employing and managing a nanny.

**Employing and managing a nanny: It doesn’t feel like formal employment**

In each of my interviews with employers I asked numerous questions about what it was like to be an employer and to employ a nanny. A few of the parents were completely thrown off by my questions. Some did not see themselves as employers, while others had not previously thought about this component of their relationship with their nanny. Regardless, employers overwhelmingly agreed; employing and managing a nanny was not an easy task. The arrangements felt “informal,” and they were often unsure how to handle issues that arose due to their personal relationships with the nanny. As a result, employers in this sample avoided conflict or relied on passive aggressive strategies, such as indirectly suggesting to their nanny that they would like something done. This occurred out of their fear they would lose their nanny if they upset her.

Large gender differences emerged in parents’ discussions of themselves as employers. Within two parent households, mothers were often the primary employer. Taking on this role was often challenging for them. Some mothers expressed struggling more than fathers with their role as an employer. They also felt as if the weight of the child care arrangement was all on them. Finally, employers discussed the differences between employing someone in their home and at their place of employment and the difficulties that emerged within the context of the home.
I don’t feel like an employer

Four of the twenty-seven parents did not see themselves as employers. Three of these four parents hired nannies for part-time care. Cathy was the exception, she had full-time child care, but she hired several nannies that each worked part-time. The part-time nature of each of these relationships may have influenced the thinking of these employers.

Mark was especially bothered by my questions about employing a nanny. As he admitted, prior to our interview he had never thought of himself as an employer.

[LB: How do you feel about your position as an employer?]  
(Laughs) I don’t really think of myself as an employer, ever. Employer? I’m paying her to do a service, I don’t really think of myself as an employer… I just don’t think of myself as an employer at all. I just don’t know how to answer that question. All of these employer/employee questions are bothering me because I never thought of these categories before. (Mark – employer)

Both Mark and Cathy held the strong view that they were not employers. Like Mark, Cathy was also caught off guard by my employer/employee questions. Despite hiring several women for forty hours of child care; Cathy also did not see herself as an employer.

[LB: How do you feel about your position as an employer?]  
Okay, what do you mean?  
[LB: That you are an employer and you employ people. How do you feel about it?]  
I don’t ever feel like, I guess I don’t feel like an employer. I never feel like an employer. I give them cash or check so I don’t feel like I pay taxes, so I don’t feel like an employer. I feel like the same way that somebody would hire a sitter on a Saturday night probably wouldn’t feel like an employer, I just don’t feel like an employer. (Cathy – employer)

Cathy did not see a difference between the nannies she hired to get through the work week and the sitters she hired for a night out. This could also be due to the fact that she
relied on the same nannies she used during the week for evenings out. Riley’s view was similar to Cathy’s.

I don’t know, I guess I don’t really feel like an employer as much as I do a mom that needs that extra help. (Riley – employer)

Kyle was the final employer to express this stance. His impression was shaped by his view of his relationship with his nannies as friendships and by the location of the relationship in his home. Each of these employers saw their relationships with their nannies as familial or friendships. As I addressed previously, the statuses of friend or family member were incompatible with the status of employer or employee for the participants in this study. The view that their relationships were friendships led these four employers to feel as if the relationships were not based on “work.” Kyle elaborated on his stance:

I guess I don’t really feel like an employer in that sense when it relates to a girl coming into our house and playing with our kids. Like with Elise it’s more, you know, a friendship… the same thing with Leigh too. Leigh didn’t even care about the money really, it was just more of you know, you have more of a personal relationship with the person and that makes it a lot easier too. (Kyle – employer)

Cathy employed college students. Riley’s nanny held a Bachelor’s degree, and she aspired to become a teacher. Kyle’s nannies were college students and women who were already in full-time teaching positions. Mark was the only one of these employers to hire a career nanny. However, like the other three, he had integrated his nanny into his family life. Each of these employers may have also been impacted in their thinking by the part-time status of their nanny’s work for them.

While four employers did not see themselves as such, Ryan saw the arrangement between nanny and employer as semiformal, which made it easy for him to “forget” that
he was an employer. He described a time when he and his wife were interviewing but did not get back to the nanny they were interested in hiring in a timely fashion.

I think the thing that I don’t like about it [position as an employer] is that… it’s a semiformal situation so it’s easy to forget that you’re an employer. And I think that we both, when we were interviewing [last person], we liked her so much that I think personally we reacted to her and said oh well, she understands that it’s the holidays and we’re going to take a certain amount of time to get back to her. But she’s looking at it from a job standpoint and needs to know within a certain amount of time whether we’re interested. And you know I think that we just weren’t able to. I wasn’t able to keep track, and Linda for sure wasn’t able to keep track of the fact that we were actually employers and we needed to make a timely response if we wanted to hire her. (Ryan – employer)

Ryan admitted he and his wife were looking at hiring a nanny from a different standpoint than the nanny they interviewed. She viewed the position from a job perspective while they saw it as a “semiformal” arrangement. This further demonstrates the issues that can arise when employers and employees do not agree on the status of their relationship. The relationships formed as well as the type of labor being provided impacted employers views.

**Dealing with issues: Employers strategies**

Employers views ranged from not seeing themselves as employers to experiencing their role as burdensome. All of the employers with that I spoke (with the exception of Kurt and Ryan who deferred to their wives), provided examples of instances where they experienced difficulty with their nanny. As a whole, they tended to avoid conflict. In facing and tackling tough issues, some reported that they would use “passive aggressive” strategies to deal with their dissatisfaction. Others said they were “non-confrontational” people. Some employers did not want to hurt their nanny’s feelings. Finally, others avoided conflict because they would be in a difficult position if their nanny left.
I am a very forward person, I notice myself becoming passive aggressive when I’m in situations like that… One day I saw like six on demand movies saved. So I’m like, she hasn’t been here that long, like even if they’re a half hour long, what are we doing, watching TV all day? So the very next time she watched the kids, Karl went down for a nap and I had Leah, the minute I knew she’d be at the door, at the table ready to do arts and crafts. And that was kind of my passive aggressive way. And I think I said, “Leah, you watch enough television, you need to be doing things.” (Julie – employer)

While Julie used a passive aggressive strategy, Cathy was non-confrontational and struggled with not wanting to criticize her nanny.

It’s always hard to tell someone what to do. I am so non-confrontational and I am very thoughtful before I say something to someone to correct them because I don’t want them to feel terrible. (Cathy – employer)

An additional reason why employers were wary of addressing issues head on was because they were afraid of the consequences that could arise if the nanny became upset and left. This was an issue of great concern for those who relied on their nanny so that they could go to work outside of the home. It was also of much greater concern for mothers than for fathers. Mark was the only father who stated that if his nanny left, he and his wife would be in a tough situation.

[LB: Can you tell me what you dislike about being an employer?] Well things like having to deal with um, you know, again if it was like a day care type situation and they were suddenly saying, “We’re closed at 3:30 instead of 4,” well I would probably get pretty shitty with them. I’d be like, “My ass you’re closing at 4.” But in this situation I would never say that because it’s kind of a friend. You know? On the other hand, it’s kind of a friend. But on the other hand, I don’t think I would really want to screw it up. Because if she were to get frustrated, and to find somebody else to work for, we’d really be between a rock and a hard place. (Mark – employer)

In reference to why she did not confront her nanny on issues that bothered her, Tina stated:

Part of it is I’m afraid that I’ll say something like that because she’s here all the time with our kids and we need her. If she quit today we would be majorly
screwed. What would we do? So there’s that kind of balance like I don’t want to get her upset. (Tina – employer)

Julie also opted not to be direct out of fear that she would not have coverage.

It’s kind of the same way when my mom was watching the children and I wouldn’t speak up and say things because ultimately I needed her to watch the kids. It’s such a process to find someone that’s reliable when you need them and is even taking adequate care of your children that, like I think I get nervous that I’m going to end up with no one. (Julie – employer)

These employers recognized the difficulty in finding replacement care. Their need for coverage, which enabled them to work, made them keep quiet out of fear they would be without child care altogether.

The silver lining: The end to employing a nanny

Having a nanny meant employers had to tackle tough issues in one way or another. Despite the difficulties that arose, the majority of the employers preferred their arrangements to having their children in day care. When I asked what they liked about having their nanny come to them, employers who worked outside the home consistently cited their ability to supervise the care being given and having the luxury of being able to leave their children in the home. Those who were stay-at-home or work-from-home parents enjoyed having their children at home so they could visit with them throughout the day. However, Susan, Linda, and Tina shared a different perspective on this. Each struggled with their positions as employers. Susan, whose children were older, was pleased that her need for a nanny would soon come to an end, and Linda and Tina looked forward to putting their children in day care. Each felt this way because they would not have to deal with the management side of child care any longer.
Susan did not refer to day care, but she was happy that there was an end in sight to her days of hiring a nanny.

[LB: How do you feel about position as an employer?]
I have very mixed feelings. I’m very, I don’t want my children to grow… but I think the silver lining will be that I don’t have to deal with child care. I find it very stressful, I find that when it’s not going well or I’m in transition, it just, I feel very, it looms large in terms of the responsibility I have and the energy it takes to keep that relationship positive. I feel like it’s an extra big job. (Susan – employer)

Like Susan, Linda and Tina felt managing a nanny was taxing. Neither Linda nor Tina were comfortable being in charge of their nanny. Both described occasions when their nannies had cancelled at the last minute and the toll this took on them and their work. As a result, both looked forward to having consistent coverage and not having to manage these employees.

One of the things you asked about, next fall and um putting him into formal care in September and one of the things that will be really nice is that someone else will manage this… But I won’t be managing the work. I’m not a good manager in that sense, I don’t enjoy it, I can do it but it’s not something that I’m fond of. (Linda – employer)

[LB: How do you feel about position as an employer?]
I don’t like it. I think I generally have a hard time conveying what I’m upset about or what I want in a way that’s non-emotional. Maybe because it’s with my kids. At work I don’t have a hard time talking to people about what they should be doing. It’s hard for me to separate the emotional from the employer part. And it’s also hard for me to kind of tell her what to do… I tend to side on not saying anything because otherwise I’d be naggy. It’s a very hard balance… I would much rather deal with a teacher [day care] situation. (Tina – employer)

*I’m not used to taking on the role of an employer*

For each of these employers, it was not the supervisory position they had a problem with, but the location and type of work that they oversaw which posed an issue for them. The differences between home and work arose in discussions surrounding difficulty in managing a nanny. Employers were much more at ease with their role as an
employer or supervisor within the confines of their place of employment than they were in their own home. This was largely due to the emotions present in the home and the lack of clear guidelines for employing someone in their home. This was an area with which mothers especially struggled.

[LB: You mentioned that you are in charge of employees at work. Do you find it easier or more difficult…] [Interrupting] Far more difficult because of the emotional overlay. The interactions at work, for the most part, don’t have an emotional overlay. It’s about the work; it’s talking about something objective that can be discussed without people feeling personally vulnerable… I think in another work setting you usually have different types of supervisors or you have a community of employees too and colleagues. I think that means the nanny has less place to diffuse that but I also think as a supervisor it all falls on, I think it’s an intense relationship, more intense than at work. (Susan – employer)

The emotional component of dealing with someone who was responsible for the care of her children impacted Susan’s perception of the difference between managing someone at home versus at work. The lack of clear guidelines shaped Silvia’s experience.

[LB: How do you feel about your position as an employer?] I don’t think I’m really all that great. I feel more comfortable in the structure of my job when I am supervising people and there’s evaluations they fill out and you know you have defined parameters… I think it’s also difficult because there’s not a whole lot of information, at least not publicly available information about what reasonable expectations are. And what reasonable pay is and all of that stuff. It’s like word of mouth… So there’s not really reasonable, well what’s a reasonable job description? (Silvia – employer)

Julie also discussed the differences between supervising someone at home versus at work:

It’s very weird to me. It’s not formal enough, the way I am at (work). I mean when I hire you I bring you in, the tax forms, it’s all very legitimate and maybe that’s why I feel so caught off guard with coming forward and being able to say things because it almost doesn’t feel like formal employment. It almost feels like a favor and a give and take, you watch my kids but I give you money… So I do think it’s so informal that that’s maybe why I do get nervous whereas, at (work) I hired a (employee) that did not work out and I had absolutely no problem telling her. Because to me it was the professional world. Here I’m an employer but it’s
my personal life and it’s very conflicting for me. I just feel like, I feel like a mom not a boss. And maybe I should be more that way because then there would be less room for error. (Julie – employer)

The informality of the arrangement with which Susan, Silvia, and Julie struggled was a reoccurring theme throughout my discussions with employers.

Although they had professional jobs, either presently or in the past, some employers stated that they were not used to their role as an employer and they lacked managerial experience, which heightened their difficulty in navigating their role. Those who noted their lack of experience held postgraduate degrees.

I’m not in the business world, I’m not used to having employees. (Teresa – employer)

I haven’t had any managerial experience before. So that part just the hiring, figuring out who to select, it’s all pretty new to me. (Ann – employer)

I feel like it’s a little strange in that I’m not used to taking on the role of an employer I guess I’m used to being an employee. So it’s hard to strike the balance between being a nice person but still like lay down the law in terms of what I want done. (Gwen – employer)

Women, more than men, were uncomfortable with their role. They also grappled with finding a middle ground between being a likable employer and being firm. The relationships formed, the nature of the labor being performed, and the location of this work all shaped employers views and experiences of their role. The attitudes and experiences of employers were strongly gendered. Male employers either avoided their nannies or stated conflict was not an issue for them. They were able to escape interactions with their nannies in ways women were not able to. This was twofold; first women were unable to avoid this because they are mothers. Mothers felt pressured to oversee this care. And second, many mothers were forced into this role because their husbands would not assume it.
The role of fathers in nanny work

This study is the first to date that specifically seeks to examine the role of fathers in nanny work. One of the largest obstacles in my recruitment arose from difficulty in accessing men. The reasons for this are complex. I advertised primarily on Craigslist, and only mothers responded to these advertisements. Mothers also stated that they were always the ones who did the legwork in the hiring process. Therefore, they were more likely to be the ones looking on Craigslist. Fathers’ schedules either did not permit them to do an interview or, as their spouses would report, they had “absolutely no interest in being interviewed.” Jeanne stated, “he’s still against having a nanny and he doesn’t want to interview with you because he has nothing good to say and he said, ‘and she won’t want to hear it.’” Mothers also told me that they were not sure what kind of information their husbands would be able to provide during the interview due to their limited interaction with the nanny. They assumed that this would not be useful to my research when in fact, it was very important. This also speaks to the fact that the mothers in my sample were much more involved in the recruiting, hiring, and management of their nanny than their significant others.

Fathers were more likely than mothers to cancel an interview due to a work conflict. In fact, I was in regular and lengthy contact with three men, and the interviews never materialized due to scheduling issues. I secured each of the interviews with the fathers in my sample through snowball sampling. I made the contact with seven of the eight fathers through their wives. One man, Joel, responded to my email on behalf of both him and his wife. I corresponded with two fathers directly after their wives first established contact.
In the end, I was able to interview eight fathers. However, I spoke very briefly with two of them. One agreed to do the interview if it was very quick. In the second interview, the person asked his wife a question, and she became involved in the interview, making his portion rather short. Both of these interviews lasted about fifteen minutes.

I asked each father questions about his role and the role of his wife in managing their nanny. These questions yielded responses that speak to the gendered nature of caregiving. All but three of the fathers I interviewed admitted that their wife had much greater interaction and involvement with their nanny. These three fathers reported equal interaction, which their spouses confirmed. Two fathers, Mark and Joel, worked from home part-time, which impacted the amount of time they spent directly interacting with their nanny. The third, Brian relieved the nanny at the end of her shift. The other twenty-one single or spousal pair interviewees stated that the mother had a much larger role in interacting with the nanny. Some of the employers noted that although the husbands were involved in the hiring of the nanny, they had very limited future involvement with the nanny.

Three of the mothers readily admitted it was their decision to hire a nanny and that their husbands did not support it. One husband had come around to it and even liked the nanny. The other two still had not warmed up to the idea and avoided their nanny at all costs. This factor shaped the household arrangement of the mother interacting solely with the nanny in the latter two families.
The reasons for and consequences of this division of labor

The general trend in this sample was that the nanny and the mother were more involved with one another than the nanny and father. Mothers also reported more difficulty managing their nannies than fathers. Part of this stemmed from feeling as if the entire burden of locating a provider and sustaining the relationship was “always on the mom,” as Julie stated. Mothers felt great pressure to find the best person to care for their children. They also struggled to ensure that the relationships worked.

I get nervous. I need somebody. Even if I could just get through this semester. I’m already talking about changing my schedule next semester where I could work at night because I teach at night. And teaching during the day is just really, really difficult and ultimately, this is something that I talk about with Kyle, it’s always on the mom. (Julie – employer)

Julie grappled with how to rework her schedule to avoid having a nanny but did not suggest Kyle do the same. Moreover, for many mothers, “always on the mom” also indicated that they were the ones who had the most interaction with the nanny. Although some accepted this role, others consistently reported wanting their husbands to be more involved in the daily management of the nanny. At the very least, they wished their husbands would communicate their individual concerns to their nanny rather than relying on them to always relay the message to the nanny. This was often frustrating to these women, as they did not always agree with their husband’s complaints.

So I communicate everything. Um, yeah so my husbands relayed, our heat bill was up three hundred dollars one month because she was blasting it… so he was concerned, relays it to me, expects me to relay it to her… It’s um; I think in that situation I was hoping my husband would present his concerns instead of kind of throwing it off on me, that part was frustrating. (Ann – employer)

Christina mentioned her husband had concerns but that he would not address them with the nanny. Instead, he left this task up to her. She described this:
It’s frustrating to me actually… one day a week I’m actually working late so he comes home. So no, it’s kind of left up to me and I think some of his concerns aren’t, not to say that their not valid because that’s the wrong word but because I have such a hand in the childcare and kind of knowing what’s going on, some of the concerns are unfounded. (Christina – employer)

Part of Christina’s frustration stemmed from what she perceived as her husband’s lack of knowledge regarding child care. She also felt that he had the opportunity to voice his feelings. Like Christina, Susan did not always share her husband’s feelings on the issues he wanted her to address.

This is a source of… reoccurring arguments… The one that’s always coming up is that Roger, if he has a criticism about the nanny, he doesn’t tell the nanny, he tells me to tell the nanny… doesn’t even necessarily bother me or I don’t even see the scope of it… ‘Oh Roger was talking to me he noticed that you didn’t take them to tae kwan do’ and then I hear some defensive reaction and I’m not there to really know the details. It’s not my issue… it is hard to supervise and it is an emotional investment. I think Roger opts out of it. (Susan – employer)

Cathy’s husband had limited interaction with their nannies, but she too expressed the wish that he be more vocal when the opportunity presented itself. He also “opted out,” and she felt stressed by full-time employment, single handedly overseeing the child care, and having to tackle his concerns.

It’s very different, my husband, his relationship with them versus my relationship… unless he is home, is not involved with interviewing them. He doesn’t know about this transition. He doesn’t know about the scheduling, he is pretty much removed from the whole situation. He knows who they are, and some of them he has never met before…

[LB: How does that affect you?]

He is very particular about things and he worries about things a lot… So with the 2 and a half month old, “make sure you tell the girls to always buckle him in a seat.”… And days like today when he is home and he has an opportunity to say something, I encourage him to be the one who says something. Because it’s not easy to have your mind in so many places. You’re working on work from home and then you have to remember to tell them this, this, and this. And it’s something I have chosen to do but it’s difficult to be all of these places and be responsible for all of these things at once.

[LB: So today will he say anything?]
Oh he would… other times he has not… But he is not there all the time and it’s hard… to remember those little things but he is like, “make sure you do it.” That’s a hard thing to be responsible for. (Emphasis original) (Cathy – employer)

Julie, Ann, Susan, and Cathy spoke of bearing primary responsibility for overseeing child care and managing the nanny. For each, having their husbands leave this entirely up to them has caused them stress, especially when their husbands interfered with the arrangement and expected them to convey concerns that were not their own to the nanny. Cathy, like a number of other mothers in my sample, reported overseeing child care as something she had “chosen,” yet this did not mean these mothers did not struggle with their role. The mothers in this sample who did not report being stressed by this role were the minority.

Jennifer not only accepted assuming the primary role but saw it as something she, as a mother, should do.

I would say I play, and… maybe you’ll find… that most moms do. It just seems like a natural thing that a mom would take over… if we were building a house, he might be the one to select all the tools and all (laughing)… there’s probably still stereotypes out there and that might be one of them. (Jennifer – employer)

Like Jennifer, Lillian spoke of overseeing child care as being “natural.” She too stated that this was a role she had taken upon herself:

To me it just feels like it’s more part of, before we had kids, and plus we’re both older since we did the career thing first. We’re both executives. So I just figured when we had kids it would be the same way, we’d both be doing the fifty-fifty… But then when we had my daughter, I didn’t want that. It felt to me it was more like that was who I am. I am more a mom and I just, it’s not him not wanting him to be involved, it’s more me pushing him and saying like this is what I like to do. I like to be the mom. (Lillian – employer)

Jennifer and Lillian differed from the other mothers in this sample in their acceptance of this role. Most expressed the feeling that their husbands selected out, while Lillian “pushed” hers out. The majority also expressed frustration that their husbands chose not
to handle unpleasant situations and felt this task was forced upon them. On the other hand, Lillian was able to rely on her husband for support. When I asked her if there was an area of child care that her husband was more involved in she stated:

I guess if there’s any talk that needs to be had he’d be the first one to do it. So more of a disciplinarian. It just is he does not have issues with confrontation or the awkwardness that it brings. (Lillian – employer)

It is possible that Lillian was so comfortable “pushing” her husband out of the “mom” role because, like many of the fathers in this sample, she was able to withdraw from the more unpleasant components of this status.

Joel conveyed that his wife, Tina, was more involved in establishing the children’s routine with the nanny. However, like Lillian’s husband he was in charge of the “more difficult” discussions.

When it comes to more difficult things like saying, “you’re leaving things around the house.”… Or “we have to talk about how many sick days you’re taking,” then that’s me. [LB: Can you tell me about that?]
That’s just how it works and it always has… I, again am easy going, am a comfortable guy… I have a good way of relating to people and not coming off as aggressive or anything. And Tina… doesn’t like those situations. I mean I don’t like them either but she’s timid about them. I believe that she thinks that she comes across too aggressive or bitchy. So it’s been like that. (Joel – employer)

Many mothers reported wanting their husbands to be more involved in the child care process. Tina and her husband Joel, who readily stepped in, were the exception. As noted earlier, Tina and Joel were the only couple where the father classified his relationship with the nanny as a friendship and the mother labeled it “employer/employee.” Joel also worked at home part-time. Having greater amounts of time to interact with his nanny may have led him to feel certain issues were pressing and needed to be addressed.
By the wives’ accounts, the vast majority of their husbands were fully willing to relinquish the supervisory role them. However, it is not completely clear why this was the case. For the fathers with whom I spoke, those whose wives had the majority of the interaction with their nanny did so because the nanny was hired to cover the wife’s schedule. Three male employers had a significant amount of interaction with their nanny. Of those who admitted to little to no interaction, only one offered a reason beyond incompatible schedules for lack of communication with thee nanny. Gregg’s story provides some insight into why a father may leave the task of overseeing child care and his nanny up to his wife.

**Gregg’s story: Avoiding the nanny at all costs**

Initially Gregg did not want to speak with me. After explaining my difficulty in recruiting male employers, his wife Jeanne persuaded him to do the interview. Despite having a nanny, Gregg was entirely against having one. He readily admitted he did not want to communicate or interact with her. This was a role he left fully up to his wife. Throughout the course of the interview, Gregg’s reasons for his arrangement became apparent.

I say goodbye to my children every morning. So I kiss my kids goodbye… But a couple of times Chris has said, “kiss Miss Kendall goodbye.” And I’m high tailing it out of there because it’s just, it’s awkward… Maybe I’m paranoid but I don’t think so. I don’t want to be in that situation. (Gregg – employer)

As I will discuss in greater detail in a moment, some nannies disclosed that fathers behaved inappropriately. However, Gregg was the only father to express fear over making his nanny uncomfortable or being accused of inappropriate behavior. Gregg
explained how he deliberately structured his day to ensure that he was neither present when his nanny was at his house or involved in overseeing her work.

I try to have as little contact with her as possible. I don’t think it’s appropriate… I have a lot of reservations about a young girl being in my house with me alone… it’s a terrible thing but I don’t think there should ever come a time where it’s my word against somebody else’s. Especially a very young girl who is kind of bubbly and air headed. I don’t need any of the stereotypes. I used to go to work at 7:30 in the morning, now I leave at 10 after 7 to beat my wife out the door because I don’t want to be in the house when she’s there. (Gregg – employer)

Gregg further described where these feelings and perceptions came from:

I work with a bunch of guys and onetime… We had a babysitter who is a very nice girl and lives down the street, we know her parents, the whole nine yards. And I used to drive her home… So we get in the car and I drive her down there and she was going to Europe and I said, “oh what are you going to do in Europe?” Thinking that it’s a quarter of a mile, it will be a quick answer. Well it wasn’t. There I am parked in this girl’s driveway with the lights off. She’s taking to me. I’m opening the door so that the light comes on. It was just awkward. And I said something to the guys in the office. They’re all older than I am; they were like, “don’t ever put yourself in that position.” So that kind of stuck with me. I don’t ever want to be in that position. (Gregg – employer)

Unfortunately Gregg’s concerns were not unfounded. Some of the nannies in this sample experienced situations similar to those Gregg attempted to avoid. When I asked Gregg whether or not he ever addressed concerns he had with his nanny he stated:

I have not, I asked my wife to. I don’t do it because I try to have as little contact with her as possible. (Gregg – employer)

The majority of mothers in this sample saw their husbands as deliberately leaving the supervision of the nanny up to them. Gregg’s story sheds greater insight as to why he selected not to interact with his nanny. Gregg was not the only male employer to have little to no contact with his nanny. However, other fathers suggested that their lack of involvement was due to the nanny’s work schedule. It is important to note, Gregg may
very well be the exception, but he highlights important points that should be explored in future research.

*The nannies experience: The moms take care of everything*

The responses from nannies produced findings that were similar to the stories told by employers. All of the nannies I interviewed worked for two-parent heterosexual families. Twenty-two of the twenty-five nannies reported having more contact with the mothers than the fathers. They also noted that the mothers played a greater role in communicating the needs of the children to them. Only two stated that both parents had an equal role. One nanny, Mary, reported that she had more interaction with the father by choice.

The following statements reveal the general trend of nanny-parent interaction for the participants in this study.

The moms take care of everything. The moms are the more organized ones, they manage more, they know their kids activities and stuff. (Claire – nanny)

The mothers are almost always the primary caregiver. (Chloe – nanny)

In reference to fathers Katie stated:

They are not really part of it. The moms are the bosses definitely. (Katie – nanny)

Many nannies noted that they had minimal interaction with their male employers. Samantha who had worked for her employer for a year and a half stated:

I wonder if he would even know my name. I’m dead serious, he would say, “which one, which nanny?”… I’ve seen him like three times. And he would come in… screaming into the phone, he’s got this really stressful like, “take care of it!” “Do you need anything?” I’m like, “no.” (Samantha – nanny)

As in Samantha’s experience, it was not uncommon for the nannies in this sample to report meeting the fathers after they had started working for the family.
I just went through with the mother and the baby. I didn’t even meet the husband until (pause) … probably my second day of actual work. He came home before her… it was kind of weird because I never met him. (Meredith – nanny)

By the nannies accounts, some of their male employers were involved, just not to the same level as their female employers. Those nannies that reported fairly equal interaction with both parents were in the minority.

The mother always plays a greater role. And I think that’s generally because the mothers of the families that I have, have worked less hours. And they’re the ones who come home first… So it’s just been, the mother by default. Not so much that I’m like the father’s never home, this guy doesn’t want to be around his kids. (Karen – nanny)

Karen went on to say:

I would say that in this family each parent, they’re pretty equal they are pretty much a partnered family, a partnered relationship. (Karen – nanny)

Monica also worked for a family where the employers played an equal role in childcare and in supervising her.

It’s pretty even. It’s pretty fifty-fifty… that’s one thing I like about them. It’s not like it’s all on the mother and the fathers not really there… I know he feeds the baby and changes diapers too… I have his cell phone and all his numbers, its not like she’s my contact person and she tells me what to do. (Monica – nanny)

Avoiding fathers

As a whole, nannies had workable relationships with both parents. However, if nannies sought to avoid one parent it was generally the father.

When the father’s around I’d say that would be when I feel the most uncomfortable… there are times when I walk in the room and I said good morning and he doesn’t say anything to me. (Margaret – nanny)

I’m closer with both of the mothers. I think the father that I’ve been working for for a long time; he has a really strange personality. He’s really hard edged. He’s really hard to open up to. (Claire – nanny)
Margaret and Claire avoided the fathers who employed them due to personality differences. But the majority of nannies who expressed being uncomfortable around the male employer noted it was due to inappropriate behavior.

For Nicole, this was a feeling she had.

And with him I totally get the creepy dad vibe where I feel like if I made an offer to him, he would take me up on it. (Nicole – nanny)

Danielle described discovering the father had video cameras monitoring the whole house.

I had just had a bad situation… the guy that was pervy. Well he had cameras. And I have no problem with cameras… I think it should be let known if there is in certain rooms like bathrooms… And I confronted him and he turned bright red. And uh, “there are none, that was just rehab homes.” (Danielle – nanny)

Both Abigail and Eleanor described their male employers as behaving in sexually inappropriate ways. In each instance the father spent considerable time at home, which increased the number of these encounters and made their job difficult.

Really was very uncomfortable with the father, because he worked from home three days a week. Uncomfortable, like he would ask me very inappropriate questions. He would put his hands on me in very inappropriate ways. (Emphasis original) (Abigail – nanny)

And a lot of people do say, there is a sexual image in people’s head about the nanny and the relationship that she carries on with the father… He’s very rarely every touched me but the man was literally always in his underwear, extremely inappropriate. (Eleanor – nanny)

Mary was the only nanny to express that she preferred to interact solely with the children’s father in both of her nanny jobs. As seen in Chapter 7, Mary felt her previous employer’s jealousy over the children’s attachment to her caused her to lose her job. This influenced her preference for interacting with male employers as opposed to female. In reference to her present employers she stated:
We communicate well, me and the father. I’m a little, I don’t know the word for it, I guess scared to talk to the mom because her reactions are just so much different from the father.

[LB: Can you give me an example?]
I gave Connor a bite of a cookie at lunch one day. And she was like; “oh I wanted to talk to you,” because I have to write it down… “Well we don’t really give him cookies or anything unless it’s a special time.” I mean literally it was a little bite. And I’m like; “oh I’m really sorry, like it was literally just a little piece of it.” “Yeah but I’d rather you not,” and she just kind of went on and on for like ten minutes when the father would just be like, “hey, just a heads up, don’t give him any sweets or anything...” (Mary – nanny)

**Stepping in: Fathers make an appearance in nanny work**

Nannies reported their primary interactions were with the mothers who employed them. However, some noted instances where the fathers behaved as an employer would. This was not something the nannies discussed in depth, which could be because they did not think it was significant. They tended to view the gendered division of labor that existed between their employers as normal and acceptable. Most did not see a problem with the mother overseeing child care. I asked each nanny if either parent played a greater role in any aspect of her work. Only Nicole appeared to consider it to be noteworthy that her male employer was involved in this way:

I feel like the mom is pretty much in charge of me, which is funny because the dad pays for me. They have separate checking accounts and that’s his bill. (Nicole – nanny)

While Nicole’s check came out of the fathers “bill,” that was the extent of his responsibility and role in her work. Other nannies noted that fathers would handle discussions of pay:

[LB: How much interaction do you have with each parent?]
Kristin: 90 percent Debbie, 10 percent Bob.
[LB: Can you describe for me the role of each?] She would tell me all about the stuff and he would be more about the money and the pay and the logistics…. (Kristin – nanny)
When I probed this further, Kristin went on to say:

He’s more like a number person. And she was an English major and she’s more with the kids. (Kristin – nanny)

Despite interacting with Bob only “10 percent” of the time, Kristin did not find it odd that she was to work out her pay with him.

Mary’s male employer paid her and when issues needed to be addressed he would be the one to discuss them with her. Like Kristin, she felt that the role of mothers centered on their children, whereas the role of fathers revolved around the business components of their work.

He also pays me; he does the payroll, the paycheck and everything even though her name is on it… So I think he’s the majority of it, she’s just more of the concerned mother that has to ask questions throughout the day. [LB: Can you give me an example of something that he would do?]
Just discuss like if there’s an issue. My boyfriend used to smoke… And then they brought up; he brought up the issue to me. She came home early one day and she just kind of sat there while he talked. (Mary – employer)

Although only a few nannies noted that the fathers had greater involvement in certain areas of their work, this again, could be because they did not find these instances important to mention. As a whole they expressed that the greater involvement with the mother was the norm, and many were not even put off or surprised by the fathers lack of involvement. In the next section, I will focus on nannies accounts of their work experiences and interactions with stay-at-home and work-from-home mothers.

**Micromanagers: Stay-at-home and work-from-home mothers**

The presence of an employer in the home complicated the job of the nanny. When employers were at home, nannies questioned themselves and felt as if their employer was scrutinizing them. Because of this, nannies struggled to manage the times
when they were present with both the parent and the child. As a result, they sought to structure this time so that it caused the least amount of conflict. Over half of the nannies in my research, (thirteen of the twenty-five) worked for families where the mother or father either worked from home or was a stay-at-home parent. Four of the nannies did not have significant issues with their arrangement. However, nine out of thirteen, reported substantial problems arising from having a parent present while they were working.

When the parents were present, nannies worried about their employer’s perceptions of their work. Some felt they were under constant watch. Nannies came to doubt their skills when parents continually interrupted their work with questions and instructions on even the most mundane aspects of house work. Some also felt their employer’s undermined their authority with the children.

In my case I’m constantly being watched and it’s one of those things where you know you’re not doing anything wrong but um, the grandmother, my employer, works from home most of the time… And so it’s like I’m always worried, do they think I’m doing a good job? Um, how do they rate me as a nanny kind of thing? (Suzanne – nanny)

If the mother worked from home she was always… checking on me. I don’t know if they thought I was going to do something they wouldn’t like… I would prefer to have a nanny cam than to work with parents at home. (Abigail – nanny)

Regardless of whether or not the parent was present throughout the course of the day, all nannies were forced to navigate the time they spent together with the children in their care and the children’s parents. As a whole, nannies reported this time to be difficult. For those who spent the majority of the day with their employers, this situation presented itself as challenging given the greater amount of time they had to interact. This arrangement was further compounded when the children played the nanny against the
parent. Both Kristin and Sage explained the difficulty that would arise when the children did this.

Maybe Rick wants to play with a certain toy and... it’s going to be like an hour long... Well it’s 20 minutes before dinnertime so I would say, “No Rick we’re not going to play with this right now, we’ll play with it tomorrow.” ... So then goes running upstairs and asks his mother. Doesn’t hear anything that’s going on... comes back down and he said, “Mommy said I could play with it.” Fine, so I take it down and 20 minutes later he doesn’t want to stop playing it and then there’s another big explosion. (Kristin – nanny)

It used to annoy me though. I would say you can’t have that until you eat something. And then the mom or the dad would be working or doing something and they would just go up and say, “Mom can I have this?” And the mom would say yes, or the dad would say yes... The parents knew I had already said no. (Sage – nanny)

In situations such as this, nannies were never sure who was expected to be in charge, them or the parents. Many nannies described scenarios similar to Tanya’s where they worried about overstepping boundaries.

In the morning the mom will be in the kitchen but she won’t necessarily be making breakfast for the kids. I’m like; do I go in there? Do I make breakfast? Does she want to? I don’t know if she feels better like she’s doing something for the kids or if she’s just waiting for me to do it. I don’t mind doing it at all but I don’t want to interrupt it if she wants to do it that morning. I don’t know if she feels like she doesn’t get to do that kind of stuff for the kids. (Tanya – nanny)

Kristin and Abigail described difficulty in working alongside their employers. The vast amount of time spent together with their employers made the differences in their child rearing styles more apparent.

The part that makes it hard is that we’re working alongside each other. When I’m alone, it’s by my rules and they, the kids want rules and they follow it... He used to like scream and I’d have to like give him a time out but now it’s like she’s making all these decisions. Sometimes I have to just roll my eyes like you’re... making your job so much harder. If you just stuck to your word the first time then your job would be progressively easier. (Kristin – nanny)

Well what was nice at first is that I had the extra help with the twins. What was hard though is that I was always afraid of overstepping my boundary. If I started
to feed them and she [mother] didn’t want them to eat yet. If I started to do this and she didn’t want them to do that. You know, I mean for the most part I knew their schedule much more than she did. Do I correct her if she wants to feed them and they’re not going to be hungry yet? (Abigail – nanny)

Nannies struggled with whether or not to correct their employer or interfere in their employer’s child rearing strategy. While nannies did not feel comfortable asserting themselves in this way, they were bothered when their employers would impose their ideas and ways on them while they were working. Abigail provided an example of a time when this would occur.

If I was about to put them in the bathtub, she would be like; “Oh don’t you think you should take them for a walk now?” And then I would feel obligated to take them… by the time I got back I would be rushed for their bath. Then she would want to know why they didn’t have a bath that day. Like, she never made the connection, like I do things the way I do for a reason. (Abigail – nanny)

At times like this, nannies felt thrown off and could not accomplish what they had hoped for the day.

Nannies who worked for stay-at-home mothers described being given the most instruction by their employer throughout the day. This is not to say that nannies whose employers were not physically present during the day did not make requests of them, but because of the presence of the mother in the home, this instruction tended to occur more often throughout the day. Four of the nine nannies who reported that their job was more difficult when the parent was home described being given extensive direction regarding their daily activities related to household chores, but not for child care. Stephanie was provided a daily schedule of the children’s activities and errands she was to run. She was the only one of the four that was not responsible for any cleaning, as her employer had a housekeeper. The other three nannies’ employers had weekly house cleaners. These three were each required to do the children’s laundry but their duties as they related to
cleaning the house varied. Having their employer present in the home meant that their employer had the final say over everything they did. An example of this can be seen in the following explanation of the dinner routine by Stephanie:

Well it had to be one protein, one vegetable, and one starch. But other than that it was up to me (laughs).
[LB: Do you pick the types of food?]
Well initially she would tell me what they would eat but then as I became more familiar with it I would just buy it and make it but she still had like last say over dinner. I would be like, “So what do you want me to make for dinner tonight?” She’d be like, “Oh you know that’s up to you.” I’d be like making it and would be halfway through and she’d tell me like she wants something else. (Stephanie – nanny)

Three nannies stated they were given detailed instruction regarding the washing or folding of laundry. They were told to inspect laundry for stains and were provided with specific directions on how to fold laundry. The laundry process was particularly frustrating for Samantha whose initial responsibilities were limited to child care.

Something got on Eve where I just threw it in the dryer… But what was in their dryer, say was all their clothes. So I’m like, “Oh I folded those clothes.” Then all of the sudden that was like expected… And then she’d like take it to the next step. So like the washcloth, I would fold it in squares like that. [Demonstrating] She’s like; “Actually, I just wanna let you know how I fold them. Like in half and then tight roll them.” All of her little freakin’, and then put them in a basket like this way so it’s set up all pretty or whatever. So she’s like, “So moving forward when you do the laundry can you tight roll the washcloths?” (Samantha – nanny)

Each of these nannies was the most offended when they were instructed on tasks related to cooking and laundry. Conflict was less likely to arise over child care. An example of this can be seen in the following statement by Nina:

I guess just what I perceive is just a lack of faith in my ability sometimes. Which again is frustrating because I want to say, “you have faith in me to take care of your children but you don’t have faith in me to pick out the right piece of fish.” Sometimes the parallels are crazy. (Nina – nanny)
The experiences of these nannies were similar to those of the nannies Wrigley (1995) interviewed. Wrigley states,

“When parents have conflicts with a class peer, they are less often about child care than about other aspects of the job or the caregiver’s relationship with the parents… More fundamentally, some parents do not follow strategies that could reduce class peers’ resistance to domestic work; these parents can quickly alienate their caregivers” (1995: 50-1).

These four nannies were not opposed to performing household chores. Instead, it was the directions they were given to complete simple and unnecessary tasks that bothered them. All four had college degrees and expressed some degree of social similarity between themselves and their employer.

Not all of the nannies that work for stay-at-home or work-from-home parents told stories of being micromanaged. However, all of the nannies that felt they were micromanaged worked for stay-at-home or work-from-home mothers. Sara was one of the four nannies who did not report having problems due to working for stay-at-home parents. She was the only nanny who worked for a father who was present during the day. Her employer recently retired and was now involved in a number of organizations that occupied his time and took him out of the house during the day.

Lynn and Vanessa both worked for mothers who spent most of the day out of the house. Each had primary responsibility for one child while the other children were at school or involved in activities that their employer primarily oversaw. Despite not having any problems with their present arrangements they experienced initial reservations about working for stay-at-home mothers.

Right before I was offered this job, I had another job that wanted me to interview with them… Both the parents would be working… I was really torn because I liked the idea of not having the mom home… I was definitely wary of it. [LB: Why?] Because you can’t do whatever you want. It’s just the fact that, more of the kids and disciplining them in front of the mom. Having them favor you in front of the
mom, stuff like that. It was more of that that I felt uncomfortable being with the kid in front of the mom. (Lynn – nanny)

Whenever I first started looking for a nanny position, and maybe because I was a live in when I first started, that I did not want a stay-at-home mom. That was just not an option because I would feel very uncomfortable doing anything, disciplining them in front of the mom. (Vanessa – nanny)

Having prior experience in similar arrangements made several of the nannies hesitant to work for stay-at-home mothers in the future. Nannies who reported having the most successful and workable arrangements with their stay-at-home or work-from-home employers also stated that their employer’s were not highly involved in their day-to-day activities. Those who struggled the most noted frequent interruption by their employer and the constant presence of this person in their daily routine.

**Conclusion**

The present study paints a different picture of nanny and employer relationships research in this area. My findings demonstrate that the nanny-employer relationship is based on much more than just simple child care. As a whole, the employers in my sample created and negotiated social distinctions between themselves and their nannies. Because their nannies played an integral role in the lives of their children they bridged these social gaps and often viewed their nanny as a friend or family member. Nannies also drew similarities between themselves and their employers when they saw their status as a family member. Those who felt their employers treated them negatively saw their status as an employee, which also shaped their view of their employers’ requests of them.

Mothers, from the perspective of both mothers and nannies in this sample, were the ones to oversee child care. While nannies were critical of their male employers, they were far harsher in their accounts of their female employers. This was due to greater
amounts of interaction with this person but also because of the gendered expectations they held.

Employing a nanny for child care was often stressful, especially for mothers. As I uncovered, the mothers in my sample reported lacking managerial experience. They also struggled greatly with employing someone in their home. While employers expressed their role was often difficult and complex, nannies reported more complications than did the employers. This was particularly troublesome for those who were employed by a stay-at-home or work-from-home mother. In the chapter that follows, I will explore an additional dimension of nanny work: the requirement that nannies engage in social reproduction.
Chapter 9
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN NANNY WORK

One of the initial goals of this dissertation included uncovering how shared social characteristics shaped the interaction between nannies and employers. What I found extended far beyond the relationship between the two groups. This chapter explores the motivations of employers in selecting and hiring status similars to care for their children. It also examines the role of nannies in socializing children. The first part of this chapter looks at two historical figures, the governess and Mary Poppins. Examining these figures provides important context for understanding the contemporary trend of hiring socially similar, college educated women for care. The second section of this chapter discusses the parental preference for hiring a nanny who is socially similar. The third section uncovers the role of nannies in the reproduction of social class.

From governess to modern day Mary Poppins

The concept of the governess was popularized in nineteenth century Great Britain. A governess served several purposes. First, she functioned as an indicator to society of a family’s social status. Second, she fulfilled the role of educating children and bringing them into their parent’s social sphere. This job had previously been performed by mothers of upper-class standing. Finally, the employment of a governess, and the removal of mothers from this role, signaled to society that the mother of a household was a “lady of leisure.” Thus, the presence of the governess served to enforce and maintain particular “Victorian values” (Peterson 1970).
The governess was assigned the duty of social reproduction (Berman 2006). Therefore, only a particular type of woman could become a governess. “The real definition of a governess, in the English sense, is a being who is our equal in birth, manners and education, but our inferior in worldly wealth” (Eastlake as cited in Peterson 1970: 14). “Well-bred” women were not allowed to earn money at this time. If a woman encountered extreme financial hardship and had no relatives to turn to, she could become a governess. This was the only socially appropriate form of work that would allow her to maintain her status. Governess work was socially acceptable because it was located within the home and it covered work typically performed by a wife (Peterson 1970).

Mid-twentieth century Great Britain saw the emergence of another icon, Mary Poppins. This figure was presented through film and arose in the 1960s, a time when middle-class family life was changing in Europe as well as in the United States. The image of Mary Poppins as a nanny embodied the disintegration of the division between the spheres of public and private life. Like the governess, Mary Poppins was socially acceptable as a caregiver in that she behaved as a member of middle-class standing would and represented middle-class life (Mcleer 2002). The film *Mary Poppins*, promoted motherhood as the ideal for women, and Mary Poppins served the purpose of recreating harmony in family life (Mcleer 2002). In doing so, Mary Poppins behaved in a socially appropriate manner to minimize social differences between herself and her employer.

Similar to the image of the governess and Mary Poppins described by Peterson (1970) and Mcleer (2002) respectively, the nannies I studied served as a marker to society of the middle and upper class status of their employers. The impetus behind the hiring of a governess and Mary Poppins was to reinforce social standing. This was also
central to parents from my sample as they chose their particular nanny. Both the employers and the nannies I interviewed noted that the social characteristics of the nannies made them desirable employees for the families that hired them.

The employers I studied sought nannies who would easily blend socially into their families. This is similar to a governess or Mary Poppins where the governess or nanny served to socialize children into their social class standing. In fact, the social backgrounds and experiences of the nannies and employers from my sample were fairly similar, which will be the focus of the sections that follow. When differences existed, (except for from very few exceptions), the nannies had enough in common with their employers to allow them to exist in their relationships. The employers minimized distinctions between themselves and their nannies, which was easily done as she was, at least to a certain extent, part of their social world much like the figures of Mary Poppins and the governess.

Corresponding with the image of the governess and Mary Poppins, the presence of the nannies I studied also served to uphold the image of the nuclear family. A number of nannies thought this was part of their role. They also emphasized the importance of being socially similar to their employer. The notion of a nanny who resembled Mary Poppins was present throughout my discussions with nannies. In fact, one nanny referred to Mary Poppins directly:

I hate to say it but I think that race would probably play an issue and um background… my employer said, “I can’t tell you what a godsend you are, you’re my Mary Poppins.” She actually called me her Mary Poppins and that was like what everyone was calling me when I initially got hired. But she said, “You wouldn’t believe how awful I felt this one day when I got off the phone with this lady who could barely speak English…” You know the whole English speaking thing did come in to play… I think all of these people are kind of expecting a white Anglo-Saxon similar economic status, at least growing up; they’re not
looking for people who maybe have kids of their own, that are really struggling hand to mouth. (Suzanne – nanny)

Suzanne was the only nanny to specifically draw reference to Mary Poppins however, many nannies talked about how important it was to reflect well on the family and to blend in socially. Having a well educated, socially similar nanny signaled to others that the family was of a particular social standing.

Nicole communicated her view that as the nanny, she “goes very well” with the family’s lifestyle and the image of the “perfect family” they sought to uphold.

I was supposed to go on vacation with them this past week and I couldn’t because of my schoolwork. And I could tell that it was upsetting to them that I wasn’t going to be able to go because I would be the nanny. I would be the perfect little accessory to their family. I go very well with the golden retriever and the white picket fence. I go very well with that… I feel like their entire life is for show. (Nicole – nanny)

The idea of fitting in and upholding the social status of the family was also expressed by Kristin. She described having a nanny as a “consolation prize” for mothers in the town where she worked.

All the like nice respectable areas here, it seems like it’s keeping up with the Jones’s. Everyone has a live-in nanny/housekeeper or a live-out nanny that is like part of the family. And the husbands all work in the city and the mother’s consolation prize is a nanny to be her second hands, to be like her partner for the whole week. So there’s a lot of stuff that I’ve seen with the family. (Kristin – nanny)

Kristin stated that the nannies she saw were “part of the family.” The image of a nanny who is largely socially similar to the employer is imbedded in her statement. As illustrated in Nina’s experience in Chapter 5, stay-at-home mother’s, like the one she worked for, sought someone whom they could relate to due to the significant amount of time they spent together. “Relatability,” as she termed it, was signified by a nanny who had social indicators on par with their employers. In accordance with the comments
made by Suzanne and Nicole, in Kristin’s statement we see evidence that someone who
did not physically and socially resemble the family would not blend in with family life.

The majority of caregiver and employer relationships are comprised of individuals
who are socially dissimilar as noted by Nelson (1989). Yet as I have discussed, the
nannies and the employers from my sample were far more socially alike than those from
past studies (see for exception Wrigley 1995 and Nelson 1989). Nelson’s (1989) study
on mothers and family daycare providers of equivalent socioeconomic status found the
two groups butted heads because of differing ideologies of motherhood. Yet the data
from my interviews with nannies and employers showed that social class congruity made
interactions between the two groups run smoother. The nannies who did not share social
characteristics expressed difficulty in dealing with their employers and did not enjoy their
jobs. They reported their relationships were business like and did not feel they were a
part of the family. When characteristics were not shared, employers also reported having
a strictly “work” relationship with their nanny. I now turn to a discussion of the vast
majority of employers in my sample who hired and preferred a nanny who was socially
similar.

*Seeking social similarity and dealing with difference*

Chapter 5 briefly addressed employers’ selection of a nanny. This chapter
elaborates on this discussion and examines the selection of a nanny as it was tied to the
nannies’ social similarity. Two-thirds of the employers I interviewed described their
nanny as social similar to them making their interactions comfortable and possible.
While there were clear discrepancies between their nanny’s present earnings, her
occupation, and their own, the employers recognized their nanny’s desire to move on to
other forms of socially acceptable employment which strengthened the similarities between them. As I argued in Chapter 5, college attendance was also taken as an indicator for employers of social similarity. It implied that their nanny’s values were similar to theirs and gave them the indication that they shared goals. This led to the assumption that the nanny would “fit in” with their lifestyle. When speaking of parallels between their lives, employers referenced upbringing, financial status and college attendance.

Lindsay described her nannies as being socially similar to her.

Yeah I guess there are definitely similarities between us and them… The ones I have hired are definitely been more in line with us. (Lindsay – employer)

I asked Lindsay to elaborate on the way their interactions were impacted by the nannies comparable socioeconomic status.

I guess that without ever directly asking them I assumed that they shared similar ideals. I mean, you know, when I interviewed them I would ask specific questions and I would say, you know, how would you handle this? And I would ask about their family life and their future goals. So yeah I guess feeling like they are close with their family like I am, like we are and that they’re driven and motivated to go to school, to get their degrees to you know, do what they want to do. It definitely helped, it put me more at ease, and I am thinking, like I said, someone in my family, somebody that I am friends with or would be friends with and they are going to be taking care of my children. (Lindsay – employer)

Susan also expressed having smoother interactions with those who were not too different from her socially, and she relates this to educational attainment. In reference to her encounters with her nannies she stated:

Yeah, I think it’s gone easier when it’s people who are similar. I know in our family education is very important, where delayed gratification is just a common theme. You know like, (laughing) just a really strong work ethic. (Susan – employer)
The social similarities between nannies and employers helped ease encounters. Melyssa acknowledged the fluidity of interaction between herself, her nanny, and her larger social circle. She attributed this to their shared social status.

I guess maybe because we understand where we came from. You know what I mean? Even growing up our economic status was the same so we have a similar background. So maybe we can understand each other a little bit more. Whereas if I came from a higher social class and she didn’t, maybe we would have differences of how you’re supposed to act in social situations. But honestly, even at family functions she acts the same way we do. Yeah I think it’s easier. I don’t know what it would be like if I had to tell someone that they were acting inappropriately or if I had someone that was snobby to my family because they’re not high class. (Melyssa – employer)

Collectively, employers agreed, the more alike that their nanny was to them in terms of social class status, educational attainment, and personal interests and experiences, the more at ease they were interacting with one another.

It is rare that an employer expects an employee to have a lot of interaction with their family. However, the level of immersion into family life that employers expected of nannies required nannies to assimilate to their employer’s lifestyle. It was important that nannies had knowledge of appropriate behavior in social situations. And a shared understanding of appropriate social behavior was key to these relationships.

The perception of vast social differences also influenced hiring decisions. Kendra described the way the discrepancy in life experience and family background between two nannies impacted her selection.

I think there’s economic status and there’s class. And it could be that one of the reasons that I decided not to go with one of the nanny’s, the [city] nanny was that it was just a different social class… And you know Jessica, (present nanny who is leaving) Jessica’s mom is actually an [doctor]… I never felt like our social class was sort of that different. And maybe it was because of her mother’s education and occupation. Um, but sometimes it’s hard to bridge social class… [LB: Can you tell me more about that?]
I mean here’s the difference. Gabrielle, the person we hired, [from state], spent her youth growing up with horses. I mean if you have horses you have more than 5 dollars. Um, you know went to [college]. Not a school for the cheap. Has done some interesting volunteer things… obviously you can’t do that if you don’t have the means to do that. So, there’s kind of that and then the other woman… here’s the difference; her boyfriend is a truck driver. The [college] woman’s boyfriend is, you know, a [medical field] tech person at [location]. I mean I don’t know, I mean I think that we have to admit, I don’t know, it’s a very complicated thing and it’s something that people don’t like to talk about. But… you know I do want my kids to be exposed to people who are bright and who are, um, you know, who’ve accomplished a lot in life. (Kendra – employer)

Kendra appreciated the similarities between her family and Jessica’s. Kendra never felt that their statuses were vastly different until events transpired which led Jessica to leave and Kendra to interview for a new nanny.

She was very, very good and very stable until right before [death in significant other’s family]. At that point she became very, strangely unreliable… And we didn’t know until late Tuesday night that she wasn’t planning on coming back that entire week which of course was difficult. Well as it turns out the father’s wife, sounds like she’s got some mental illness and the father’s wife also lives with her mother and her brother whose like mentally retarded so it sounds like a house full of adults that can’t take care of themselves. (Kendra – employer)

Kendra’s hiring strategy and preference for a nanny who had goals and interests comparable to her own, was also based on the fact that Jessica, had encountered obstacles, which had affected her ability to come to work.

It just seemed like there was a lot of potential complications and after… the extended thing with Jessica, I just felt like, both being equal in terms of our kids liking them and whatever, I mean it seems sad but I had to go with the nanny who seemed like she had less baggage. (Kendra – employer)

She further expressed her reasoning for not hiring one of the nannies she interviewed whose life was similar to the features of Jessica’s that had emerged and infringed on her ability to come to work.

Then the other woman, again, you know, multiple, sort of multiple brothers… her father with his second or third wife had [children]. Her mother, I think, has been
married multiple times. There’s the DCF involvement, there’s a lot of different things. (Kendra – employer)

The employers who spoke of being socially similar were not always equally matched in terms of social class status. However, they reiterated markers of similarity, which enabled them to easily interact with their nanny. Ann’s nanny struggled more financially than she did, but she reported “enough similarities” between them, which allowed her to be comfortable and enjoy the relationship. She categorized her nanny as being in the same “class,” because of the advanced degree the nanny was pursuing.

I think, I guess there’s enough similarities that, I would imagine if there was a significant class difference I would be concerned about just things being taken. I think that would be the only concern that I would have and I don’t really think about that.

[LB: Do you think there is anything about your interaction that has been impacted by class similarities or differences?]
Well just having a lot of discussion around education is definitely unique to the overall class that we’re in. So that kind of takes up maybe 50 percent of our dialogue right now. (Ann – employer)

The fear of theft did enter into my discussions with employers in regards to the social status of nannies. However, it was not of great concern for employers. Theft emerged as a default response for those who sought to explain why it might be hard to employ someone who was vastly different from them socioeconomically. As Kendra stated, social differences are “something people don’t like to talk about.” While I felt that employers were honest and open with me, most were not as forthcoming as Kendra was in her explanation of why she chose the nanny who was educated and from upper-class standing as opposed to the woman of lower-class status whose life was “complicated.” The situation Kendra encountered was very recent in relation to our discussion, which may have put it at the forefront of her thoughts. It is likely that these
employers were seeking a nanny who could help them with their children, not one who required a significant amount of assistance herself.

As a whole, employers enjoyed interacting with their nannies. Like Ann, they appreciated being able to assist them and converse with them on matters regarding education and advanced degrees. However, employers who differed substantially from their past or present nanny on indicators of socioeconomic status, such as income and education level, reported devoting time to helping their nanny and “taking care of” her.

In an effort to have her nanny be on time for work, Lillian purchased an alarm clock for her.

I had issues with my last nanny calling out a lot and my fault for letting her get away with it. We talked about, we had many talks, I bought her alarm clocks, I just, I tried to help her be a better nanny for me. (Lillian – employer)

Although her nanny had a Bachelor’s degree, Gwen saw significant differences between her social and economic status and that of her nanny. Gwen described a time when she tried to help her nanny’s husband obtain employment.

Her husband has been out of work for a long time. And she for a while wanted to get him a position in our building on like the maintenance staff. And I tried to help out but it didn’t lead to anything so it kind of made me feel a little uncomfortable. (Gwen – employer)

As discussed in Chapter 5, having a college degree signified the ability to persevere and demonstrated commitment to those in this sample, something that employers like Susan, found lacking in uneducated career nannies. In reference to a prior nanny Susan stated:

There were times when we had to take care of her. It seemed like her life went from crisis to crisis. She just didn’t move forward in life. (Susan – employer)
Susan continued to express the differences between those for which nannying was a temporary position and those who saw it as a career. She stated:

I’m such a liberal but I have used phrases lately that like when I talk with my husband about applicants, that I just cannot believe are coming out of my mouth, but are true. Like, thinking of things, oh this person comes from a good family. I feel better about that they, their values are going to be similar to ours. And it’s not like, you know I’m not conservative in any way but I feel like we’re going to be on the same page. I feel like they have more resilience, more resources for like just doing a good job and sticking with it. And that I find that the other kind of employee who doesn’t have those markers, when I’m thinking back in general about patterns of success and nonsuccess that’s what I’ve seen. Those are the people who haven’t worked out, either because of communication or because I feel like we’re taking care of them more. (Susan – employer)

Unlike Susan, Erin was not at all bothered by providing advice and support for her nanny. She described items that were often the topic of conversation between herself and her nanny in the following statement:

Talking to her about her life … looking into things for her as far as, she has Diabetes and she is overweight and so she’s always trying to think of ways to lose weight… Just talk about her life goals and just how sometimes she struggles with some of these goals. Mainly the weight loss, and she’s also single so we just talk about that, about not having another special person in her life. (Erin – employer)

While Erin’s family’s educational, occupational, and economic status was vastly different from their nanny, Erin’s husband Mark explained why Pat worked well with their family.

There’s kind of an implicit assumption that she’s going to fit in with our way of doing things. Luckily, again, you know she’s familiar with our circle of friends and we all are very similar. We wouldn’t have hired her if we didn’t know that she would fit in with the way that we do things. (Mark – employer)

Pat’s prior work experience with families in Mark and Erin’s social sphere indicated to Mark that Pat would “fit in” with their lifestyle.

Based on social characteristics (and the cultural capital and life experiences those characteristics presumably represent), most employers assumed that their nanny would be a good match for their family. When a gap existed most of the employers I interviewed
were able to bridge the space between their socioeconomic status and their nanny’s. Arguably, if these differences were too large and had caused an issue they would not have remained in these relationships, much like Kendra and Susan whose experiences with nannies who were not socioeconomically similar led them to make different hiring decisions in the future. A key theme was that if differences existed they still had “enough similarities” that allowed them to form a connection to one another and transcend the working relationship, as Chapter 8 explored.

**The role of nannies in social reproduction**

Employers described extensive searches for a nanny. Few employers stated they were looking for specific qualifications or characteristics in a nanny, aside from their desire for some college education. Quite often, employers referenced the role the Internet played in their selection process. Some remarked that they sorted out and excluded candidates over email. Yet their statements demonstrate that despite not expressing that they held specific criteria in mind, they were in fact, looking for a particular type of nanny.

And honestly even through e-mail I feel that I can weed through more heavily than even in person because I only met maybe, so I have hired 3, maybe 6 or 7 all together. (Lindsay – employer)

We have this list of questions that I’ve been giving to prospective caregivers online… But the questions have been really the best screening device… Usually I would read through the questions and if they’re, actually more than college graduates, it’s can they write a coherent sentence? And if they can write a coherent sentence then I’m happy to give them the questions and see what they will do with them. (Linda – employer)

I weeded them out over email and phone… And even things they would write and their spelling was atrocious and I’m like yeah, not, you need to be able to present yourself well in writing as well as speaking. (Melyssa – employer)
The ability to express oneself well through writing was not a key component of nanny jobs. Each of these employers had small children, ranging from one to five years of age. In each of their statements it is apparent that employers were looking for a particular type of person to care for their children. They were looking for someone with credentials that they valued because this person would be a significant influence on their children’s lives.

Hiring a socially similar nanny was about more than just making interactions between nannies and mothers comfortable. As I discussed in Chapter 3, parents today have a heightened awareness that their children must be able to compete with others and keep up in life. This ideology has led to changes in the way children are raised (Williams 2000). Employers, mothers especially bear the burden of locating suitable care that will enhance the lives of their children. The rise of the separate spheres ideology has left the job of childrearing largely up to women. It has also placed motherhood as the defining feature of women’s lives (Laslett and Brenner 1989). The result of this is that children are seen by society to directly reflect how well they have been mothered (Hays 1996). The attribution of children’s outcomes to their mother’s efforts (Jackson and Mannix 2004) has led to, as Chapter 3 showed, the adoption of the child rearing strategy of intensive mothering. Intensive mothering is expensive, labor intensive, and driven by experts (Hays 1996). Because mothers are held accountable for how their children turn out and children are seen as directly embodying their mother’s efforts (Garey and Arendell 2001), mothers face pervasive pressure to have their children excel in life. Consequently, “much of what mothers do is designed to preserve and pass on what has been called the family’s social capital: their style of life, religious and ethnic rituals, and social position” (Williams 2000: 36).
Scholars have recognized that families are the site of much social reproduction (Bourdieu 1984). Social reproduction, as defined by Laslett and Brenner, (1989) encompasses “various kinds of work – mental, manual, and emotional – aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation” (383). Social reproduction refers to the variety of activities and relationships central to maintaining individuals intergenerationally and on a daily basis. Activities include feeding, as well as caring for and socializing children. This labor, once performed at no monetary charge, by women in families has been transferred to the market. This commodification of social reproduction has increased since the Second World War and the rise in women’s paid employment (Nakano Glenn 1992).

For the families who participated in my study, the commodification of social reproduction and the use of a nanny was about more than just mother’s paid employment status. The majority of parents in this sample employed a nanny who was socially equivalent to ensure social reproduction. A significant number of parents did not work for pay outside the home. Despite this, they utilized help from a highly educated nanny. Almost one-third of the employer’s and wife/husband employer pairs either worked from home at least part-time or were a stay-at-home parent. Two-thirds of the employers who fell into this category hired nannies who were enrolled in college or had a Bachelor’s degree. The one-third of this segment of the sample who hired non-college educated nannies was comprised of fathers who worked from home part-time. Likewise, over half of the sample of nannies was employed by a stay-at-home or work-from-home parent. Almost two-thirds of these nannies had a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Of the other one-
third, half worked part-time for stay-at-home mother’s and the other half worked for work-from-home fathers. The selection of a nanny with educational credentials on the part of these employers indicates that having someone they could interact comfortably with was just as important for these individuals as was their perceptions of appropriate care for their children.

Other research has shown that, parents who hire immigrant women to care for their children maximize control over the care being given and the cultural differences between themselves and their nannies (Wrigley 1995; Pratt 1999). Those who hire individuals who have similar social and cultural backgrounds minimize the need for greater control (Wrigley 1995). As Chapter 5 discussed, employers used college attendance as a proxy for valued attitudes and behaviors.

Educational credentials have long been cited as enabling individuals to maintain and enhance their social class standing. For decades, the Bachelor’s degree has been viewed as a ticket to upward social mobility and a middle-class lifestyle (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991). Research shows that first generation college students have lower levels of social engagement as compared to their second-generation counterparts. They have less experience with college as a whole and have fewer college educated role models to assist them with their experience (Pike and Kuh 2005). As a result, children whose parents graduate college have higher college attendance and graduation rates than those whose parents did not (Lareau 2003). As noted earlier, the employers who participated in this study overwhelmingly expressed the hope their children would attend college.

Along with parent’s educational attainment, one of the strongest factors that influences college attendance and life after college is one’s social origin. Bourdieu and
Passeron (1979) argue that social origin matters just as much, if not more than economic factors in individual’s life outcomes. Social origin “defines the totally different opportunities and working conditions” (12) and determines exposure to extracurricular culture, which embodies attitudes, skills and behaviors that Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) refer to as the “implicit conditions of academic success” (17). These attitudes, skills, and overall knowledge or competencies translate into capital. The section that follows, transmitting cultural capital, addresses the role of nannies in this process.

Capital, according to Bourdieu (1984) exists in economic, social and cultural forms, each of which are transmitted and inherited. Each social class is reproduced intergenerationally and each generation passes on their advantages and privileges to the next. “Cultural habits” and “dispositions” which become translated into competencies or capital are inherited from a person’s family of origin and are unevenly spread out across social class groups. Those who do not possess these competencies feel “lost” in social situations.

“Privileged students derive from their background of origin habits, skills and attitudes… knowledge and know-how, tastes and a “good taste” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979: 17). Cultural privilege becomes evident “when it is a matter of familiarity with works which only regular visits to theaters, galleries, and concerts can give” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979: 17). Cultural capital, which is the focus of the section that follows, is described by Chin and Phillips (2004) as, “nonmonetary parental resources that confer advantage on children” (187). Research has found that the higher the student’s social origin, the greater the knowledge they have of culture and thus, the greater cultural capital they possessed (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979).
The majority of employers I studied recognized that social and cultural capital were as important as economic capital. In the section that follows, I uncover the ways in which employers rely on nannies to impart information to children and provide them with culture. Hiring a nanny of similar cultural and social status was at the heart of parents strategies of social reproduction and was closely connected to the social characteristics of caregiver they selected. The child rearing strategies parents adopt are tightly linked to their membership in a particular social class group (Lareau 2003).

**Transmitting cultural capital: The role of the nanny**

The concept of cultural capital and the efforts of parents to provide their children with it was present throughout Chapter 5. The definition of cultural capital that I adopt is put forth by Lamont and Lareau (1988): “*institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion*” (156).

The child rearing that occurred in this study was very much based on social class and efforts to impart cultural capital to children. According to Lareau (2003), “In this historical moment, middle-class parents tend to adopt a cultural logic of child rearing that stresses the concerted cultivation of children” (3). Concerted cultivation as defined by Lareau (2003), and as discussed in Chapter 3, is the process by which middle and upper-class parents foster their children’s talents in an organized manner. They do so through providing them with endless opportunities, which will maintain or enhance their social standing. Concerted cultivation is taught through interactions with adults and involvement in organized activities. It is essentially the process through which today’s middle-class parents provide their children with cultural capital. This practice is central
to the strategy of intensive mothering (Hays 1996) and at the center of parenting strategies in this research.

The concept of choice is central to concerted cultivation. A feature of middle-class parenting is that parents do not direct children on what to do, they provide their children with options and then allow them to make their own decisions (Lareau 2003). Nannies in my study, such as Sage and Claire spoke extensively about the use of this practice in the families who employed them. Sage has attended boarding school and a private college, her upbringing did not differ substantially from the lifestyle of her employer. She reported that her employers treated her as a family member and this was apparent in their interactions.

Like it’s not like “Sage, you have to do this.” It’s always a choice. I guess that’s the thing, like, “do you want to do this? Like, honestly, if it’s too much just let us know.” It’s not anything that is like demanding. And they always want you to feel included. (Sage – nanny)

Being spoken to in this manner allowed her to feel as if she was an equal to her employer and that she was not treated as an employee.

Clarie reported being “privileged on the same level” as her employer’s children. Although she was raised in a family that was not as financially well off as the one who employed her, there were a number of similarities in their experiences, which enabled them to identify with one another. I asked what it was the family she worked for liked about the similarities between them. She replied:

Because it comes to, we can talk on a different level. It’s not just “do this, do that.” You know they might be like, “we’re going to the Bahamas,” “we’re going to where ever” or I could be like, “do you recommend a restaurant?” And they can ask me the same kinds of things. And it’s taking it to a different level because, it’s not like their almost looking beneath you. Like they see the housekeeper as someone who is there, and Abby [child] doesn’t really respect her,
she’s there to do certain things, she’s given a list of things to do and that’s her job. (Claire – nanny)

Much like Sage, Claire expressed that her employer’s did not direct her on tasks in a “do this” manner. She contrasted her status and experience with that of her employer’s housekeeper. Unlike the status of the housekeeper, she saw her role as transcending a “job” status. Her relatively comparable status placed her on equal footing with her employer.

The theme of choice, which is crucial to cultural capital, was present in nannies’ accounts of their interaction with employers as well as in their descriptions of parent-child interaction. Nannies spoke of their employer’s provision of endless options for the children in their care.

She’ll give them a spread, a spread of like six, seven different things for lunch. You have your sandwich and you have your apple and how about some carrots and some of this chip stuff, and I’m like what are you doing? You know, and they, they get really picky, “no I don’t want that.” And then she’ll make something else and then, “oh no I don’t want that either.” Or then the kid will take like three bites. She doesn’t force them to eat or finish or anything and so much food gets wasted there. (Danielle – nanny)

They have every choice of every thing. They have like 20 different plates, which plate do you want to use for breakfast? Which fork do you want to use for breakfast? What do you want to eat for breakfast? Take a few bites. “I don’t like this, I want this.” Changing of food in the middle of meals. (Kristin – nanny)

Kristin described an additional instance when this occurred and compared it to her upbringing.

And now it’s clothes. She takes the little girl shopping and she wants 5 pairs of neon colored shoes and she gets a couple of pairs. I mean if you wanted something in my house, it was put it on your Christmas list. And if it was like a big to do or a holiday then maybe you got it. But this is like a weekly thing. “Oh Bob, Sleeping Beauty is being released from the vault, we have to get it.” (Kristin – nanny)
Despite not fully agreeing with her employer’s behavior, she justified her employer’s rationale for giving the children endless options.

As much as they have so many choices, they love them so much so it’s like excess of everything. (Kristin – nanny)

Kristin reported having a warm, familial like relationship with her employer but she also noted her employer’s insecurities. She stated at times Debbie “worried” a lot and was “very uncomfortable in her own skin.” Consistent with the status of class peers in this research Kristin reported providing a good deal of advice and reassurance to her employer. In reference to her statements about Debbie’s “worry” I asked:

[LB: Do you feel that’s why she has you?] Yes, oh definitely. She needs constant reassurance and with me there it was like, oh should I get them this? Kris what do you think? And sometimes I would tell her no, you shouldn’t. When they were packing for vacation they used to pack two huge suitcases for each child. Now it’s been two years, I’ve got them down to one suitcase for both. Bob would pack them like 4 outfits, Debbie wants them to have options and comfort and nice and this and that and 5 pairs of shoes. And even for her, I helped her pack and make her suitcase less. (Kristin – nanny)

Although Kristin had long-term career goals outside of nanny work, she recognized the help she provided was of great benefit to Debbie. She did not see her efforts as wasted.

Through the process of concerted cultivation, parents teach middle-class children communication and reasoning skills. Children are taught that they are equals to adults and that they should be treated as such (Lareau 2003). In reference to the mother of the children she cared for Marianna stated:

She’s raised them in a “we can talk about anything” environment. And they’ll say vagina or penis in the store. I’m like you can’t say that. And then they’re like, “why not? Vagina and penis, everybody has one and why can’t we talk about it”? And in some situations they shouldn’t talk about it. Or they’ll just mention the weirdest stuff. And, I’m just like oh you can’t say that or you can’t act like that right now, like a place and a time for everything. (Marianna – nanny)
The children Marianna nannied for had been brought up in an environment where they were taught to question limitations imposed on them very similar to those in Lareau’s (2003) study. Child-rearing in middle-class families included reinforcing the right of children “to air their own thoughts and ideas to adults” (Lareau 2003: 125) as the children Marianna nannied for did.

Along with allowing endless choices and encouraging direct and open speech, extracurricular activities were an additional area where the practice of concerted cultivation was apparent. While these activities were not a major focus of my study, they emerged in my discussions with nannies and employers. Consistent with the middle-class participants in Lareau’s (2003) research, the children of families discussed in my study were involved in a number of activities. Theresa listed her children’s activities:

The girls take ballet and soccer after school. The boys do an art class, gymnastics, (pause) um Dylan wants to start an acting class next year. [LB: Is he going to?] Yeah in January he’s going to start acting class. Um so typical kid stuff. (Theresa – employer)

Theresa stated “Dylan wants,” which indicates that Dylan had expressed an interest, not that Theresa had suggested the type of activity he partake in. Theresa also refereed to her children’s classes as “typical.” She was the second employer I interviewed and I was a bit taken aback by the characterization of acting classes as “typical.” While these activities would hardly be considered the norm for families of all social classes, they were on par with those taken by other children in this study. Acting as well as numerous other classes emerged on the lists nannies and employers gave of children’s activities. Organized sports, tutoring, and various other scheduled activities were at the center of these children’s daily lives.
If it weren’t for having a nanny, most of the children would not have been able to partake in such a large number and variety of activities. Having a nanny for a stay-at-home mother of four like Theresa, “enables the kids to do activities because she drives them places which I, I just couldn’t get them everywhere.” Employing a nanny was a crucial part of their family’s process of concerted cultivation of their children.

Parents who arranged these activities did so because they felt that it was best for their children. When asked if she felt the mother she worked for was a good mother, Stephanie replied:

She was very into scheduling her kids all the time and a lot of times they’d be like, “I’m just tired I want to go home. I don’t want to go to squash, I just had baseball.” I feel like she thought she was a good mother, she did what she thought was good for them. (Stephanie – nanny)

She lists the activities the children were involved in:

Squash, dance, tutor, let’s see, baseball, soccer, hockey, what else is there? Acting class, that’s all I can think of. (Stephanie – nanny)

The activities the children were enrolled in varied by season, which contributed to the array and amount. Beyond participation in organized sports, many of the children took specialized classes.

So we’re really active… And usually Jackie [mother] always has activities. Like I’ll bring them to karate, or I’ll bring them to basketball, or I’ll bring them to a science guy named Rob. So we’re always busy. (Marianna – nanny)

Ensuring their children had access to and participated in an assortment of activities was imperative for the parents and nannies employers’ in my sample. Much like the children discussed by my participants, research has found the lives of middle-class children are very structured and filled with activities (Lareau 2003). This broad base of activities ensured for them that their children would have a “well-rounded” experience.
[LB: Is there anything that they like about your ability to speak French with them and to do these enrichment activities?]

I think they just want their kids to have a really well-rounded experience. And they don’t feel, there are some subjects that aren’t being broached in schools earlier. Like science, hands on biology… And I think they feel that I can bring a little more, a broader base to their kids. Just to help them enjoy the world more and learn more about life. (Karen – nanny)

Seeking a “well-rounded” experience for their children was of utmost importance to the parents and the employers of the nannies in this study. Some nannies did see the children as overextended but most recognized the importance of these activities. Like Stephanie, they saw the parents as doing what was best for their children. While middle-class children have much less unstructured time than working-class children they also acquire crucial “institutional advantages” through these interactions (Lareau 2003). Through these activities and interactions, and I argue, the relationships formed with a nanny of similar socioeconomic status, they are providing cultural advantages to their children. These cultural competencies are taught through interactions with status similars and activities geared at learning, which occurred throughout their daily lives.

The employers in this study did not see learning as one-dimensional. Parents understood that learning came from multiple sources and in a variety of forms. Aside from taking children to scheduled classes, the activities employers reported their nannies partaking in with their children ranged from helping out with homework and reading to doing art projects and learning music. They appreciated their nannies’ abilities to perform tasks with their children, especially those that were not in their range of abilities or interests.

Helping with their homework at the end of the day when the boys get off the bus. And reading with my daughter. (Jennifer – employer)

[LB: Does your nanny perform educational activities with your children?]
It’s very important actually and it’s something that we discussed upon hiring her. She was also a music major so she brings music into activities with the girls. (Riley – employer)

We did this art project for Thanksgiving… my older son wrote the letters of Give Thanks and the girls went out into the yard and got grass and leaves and stuff and we all decorated the letters. You know so they were kind of seeing the letters and seeing nature and we kind of came up with this pretty sign at the end and it was sort of an educational project but kind of couched in fun… I got post-its of letters that she can just tear off and you know play with the girls and go over the letters and the girls like to stick up the post-its and make, “oh what does this spell?” or putting all these consonants together, that kind of thing. (Theresa – employer)

Mark and his wife Erin hold advanced degrees. While their nanny was not at all socioeconomically similar to them, Mark recognized and valued the skill set his nanny possessed. He recognized that her talents differed from those of he and his wife.

I like especially that she’s very different from my wife and I, we’re very analytical and very quantitative. And she’s an artist and she’s from left field and she again adds a different dimension to the family that my wife and I couldn’t give them. (Mark – employer)

Like Mark, Ann valued the activities her nanny performed with her daughters, especially in areas that she lacked interest and ability in.

There’s a lot of trips to the library, a lot of reading, a lot of, she loves doing arts and crafts activities, cooking with them. Just exposing them to things that I’m not, I don’t spend a lot of time cooking so she’s exposing them to things that I, that are not my fortes. (Ann – employer)

Employers appreciated the active lifestyle their children led. They recognized the benefits their children received from exposure to an array of activities.

Television viewing has been linked to social class status. Research has found that children of lower socioeconomic status watch more television than children of higher socioeconomic status (Klepp et al 2007; Chin and Phillips 2004). This finding is consistent with the statements made by employers and nannies in this sample. Many
employers noted that television watching was something that should be kept to a
minimum. Nannies also remarked that this was something their employers put a limit on.

It’s important to me that they’re learning. I want her to be doing things with them
where they are growing and learning intellectually. I would not be happy if they
were sat in front of a TV all day or watched movies or she didn’t engage with
them at all. I think it’s really important because a lot of their learning comes from
play. A lot of their skills for later in life, they’re reasoning, their problem solving
starts when they are really little. So it’s important to me that she engages them in
that sense. (Melyssa – employer)

Consistent with the practice of concerted cultivation, nannies for the most part,
were not instructed on how to perform tasks related to childrearing. Melyssa described
the activities her nanny developed and partook in with her children.

She is very creative with the kids so for example when Emily was in preschool
and they were doing the letter of the week she would do letter of the week stuff in
the house. She would cook something that was the letter of the week and then
they would do an activity. So that was really nice. For example, when it was D
week they made doughnuts and she took them to see drummers, steel drummers at
[college]. (Melyssa – employer)

The transmission of cultural capital involves the passing on a particular set of knowledge
which is privileged. Those who have access to this knowledge and these experiences are
advantaged and those who do not are at a loss (Bourdieu 1984). The nannies in this
research recognized the benefits of their privileged social status. They felt that their
employers embraced these advantages and they discussed the ways in which they
imparted their knowledge and experience to the children they cared for.

*Privileged on the same level: Modeling similarity*

As I stated previously, despite differences in their present economic status,
nannies and employers recognized that the commonalities they shared allowed them to
have comfortable relationships with one another. Status equal nannies noted that they
received better treatment than those who were not. In reference to a large disparity in status Cynthia, an employer, stated:

I think you would sense it in a person and it wouldn’t have been someone that we would have hired if they were looking around going, (gasp) oh look at this. You needed to have the comfort. (Cynthia – employer)

Consistent with the hiring of a governess in the nineteenth century, the vast majority of nannies and employers of in this sample reported being socioeconomically similar to their employer or nanny. The majority (three-quarters of employers and two-thirds of nannies) stated they only differed from one another in terms of present wealth.

Current income is obviously very different. Um, but um I think we both, or all of us rather grew up in middle to upper middle class backgrounds. You know they went to (name of college) and (name of college) is a small liberal arts school, it is a private school, it is expensive. You know so we have those kinds of backgrounds, we did all go to college so we have those backgrounds you know we traveled and we did things as children. So I think we have similar experiences with that.

[LB: Do you think that they like that?] Yeah I think it all just goes back to the relatability. You know as they’re talking about doing things I can pull from my own experiences. (Nina – nanny)

Claire also pointed to differences in financial status but noted the significant commonalities between herself and her employers.

They have more money than my family does but I was very privileged in the fact that I traveled every single summer. I’ve been to Europe four times; I’ve been to Singapore and Malaysia. I went away for spring break; my parents went on vacations with me. I was very privileged. I was always able to do art lessons or soccer or whatever I wanted. The kids have the same kinds of things. They’re very active, they do dance, they do soccer, they do, and you know they’re always going on vacation, they’re always whatever. I’m just privileged on the same level. (Claire – nanny)

Like college attendance, travel not only provided a point of connection between nannies and employers but also implied that the nanny belonged in their social world.

One of the families that I was a nanny for in the interim… they were English and the fact that I had lived in England and you know I could relate. We’d talk about
London; we’d talk about English food. They even said, she’d written in an email, oh they would love to have someone that knows about England around… it’s just one little thing that kind of stuck out in my mind like, oh wow they kind of think I’m different because I lived abroad. (Suzanne – nanny)

[LB: Can you describe the similarities between your economic status and that of the family you work for?]

Upbringing it’s the same. In some ways I think I am probably better off than nannies who weren’t brought up that way…

[LB: Do they know that your upbringing was fairly similar to the way they live?]

Yes. Well I grew up in Europe. My parents traveled, my dad worked for [company] so they have asked about me before they hired me. On my resume it says all the countries I’ve lived in. They know that I’m well cultured.

[LB: Can you tell me what they like about you being well cultured?]

Usually it attracts employers because… they have more in common because they travel. And I can talk to the kids about their trips and be like, “oh well I’ve been there.”

[LB: Can you tell me more about the things you have in common?]

… I guess the parents can relate more to you. (Shanna – nanny)

Claire explained that her employers had also relied on live-in nannies and house keepers in addition to her position as a nanny for them. She expressed that her employers had fired previous nannies. I asked her to elaborate on why this occurred.

[LB: Can you go through the story of why they didn’t work out?]

They didn’t work out because, uh, one of the nannies who was of African American descent basically told the kid she was going to hell. She sang all this gospel stuff and they don’t want that rubbing off on their kids. And being of the same social class you can relate to the kids on, you know, just even from things that you wear, or stores that you shop at, or things that you can afford, well not necessarily that I can afford but that my parents can afford. It’s just, you know you can reach eye to eye; it may sound bad but it’s true. (Claire – nanny)

Claire recognized that her knowledge and cultural awareness of their lifestyle made her appealing to them as a nanny. It also allowed her to interact with them in ways their other employees could not. Claire saw her status as being socioeconomically and racially similar to her employers and as a result did not feel that she was beneath them, but that perhaps other employees were.
Kristin also spoke to the difference in nanny/employer interaction when social statuses were not shared. She referred to the women in the town where she worked having a nanny as a “consolation prize.” I asked her if this was something she saw often with her employer’s friends:

Yes but some of her friends have a nanny/housekeeper or even a nanny and they don’t treat them as nicely. The ones that are not treated as nicely are not college graduates, are not in their twenties and are not Caucasian. (Kristin – nanny)

Stephanie also spoke to her employer, Michelle’s poor treatment of her housekeeper.

The mom did not treat her very well…. She didn’t speak English very well. Sometimes I think she just pretended to so that she could get away with not listening to Michelle. But like anything would go wrong, things would go missing, blame it on [housekeeper]. She’d talk to her really disrespectfully. (Stephanie – nanny)

Due to employers’ preference for social similarity and the resulting lack of racial diversity in my sample, it is difficult for me to speak directly to the difference in treatment based on social status.

**Conclusion**

Cultural capital and resources are passed on intergenerationally (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). Hiring a nanny was part of this process for both the employers and the families that the nannies I interviewed worked for. The families were, for the most part, purchasing a relationship with a particular type of nanny. They were purchasing one-on-one interaction with a status similar. It is important to stress again; most child care relationships are between women of lower socioeconomic status and children of parents of higher socioeconomic status (Nelson 1989). Yet the employers and nannies I studied are mostly socially similar.
The cultural ideal of a modern day *Mary Poppins* was apparent in my discussions with nannies and employers. Employers sought someone who would blend socially into their family life and who could impart cultural knowledge and experiences to their children. For most employers, it was important that their children enjoy spending time with their nanny but they also sought out individuals with whom they were comfortable interacting. My results demonstrate the tremendous, though often hidden, desire of many families to use their nanny to reproduce their social class standing. The outsourcing of parenting work preserves class differences as long as middle and upper class families find socially similar nannies. Given that many families are willing and able to pay enough to attract college educated women who are on their way to another career, they do not have to rely on recent immigrants or uneducated women who do not have as much cultural capital to share with the family.
Chapter 10
CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation was to uncover the motivations of employers in selecting college educated nannies for care. A significant body of research has examined the use of child care by parents, the reasons for selecting their chosen form of care, and the relationships formed between employers and child care providers. This dissertation builds upon this past research and extends the analyses to compare and contrast the use of college educated nannies with those from different social strata and those without a degree. The results of this study support findings from previous research but also add new knowledge in a number of areas. I found that nanny work as an occupation, much like child care as a whole, is not clearly defined. However, I uncovered very different nanny-employer relationships than those found in previous research, largely due to the social status of the nannies in my sample. In this chapter, I will present an overview of the key findings of this dissertation, my contributions to the literature, a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research. I will conclude with a discussion of practical and policy implications.

Overview of findings

This motivation for this dissertation was to uncover why women work as nannies and how the experiences of educated nannies compare to those of nannies without a college degree. I was also interested in uncovering the motivations of employers in hiring educated and uneducated women for care. When I first began my research I encountered individuals who inquired about my study and asked, “Where will you find
college educated women who work as nannies?” Or, “Why would women with college
degrees want to work as a nanny?” These questions were based on two factors. First, the
study was conducted in an area with a large number of nannies and other care workers
who are foreign born. Second, it was based on the assumption that college educated
women should not be working, or would not want to work, as a nanny. Despite such
societal perceptions, I did not have difficulty locating U.S. born, college educated nannies
or employers who hired nannies with such characteristics. Although there is no other
evidence to suggest that this trend is widespread and growing, it appears, based on how
easy it was to find them, that there are many women working as a nanny while in college
or after completing college. Parents from my sample also appreciated employing a
college educated nanny.

Employing a college educated nanny was about more than just the ability of the
nanny to educate children. Possessing a college degree signaled to employers that a
nanny was capable of providing care, but also that she was motivated and shared the
values of her employer. Each of these characteristics made nannies appealing to
employers and allowed them to take on “role model” status for the children for whom
they cared. Perhaps most important to employers, the college degree signaled
“relatability.” Although the majority of nannies in this sample did not aspire to work as a
nanny long-term, and the majority of employers hired a nanny with other career
aspirations, both parties expressed the preference of employers to utilize the help of the
nanny past the predetermined amount of time. When it came time for the nanny to
consider leaving for another occupation or to attend graduate school, nannies and
employers alike expressed the preference of employers that she put off these goals. In an
effort to recruit and hire an educated nanny, employers were willing to pay a higher wage. They were also willing to rework their schedules to accommodate nannies’ college course schedules.

Even though nannies were well educated, the job parameters of nanny work lacked forethought. Moreover, the majority of nannies did not aspire to perform nanny work; rather it was something they “fell into.” Nanny work, as an occupation was not highly valued by nannies or employers, as I uncovered in Chapter 6. Both identified significant downsides to this line of work. For instance, nannies were expected to emotionally invest in their care work and to treat their nannying as “more than just a job.” They were also expected to behave as if they provided care out of love for children rather than out of financial need. Neither nannies nor employers were clear on how to proceed in the work arrangements they formed, and both parties agreed that the personal care nannies provided often complicated “business” relationships.

The lack of forethought on the part of nannies and employers as it related to nanny work as an occupation served as a major limitation to the occupation. Nannies were often frustrated with their employers for not implementing raises as well as vacation and sick time. Employers were also frustrated when their nanny became ill or required time off. This was something, that prior to hiring a nanny, the majority had thought very little about. Because of the type of work being performed and the relationships formed, both parties resisted treating nanny work as “work.” In addition, neither nannies nor employers felt nanny work was a “good” occupation.

In Chapter 7 I explored the nanny-child relationship. I found that this relationship is interesting and complex. The relationship is the key factor that binds nannies to nanny
work, but it also has the potential to cause difficulties in these jobs. The majority of employers accepted their children’s attachment to their nanny. However, some employers did struggle with this, and nannies were acutely aware that the children’s attachment to them could pose issues for their employers. As a result, some mothers sought to minimize the level of attachment their children formed to their nanny.

Some nannies also emphasized the bond between the children they cared for and their employer. Despite efforts at limiting the bond they formed, many nannies noted that they remained in positions as a result of their attachment to the children. Some stayed in positions based on the belief that they were one of the few positive role models in the children’s lives.

As I addressed in Chapter 8, employers and nannies were much more likely to see themselves as having familial relationships when social characteristics were shared. Those who reported having employer/employee relationships; noted greater social distance between themselves and their nanny or employer. Their impersonal interactions led them to classify their relationships as “businesslike.” Nannies’ perceptions of their employer’s treatment of them also affected how they felt about performing additional duties for their employer. Employers were able to take advantage of the familial status of their nanny, as this status translated into nannies willingness to perform additional duties free of charge.

Finally, I examined the role of social reproduction in nanny work in Chapter 9. By the accounts of both nannies and employers, employers sought nannies that were socially similar to them. They appreciated having points of connection to their nanny and enjoyed having their children socialized by a person of equal socioeconomic standing.
The employers in this sample, and the employers of the nannies I interviewed, relied on the nanny to transmit cultural capital to children. This was a central part of the job of nannies and was linked to educational attainment. Both employers and nannies reported that employers appreciated their nanny’s ability to model social similarity to their children.

As I have demonstrated in this research, nanny work is complex and strongly influenced by the social status of the nanny. However, regardless of the social status, the attachment formed to the children kept nannies in positions they would otherwise leave. The work arrangements were also very informal, leaving nannies vulnerable to exploitation. The behaviors of these nannies and employers serve to reinforce and perpetuate social class privilege and gender hierarchies. Social class statuses were maintained through the purchase of the labor of caretakers who were status similars. Gendered expectations governed nannies’ and employers’ expectations of one another. For example, nannies were expected to take on work in line with mothering. Nannies also judged mothers far more harshly than fathers when they did not view them to be “good” parents. I will now discuss the contributions of my study to the literature.

**Contributions to the literature**

Much of the previous research on child care providers and employers centers on relationships between women of differing socio-demographic statuses (Wrigley 1995; Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Uttal 2002; Cheever 2003; Hochschild 2003). These researchers describe a number of experiences, which are reflective of the diverging social statuses of the two parties. This section will elaborate
on these findings. A number of my findings were similar to prior research, but there were also several differences.

There was a strong focus on attachment in prior work (Nelson 1990; Macdonald 1996; 1998; Uttal 2002; Cheever 2003). The child care providers in Nelson’s (1990) research utilized the strategy of “detached attachment” to distance themselves emotionally from the children they cared for. This was done in an effort to appease the mothers who employed them. In this sample, nannies reported “blocking off” emotionally when they did not perceive their position to be long-term. This however, was done in an effort to protect themselves emotionally. Much like Nelson’s (1990) work, the nannies in my research also struggled with how to behave in an affectionate and caring manner their employers’ found acceptable, while still operating within their employers’ comfort zone. The nannies in this sample also reported remaining in nanny jobs that they wished to leave due to their attachment to the children they cared for. This too was the case for the child care providers in Cheever’s (2003) research.

A key difference between previous findings and my research, which is related to attachments, lies in the area of the end of the day transfer of care. The majority of nannies’ and employers’ described the employers’ preference for nannies who did not leave immediately at the end of the day. Both parties agreed nannies should behave in a way that demonstrated they cared about the children and their employers. They felt nannies should treat their work as “more than just a job” and in doing so, nannies were required to spend considerable time visiting with mothers at the end of their work day. This is in direct contrast to the findings of Macdonald (1998) and Uttal (2002) who noted “family time” began at the conclusion of their caregiver’s workday. (See Chapter 6 and 8
for discussion). The distinction between my work and Macdonald’s (1998) and Uttal’s (2002) research lies in the familial status of the majority of the nannies in this research.

The vast majority of previous research on nanny work and child care has demonstrated the confusion employers felt over the role of their caregiver in their family life. While some employers spoke of their child care providers in familial terms, they were much less likely to actually incorporate them into family activities and to allow them to take on a full role as a family member. Thus, this previous research found a gap between employers’ statements and their actions (Macdonald 1996; 1998; Uttal 2002). My findings are most similar to Wrigley’s (1995) research, which uncovered some employer’s willingness to encompass class-peer nannies into their family life. I found, the experiences of nannies’ and employers’ in my research differed substantially from most prior research (Macdonald 1996; 1998; Uttal 2002). Those in my sample were far more likely to speak of their nanny or employer in familial terms and similarly, their actions often reflected those of family members. I argue this is due to the social status of the nannies in this research. The nannies and employers in my sample were far more socially similar than different which serves as an additional point of departure from prior work. The focus of prior research has been on child care providers and employers of different social status (Wrigley 1995; Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Uttal 2002; Cheever 2003; Hochschild 2003). The exception to this includes a segment of Wrigley’s (1995) sample who were college students or employers of college students and Nelson’s (1989) work on mothers and in-home caregivers who were of similar socioeconomic status. However, Wrigley (1995) found small issues could arise for employers who hired a class peer. For example, the class peers in her sample felt free
to voice their concerns to their employer’s in ways those who were not equivalent in social status did not. The child care providers and employers in Nelson’s (1989) sample were socially similar as in mine. However, unlike my sample, those in her research held differing viewpoints, which led to issues in their interactions. The providers held conservative ideologies about the role of women in the home and on motherhood. Many of the providers in her sample had children of their own. As a result of their ideologies, their status as mothers led to their decision perform in-home child care so they could combine work and time with their own children. Conversely, the employers accepted or sought to accept their work outside of the home and the placement of their children in child care, something their child care providers frowned upon. My sample on the other hand, was restricted to nannies who did not have children. Therefore, the relationship dynamic was different from Nelson’s (1989) sample because the employer’s and nannies did not have a significant ideological gap. Additionally, the social class similarity between nannies and providers in my sample shaped their thinking of one another as “family” or “friends.”

As noted above, aside from a small segment of Wrigley’s sample (1995), research has yet to examine the work experience of educated nannies. Similarly, research has yet to uncover employer’s reasoning for selecting a college educated nanny as my research has done. These two components of my sampling strategy shape my research and set it apart substantially from prior research. These two factors also strongly impacted my findings.

Research has found that employers assume their providers share their “values” when they are of similar racial-ethnic background and social class status (Wrigley 1995;
Uttal 2002). My research builds upon and extends this analysis. The employers and employers of the nannies in my sample used educational attainment as an indicator of social similarity. Nannies and employers alike in this sample reported that the nanny was “relatable” to the employer based on her educational attainment. Employer’s assumptions of their nannies values and their abilities were also tied to educational attainment which again, was a marker of social status. The work and personal relationships this research uncovered were profoundly impacted by educational attainment and perceptions of social statuses.

My research also uncovered important findings on nanny work as an occupation, an area that has received little attention from researchers. As noted in Chapter 6, the work experience of in-home child care providers has been examined in detail (Enarson 1990; Tuominen 2003). Nanny work however, remained an unstudied area. This research contributes to the gap in literature on nanny work as an occupation. My findings suggest that this job is one in which neither party put much forethought into, which at times caused substantial issues for both parties. I demonstrate that the value or lack thereof society allots to nanny work and child care as a whole shape’s nannies’ and employers’ understandings of nanny work and their experiences regardless of level of educational attainment. The findings of this dissertation also further our understanding of what constitutes “work” and the implications not viewing nanny work as “work” has on the occupation as a whole.

Finally, this research fills a gap by uncovering the role of nannies in the social reproduction of employers’ social status. Prior research has recognized that child care providers influence children and serve as socializing agents (Johansen et al 1996; Uttal
and Tuominen 1999; Casper and Bianchi 2001). This research however, fills a gap in the literature by uncovering the role of nannies in the social reproduction of employers’ social status. Many of the employers and the employers of the nannies in this sample utilized an educated, socially similar nanny in an effort to socialize their children and transmit cultural capital to them. This research builds upon prior work that notes the pressures mothers face to have their children excel in all areas of life based on the viewpoint of society that children’s outcomes directly reflect mothers’ efforts (Hays 1996; Williams 2000; Garey and Arendell 2001; Jackson and Mannix 2004). Lareau (2003) uncovered the efforts of middle-class parents to ensure their children were exposed to an array of social experiences which would reproduce or elevate their social standing, a process which she termed concerted cultivation. This research fills the gap in the existing literature by extending the analysis of this process and the pressures mothers and fathers face to an examination of the selection and use of a nanny. It brings fathers into the analysis in a way previous research has yet to do (see for exception Wrigley 1995). Despite the number of contributions this research makes to the literature on nannies, caregiving, motherhood, families, work and family, and paid and unpaid work, it is not without limitations. The following section will explore the limitations of this research.

**Limitations and directions for future research**

The limitations of this study are important as they point to possible areas for future research. Although I was able to provide a detailed depiction of the lives and experiences of the individual participants, financial and time constraints required a local sample. As I addressed in Chapter 4, it was not the goal of this dissertation to generalize
my findings to the population of nannies and employers. Rather, the goal was to investigate a subsample of nannies and employers who have not received prior attention and to evaluate how their relationships and work experiences differed from those in previous research. Despite the sample of convenience, this study provides important insight into the occupation of nanny work as well as the nanny-employer relationship. Still, future research is needed to evaluate the generalizability of my findings.

The findings from this study indicate that employers seek out socially similar nannies for care and opt to hire college educated nannies over those without the degree. Since this sample was not representative of the entire population selecting care, I cannot conclude that the majority of parents seeking to employ a nanny would select a college educated caregiver. Qualitative methodology allowed me to obtain in-depth, detailed accounts of the experiences of nannies and employers, but the sample size and strategy posed limitations. The sample for this research was a convenience sample. Despite the limitations of the sample size and methodology, this study provides important insight into nanny-employer relationships and work experiences. I also uncovered important information about nanny work as an occupation. Future research should address nanny work from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. This would provide us with information on the number of people who work as nannies, why they select it as a career or a temporary occupation, and would allow for further insight into the occupation and experiences of nannies.

This was a relatively homogeneous sample of nannies and employers. Most of my participants were: white, middle and upper-class, heterosexual, and highly educated. This limits the generalizability of my findings, but again provides important insight into
nanny work. Ninety-two percent of the nannies and eighty-five percent of the employers in this sample were white. While I did not ask salary information of the employers in this sample, they held occupations our society would label as “professional” and had attained upper-level degrees. Their occupations include, physician, professor, attorney, teacher, and other professional occupations.

My focus was also on nannies who were born in the United States, who lived-out of their employer’s residence and who did not have children. Although such characteristics were of utmost importance to my sampling strategy in that they led to social similarity between nannies and employers, these characteristics are quite different from those of the general population of nannies. Quantitative research would be useful in uncovering the percentage of nannies who are either in college or have graduated college. In the geographic areas where I conducted this research, educated women were readily available for nanny work. However, future research should address the rate at which college educated women are working as nannies in other areas.

My findings on the experience of status similars shed key insight into issues that arise when social statuses are not shared. Although I uncovered examples of employer’s exploitation of nannies, this abuse likely occurred at a much lower level than if the nannies were live-in, lacked higher education, and did not share the socioeconomic status of their employer. Such characteristics represent the vast majority of nannies, and prior research has indicated that those who occupy such statuses are most vulnerable to employer abuse (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Romero 2001; Rollins 1987).

Twenty-five out of the twenty-seven employers I interviewed identified as heterosexual and two as homosexual. All but two were in committed relationships. One
was divorced and the other was separated. Only two were single parents. As a result, I cannot speak to nanny-employer relationship similarities or differences based on sexual preference or relationship status. Additionally, each of the nannies was employed by two-parent heterosexual families. We are in need of research that explores parental experiences in hiring nannies based on relationship status. This would be especially helpful in the area of attachment and employing and managing a nanny. In these instances, the employer would not have a partner to act as a buffer.

The educational status of the nannies make this study unlike prior work. Twenty-eight percent of the nannies in this sample were enrolled in college for their Bachelors or Masters degree while they were working as a nanny. And fifty-two percent had a minimum of a Bachelors degree. Many of the women who had graduated from college indicated that nannying was something that they had done while in college and they continued after graduation. Quantitative research should examine the prevalence of nanny-work among college educated women.

Another limitation of this study lies in my interviewing strategy. I only interviewed nannies and employers individually. I did not interview employer and employee pairs due to my perception that this may sway participant’s accounts. The result of this is that it is impossible to accurately compare what nannies and employers say. On the other hand, I feel nannies’ and employers’ accounts were more truthful given that they knew I was not going to judge their statements in relation to the statements given by the other party. Future research should interview employer/employee pairs as prior research has done, but with a focus on status similar pairs. This would provide
further insight into the experiences of nannies and employers and allow us to perform a comparative analysis amongst pairs.

The sample for this study included only female nannies and employers who hired women for care. In my search for participants I did come across a few advertisements posted by college bound men. These young men advertised their athletics backgrounds and marketed themselves as mentors for children. These men commanded upwards of twenty dollars per hour for their work, which they advertised was for the duration of the summer. This was a rate substantially higher than any of the employers reported paying. The vast majority of nannies, even those with college degrees and years of experience, did not receive wages that high. On first thought, it would be unlikely that a person who was heading off to college and looking to earn some money for the summer would be able to earn such a high rate of pay for performing child care. However, research shows that when men enter female dominated professions, they not only rise through the ranks faster but they also earn higher wages than women in these professions (Williams 1992). Conversely, research also shows that while men can become directors and supervisors in day care centers, they are limited in roles they can take on with children in terms of direct physical contact. One area where this can be seen is in the “napping” routine where day care workers often lay with children. The roles of men in these settings were similar to the roles fathers were permitted to take on in families – peripheral yet supervisory (Murray 1996). Future research should explore the roles men are allowed to take on in nanny work. It should also examine if in fact, men are able to command higher wages, as well as the roles they take on in the family, and the demands employers place upon them.
While the timing of my study was key, it also yielded data that is likely very different than data that would have been uncovered a decade or so prior. I began my interviews at the end of 2007 and concluded them at the start of 2009. At that time, the economy in the United States was in decline. Many of the women in this sample graduated from college during this time period, a period, which has been cited as having the worst economic prospects in a generation (Cody and Spencer 2010). Several could not find gainful employment in the area of their degree or had become unemployed. Others turned to nannying as a placeholder, while they figured out what to do with their lives. It is interesting that this was a motivation that made employers nervous. Several employers noted that they preferred to employ a nanny with a passion for children, rather than one who was “figuring out her life.” While seeking a career in child care was not exactly an indicator to them that their nanny was motivated, it signaled to them that she was dedicated and would do a “good job” because she would be relying on them as a reference for future work. Those who were filling the time between college and their next career move did not appeal to some of the employers in this sample, while others, after a previous negative experience with a career nanny, sought out an educated nanny.

Another limitation has to do with my reliance on posted advertisements on Craigslist. Craigslist was central to my ability to draw a sample, but it was also restricting. I posted under the “child care” section. My Craigslist advertisements yielded the most responses of all my methods. However, the location of the advertisements resulted in a number of contacts that were looking for work or searching for a nanny. As a result, I was often forced to wait weeks or months until these individuals secured employment or found a nanny. And I had to hope that they were still interested in doing
an interview after a significant amount of time had passed. I also found that using the
words, “dissertation” and “graduate student” in my subject heading increased the number
of people who reached out to me. Many of the employers sympathized with my efforts
given their graduate education, and several nannies were familiar with the difficulties in
recruitment due to their undergraduate training. This also shaped my sample of
employers as highly educated individuals.

In posting on Craigslist I only received responses from mothers. Interviewing
fathers who employed a nanny was important to my study. Future research should
address the role of fathers in nanny work. About one half of the fathers I interviewed
interacted with their nanny. This also likely contributed to their willingness to participate
in an interview. The majority of mothers noted that their male partners were not involved
in the supervision of the nanny and had limited interaction with her. In the end, I was
only able to really draw out the rationale for this from one father, Gregg. Additional
research in this area would allow us to determine whether or not Gregg’s experience is
the exception or the norm.

I also relied heavily on word of mouth and took every opportunity imaginable to
recruit for my study. I posted flyers in private children’s clothing boutiques, libraries,
fitness centers, coffee shops and children’s activity centers. More often than not, the
location I selected did not permit the posting of my advertisement and as a result, I ended
up being more limited than I initially thought in the locations I was able to advertise.
Finally, I took out an advertisement in a parent’s magazine. This was quite costly and
only resulted in one interview. I also reached out to nanny placement agencies. Some of
these agencies placed me in contact with nannies but they were not willing to put me in
touch with employers. If funds permit, future research should advertise more extensively and target magazines and newspapers.

The nature of my sample and the location of my interviews also posed a challenge to my interviews. Many of the nannies cancelled at the last minute due to a change in their employer’s schedule. This line of work is much more limiting than most other forms, such that when working with children, the caregiver cannot just leave when their shift is over. In addition, they were solely responsible for the children and had to wait for the parents to return, no matter how late they were in getting home. I also conducted the majority of my interviews with employers inside their homes. In some instances their significant other was home to occupy their children, but in the majority, we had constant interruptions from the children. This posed a challenge, as I had to get parents back on track in discussions. While interviewing in a neutral location would have been ideal, these individuals would have had to find child care for this time and my willingness to come to their home allowed them to participate in an interview.

While the hiring of socially similar, college educated caregivers is certainly not the norm, my study indicates that this is something for which many employers in my study look. If they did not initially seek out a college educated caregiver, after interviewing and reviewing their options, this was often the person with whom they felt most “comfortable”. This research has found the factors that shape employers’ hiring decisions include, educational attainment and perceptions of social status. Future research should further examine whether or not additional factors influence employers’ selection of a nanny.
My study yielded interesting information on the impact of the social location of the nanny on relationship formations between nannies and employers. Additional research should look specifically at the ways in which relationships are affected when individuals are of different social locations. This research provides important information on the use of child care for social reproduction. Unlike Uttal’s (2002) finding that employers often seek out caregivers of a different social status so that they can teach their children another language, the employers I interviewed saw those who occupy other social statuses as having less cultural capital to offer their children. For the parents in this sample, modeling similarity for their children was of much greater importance.

The age structure of the sample also does not reflect the age structure of the occupation of nannies. All of the nannies I interviewed were younger than their employer. Two wife/husband employer pairs employed nannies who were roughly the same age or older than them. And one pair had previously employed a woman who was older than them. The majority of employers sought someone who was younger and cited the “energy” level of this person as their reason. Others also expressed that they might have difficulty delegating tasks to someone who was the same age as them because they would be more of a “peer.”

Finally, the characteristics of this sample have implications for the field of nanny work as a whole. Historically, child care or nanny work, was an area where women with little or no formal education could find gainful employment. After reviewing the pool of applicants, a number of employers expressed that they had chosen women with degrees over those women without degrees. Only one employer, Mark, expressed that he would
not hire someone with a college degree and would be put off by someone who had a
degree but wanted to go into nanny work. Future research should address the impact of
educated women moving into this line of work on the occupation of nanny work as a
whole. Future research should also explore what happens to hopeful nannies without
degrees. Are they left without jobs? Does this drive down the wage they earn?

A number of educated nannies in this study reported feeling as if their employers
made demands of them that they would never ask of someone who was “on the same
footing.” In fact, a mismatch existed between the expressions of employers of educated
nannies, that their nanny was more “capable” and “knowledgeable” based on her
education level, and the perceptions of educated nannies’ in regards to their employers’
treatment of them. Nannies felt they did gain prestige in the eyes of their employers
when their social status was similar to the employers. The elevation of social status
served to heighten the connection formed between the two groups.

Based on the findings of this study and findings of previous research, it appears
that exploitation is built into the structure of this work. Even the nannies of equivalent
social status in this sample experienced requests that were beyond the scope of their work
from their employers. Yet the way they felt about these demands was different from the
accounts of those in prior research, given their elevated status and their position as
“family.” Additional research must be conducted to examine just how widespread this
occurrence is.

The experiences of nannies and employers documented here provide insight into
the relationships formed by employers and employees, as well as into nanny work as an
occupation. The patterns of interaction I uncovered suggest that nanny work reinforces
gendered divisions of labor and the reproduction of social status. Gendered divisions of labor were reinforced when women entered into caregiving roles and mothers took over the supervision of care. Social statuses were perpetuated when employers sought out social similars for care. With greater opportunities available for women today in terms of work and occupations, it is interesting to see that some nannies in this sample sought out work that was lower in prestige than they were qualified for. Others, were forced into nanny work due to the economy and their inability to find other forms of work. It is also important for future scholars to uncover why it is that educated women both seek out and “fall into” this line of work. While it was common for those in this sample to perform nanny work while in school, a number had graduated and were “forced” into this line of work as a result of lack of available alternatives. Thus, nanny work served as a blessing and a curse. It was something that provided pay and employment but was not an area of work nannies were able to place on their resume. I turn now to a discussion of practical and policy implications.

Practical and policy implications

The findings from this study suggest that nanny work is an occupation that lacks clear-cut guidelines. Based on the results of this research, many nannies were conflicted over the status of their work. Nannies struggled with a multitude of work related questions and issues. They were unsure of definitions of appropriate job descriptions, appropriate work and personal relationships, how to obtain a raise, whether or not they were entitled to sick or vacation time and how to go about securing these benefits, and countless other work related items. Similarly, employers were also not certain of how to
proceed in these relationships, which were intensely personal but centered around business transactions.

Silvia, an employer, stated in Chapter 8, “there’s not a whole lot of information, at least not publicly available information about what reasonable expectations are.” Nannies also made statements similar to Silvia’s and expressed uncertainty over the way they should be treated as employees. In reference to paid time off, Mary, a nanny stated, “typically I think, if you’re working as a regular employee they might compensate you.” (See Chapter 6 for further discussion). Given that many nannies did not see themselves as “regular employees,” they did not think to ask for paid time off or other benefits which they would likely be allotted in formal employment. The employers also did not see the nannies as “regular employees” and therefore, most did not initially consider the parameters of the job as they related to compensation in the form of raises, sick time, and holiday pay. There is no way to tell for certain whether or not this omission was intentional on the part of employers. However, given their surprise when I asked them about paid vacation and sick time, or their discussions of the issues they had as a result of their failure to implement these work related benefits, I am confident that the omission was not intentional on the part of the employers with whom I spoke.

The majority of my interviewees did not report searching for information on acceptable job parameters. Most relied on word of mouth, if they sought any information at all. However, some relied on nanny websites to determine pay and reasonable job expectations. Craigslist was the most often referenced website. The information they gained through this site came from reading nannies’ and employers’ complaints and also from the advertisements posted for both parties in search of work or an employee.
Searching on Craigslist led some nannies to understand that they could seek higher pay in future jobs. Employer’s learned what it was acceptable to request of a nanny from these sites. Tina, an employer, stated:

I read a ton of nanny complaint type websites and a lot of them complained about cleaning. They hated being like maids instead of nannies where people would make them do laundry and clean the floor and scrub countertops and all that kind of stuff. (Tina – employer)

As a result, she did not ask her nanny to perform any household cleaning duties. The findings from this research suggest that nannies and employers are in need of clear-cut guidelines surrounding nanny work. Numerous issues were referenced in my discussions, which arose from the uncertainty of the job. Both parties wanted clarity on items such as pay, raises, sick and vacation time, overtime compensation, how to terminate an employee or give notice, and numerous other areas. This research indicates that nanny work as an occupation would benefit greatly from accessible information as well as formal policies and protections for both parties.

Throughout the course of my interviews, which spanned the time from November 2007 through February 2009, a movement on the part of the group, Domestic Workers United, located in New York City and founded in 2000, was occurring to seek rights for nannies and domestic workers. This group sought to advertise their efforts and recruit widely in New York City (Gonnerman 2010). The vast majority of my interviews took place within a reasonable distance or even within this area. However, not one person I spoke with referenced the group or the movement and some nannies made references to believing they did not have any legal rights. Since the conclusion of my interviews, Domestic Workers United has successfully lobbied for and passed the “Domestic
Workers Bill of Rights.” This bill, signed on August 31, 2010 made New York state the first to pass this form of legislation (Cuza 2010; Gonnerman 2010).

This bill has the potential to alter the nanny-employer relationship. As this research has argued, discussions surrounding pay are very awkward for both parties. Rather than nannies having to say they would like overtime pay or paid time off, nannies will now be able to say they are required to receive these benefits (Gonnerman 2010). It remains to be seen how this legislation will affect nanny work. It is also uncertain whether or not other states will adopt such policies. This research contributes to our understanding of the nanny-employer relationship and work experience. The findings from this sample confirm the need for efforts on the part of groups such as Domestic Workers United. Formalization of nanny work would lead to greater protections for nannies and leave employers with far fewer uncertainties. These changes would lead to better and safer work arrangements for both nannies and employers.

Conclusion

The need for paid, non-parental child care has risen over the past few decades. The majority of individuals seeking child care are of much higher soci-economic status than the providers of care. In addition, those who perform child care usually lack formal education. This dissertation focused on five specific areas: the use of educated nannies for care, the job of the nanny, the relationships formed between nannies and the children for whom they cared, the use of the nanny to reproduce family economic status, and the relationships formed between nannies and employers.

The findings of this dissertation are useful to the field of sociology in the areas of gender, families, work and occupations, and social stratification. They are also useful to
individuals who work in child care, as well as for parents who rely on child care. This research has uncovered that while education is taken as an indicator of competence, it also signifies social similarity, which is perhaps of greater importance to employers than education itself. The findings of this dissertation have large implications for the field of nanny work. Although the majority of nannies’ in this sample were college educated and of higher socioeconomic standing than those in previous studies, these indicators of social class and education did not heighten the prestige of their labor in the eyes of nannies’ or employers’. Thus, despite the entrance of educated women into this area, the occupation as a whole remains incredibly devalued due to the type of labor being performed and the performance of this labor by women. Moreover, the hiring of status equals for this line of work perpetuates the social standing of the individuals seeking care. The hiring of women also serves to reinforce the ideology that caring labor is in fact, “women’s work.” Finally, the majority of nannies in my sample held prior nanny jobs, and the majority of employers hired other nannies for care. Having greater experience did not automatically transfer into preparedness, and my findings suggest that the job of nanny work lacks structure. Those who sought to enforce policies related to paid or unpaid leave and raises were a minority. This led to tremendous frustration on the part of nannies and employers and shaped their opinion of nanny work as an undesirable long-term occupation.
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Table 1
Sample Demographics

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<th>Current age (nanny)</th>
<th>Current age (employer)</th>
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<td>Under 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 – 25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 30</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>30 – 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>36 – 40</td>
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<tr>
<td>41 – 45</td>
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<tr>
<th>Race (nanny)</th>
<th>Race (employer)</th>
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<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>More than one</td>
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<table>
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<th>Number of nannies employed (total)*</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<th>Hopes to be a career nanny</th>
<th>Hires a career nanny*</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational attainment (nanny)</th>
<th>Educational attainment (of their nanny)**</th>
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<td>BA or higher</td>
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<tr>
<td>In college for BA</td>
<td>In college for BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in college</td>
<td>BA or higher</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Employers educational attainment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<td>JD</td>
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<td>PhD</td>
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<td>MD</td>
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</table>

*Pairs were counted in an effort to avoid counting a response twice
** Two wife/husband employer pairs hired one nanny who was attending college and one who had a Bachelor’s degree and thus, were not counted in this total
Appendix A
Interview guide for interviews with nannies

Background questions
First we are going to start with some quick background questions to help me gather a little information about you.

What is your age?
With what racial/ethnic group do you identify?
Please list for me the schools you have attended and the degrees received if any?
(If college educated) what was your major?
How long have you been employed by the family you currently work for?
Are you salaried or paid hourly?
Do you have benefits?
What are the occupations of the parents who employ you?
   Do both parents work full time?

How they came into the job
Now we are going to begin the open-ended questions. Please feel free to go into as much detail as you would like when answering the questions. It would also help me if you could provide me with examples of the ideas that you are discussing.

Can you tell me the story of how you became a nanny?
   How did you meet the family you work for?
   How did you and your employer work out your current arrangement?

Questions about their arrangement
Do you see your current arrangement as a long-term arrangement, why or why not?
   Is this important to you why/not?
   Is there anything that might cause you to leave the arrangement or have you ever considered leaving? If so, could you tell me about this?
(If they did consider leaving but stayed ask why)

(If this has not been covered) Describe for me the reasons for which you have chosen to remain in your current situation.

Please walk me through a typical day. It would be helpful to me if you could describe your routine in detail.

What activities and tasks did you develop on your own?
What activities and tasks do you engage in with the children that your employer asks of you?
How do you feel about each of these tasks?
Has your employer ever provided you with a written description of job related tasks?

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How did you come to understand what was expected of you?

Could you describe for me the similarities between your economic status and that of the family you work for?  
The differences?

**Relationship with children**  
Tell me about your relationship with the children you care for.  
Tell me how you feel about the children you care for.  
(If not already covered ask) Do you get emotionally involved with the children you care for?  
Do you ever worry about showing too much physical affection towards the children?  
Why/not?

What do you want to offer the children you care for?  
What have their parents conveyed to you that they want you to offer them?

In what ways is the environment you create for the children similar to the one the parents of the children provide?  
In what ways is it different?

**Relationship with parents**  
What do you like most about your arrangement/relationship with your employer?  
Least?

How would you define your relationship with your employer?

(If not already covered) Do you have a personal relationship with the parents you work for?  
How did this relationship develop and why?  Why not?  
Did you feel a need for it to develop?

Do you ever feel as if you are part of the family?  If so, could you give me an ex.?  
Do you ever feel as if you are not part of the family?  If so, could you give me an ex.?

Please describe to me your obligations to the family you work for.  
Are there differences in the ways in which you and your employer are obligated to one another?  Could you give me an example?

Have you ever made or felt you were making sacrifices for your employer?  If so, could you give me an ex.?  
How did you feel about this?  
Has there ever been a time when you felt your employer ever made sacrifices for you?
Has there ever been a time where you did not do something you wanted or put aside something that you wanted to follow for your employer or the children in your care?

Has either parent ever asked you for advice – either personal or about the children? And if so, could you describe the situation to me.

How often does this occur?

Has there ever been a time when you felt the need to stress the bond between the parents and the children you care for? Can you give me an example?

How much of your own ideas and wants influence your caregiving practices as opposed to what your employers ask of you?

(If not already covered) What parts of your daily routine and interaction with the children you care for are determined by your employers?

Has there ever been a time in which the parents did not tell you about an issue at home that impacts the children or you? Could you give me an example?

(Ex. The kid was sick and they had you come anyway, divorce, a particularly bad day)

Probes: How did you feel about this? How did you handle this?

**Educational aspects of care**

What aspects of the day or activities do you take part in that you would consider to be educational? Please describe them.

What led you to engage in these activities?

Has your employer ever conveyed to you that they would like you to participate in activities that are educational in nature with the children? If so, how did they do this and what types of activities did they ask you to take part in?

How important is it to you that you participate in educational activities with the children?

Would you consider it your job to be more of an emotional provider, an educational provider, or both? And why?

How much of each is expected by parents?

Is your educational status ever emphasized by your employer? If so, in what ways? (Ask for examples).

**Gendered parental interaction**

(If hetero-married family) Who hired you the mother or father?

Please describe the interaction you have with each parent.

Please describe the role of each parent in your work.

Probe: Does one parent play a greater role in certain aspects of your work? What are these aspects?
Who makes the child rearing decisions in the family you work for?  
Who communicates them to you and how do they go about this?

How much time each day do you spend interacting with the children while at least one parent is present?  
Describe this time.

Could you describe for me a situation in which both you and one parent are present with the children and the interaction that occurs?  
What is your role at this time?  (How did they decide on this)  
What is the role of the parent at this time?  
Does this vary based upon which parent is present?  
Has this time ever caused confusion for you?  
The children?  
The parent?

Do you resume your normal role at this time or do you step back and let the parent take over?  How did you come to this practice?

To your knowledge, how does each of your employers spend their time when you are caring for the children?  Probe this – are they at work or at leisure activities.

**Questions about when they are not required to be at work**

Do you ever watch the children beyond your required hours?  If yes, please describe for me this arrangement and how it came about.  
Do you ever watch the children over night?  
Do the parents call?

How often do the parents call when you are working your regular schedule?  
Do they ever stop home either announced or unannounced?  If so, please describe this.

Do you ever vacation with the family?  If so, please describe your roles on these vacations.  
Do you like this time, why/not?

Do you ever think about the children you care for when you’re not at work?  If so can you tell me about this?  
Do you ever worry about the children when you’re not with them?  If yes why?

Does the family you work for ever call you when you are not at work?  If so, what are the calls about?  
How often do they do this?

Do you ever stay after the parents are home and past the time you are required to be there and if so could you tell me about this time?  
(Are they talking to the parents or still watching the children)
The occupation
Now I would like to talk with you more about your work.

In what ways is your job similar or different from other occupations?
What are the pros and cons of this?
Would you characterize your work as a professional job? Why/not?
Is there anything about your work you would characterize as business-like or professional? Why/not?

People who work in office settings or in other jobs tend to have co-workers to turn to for support…
   Do you have anyone you can talk to for support about your job?
   Can they relate to the issues you are discussing?

Do you ever participate in activities with other nannies or parents while you are with the children in your care? Describe this.
Do you have any friends who are nannies?

Do you feel your employers view your work as a professional job – why/not? Give examples.

Can you tell me about a time when you felt you were treated as a friend or family member by the family you work for?
Can you tell me about a time when you felt you were treated as an employee or worker by the family?

Do you view your job as a nanny as a career? Why/not?
Why do you stay in this profession?

Does the family you work for see your situation as long-term?
Do they convey this to their children?

Has there ever been a time when you felt you needed to draw a line between your work and your personal life? If so, please describe.

Do you feel you are treated with respect by your employers and the children you care for?
Has there ever been a time when you have felt you were not treated with respect?

Have your job responsibilities changed in any way from the time you started working for this family and if yes, how so?
Who initiated these changes?
(i.e. adding hours, jobs such as cooking and cleaning, educational activities, walking the dog, new births, etc…)
Since you started working for this family has there been any aspect of your work that you wished to change? If so please explain.
Did you try to change it? Please tell me about this.
(Ex. Pay for sick days, or call you if the children are sick)
How did you go about this and what was the outcome?

Can you tell me of a time or a way you have adapted to the needs of the family?
Has there been a time or a way they have adapted to your needs?

Wrap up
Is there anything you would like to tell me that we have not discussed?

Possible questions to ask
Earlier you said you were salaried/paid hourly – have you ever had to remind your employer to pay you?
If yes, how did you feel about this?

Have you ever not been paid the amount you were supposed to be paid? If yes, can you tell me how this happened?

Has your pay changed since you began working? If yes, how did this change come about?
If no, how do you feel about this?

Explore pros/cons of being completely removed from or very close to the employer in terms of social class.
Driving
Interview guide for interviews with employers

Background questions
First we are going to start with some quick background questions to help me gather a little information about you.

What is your age?
With what racial/ethnic group do you identify?
If you are employed, what is your occupation?
   If employed – full or part time?
Significant other’s occupation?
What schools have you and your partner attended and what degrees did you receive?
How many nannies have you employed?
Prior to your current nanny, how long did each one work for you?
How long has your current nanny been working for you?
Is your nanny salaried or hourly?
Does she have benefits?

How they selected a nanny
Now we are going to begin the open-ended questions. Please feel free to go into as much detail as you would like when answering the questions. It would also help me if you could provide me with examples of the ideas that you are discussing.

Can you tell me the story of how you decided to hire a nanny?
   Possible question: Why did you select this form of care over day-care or family day-care?

Were you in any form of non-parental care as a child? Was your spouse? If so, please tell me about this.

If they have hired nannies previously: How have you selected the nannies who have worked for you? (services, ads, friends, etc…)
   What criteria, if any did you use in selecting the nannies you have hired?
   Why did you select the nanny you did?

What criteria did you use in selecting your current nanny?

How did you meet your nanny?

Questions about their arrangement
How did you and your nanny work out your work arrangement?
   Why did you select this arrangement?

Please describe for me your ideal arrangement.
How closely does this match up with your current arrangement?
Do you see your current arrangement with your nanny as a long-term arrangement, why or why not?
   Is this important to you why/not?
   Is there anything that might cause you to end or change this arrangement? If so, could you tell me about this?

What are the advantages for you and your children of having your provider come to your home?
Disadvantages?

Have you ever provided your nanny with a written description of the duties you require?
Do you provide any sort of training for your nanny?
How do you instruct your nanny on the tasks you would like performed?
   Do you instruct them in the educational aspects of the job?

Do you look for your nanny to have any sort of training or have a background in a certain area?

How much of your own personal values and wants influence your nannies caregiving practices?
How did you convey this to your nanny?

What parts of your nanny’s routine and interactions are determined by you?

Do you seek any sort of time commitment from your nannies?
   If yes, do you take any steps to ensure this?

What do you like most about your arrangement/relationship with your nanny?
Is there anything that might lead you to end this arrangement or consider ending it?

(If this has not been covered) Describe for me the reasons for which you have chosen to remain in your current situation.

If they work part-time or stay at home: Please walk me through a typical day. It would be helpful to me if you could describe your routine in detail.

How do you spend your time when your nanny is caring for your children?
Probe this: work or leisure.

**Relationship with the nanny**
What do you like most about your arrangement/relationship with your nanny?
Least?

How would you define your relationship with your nanny?
Do you have a personal relationship with your nanny?
How did this relationship develop and why? Why not?
Did you feel a need for it to develop?

In what ways do you see your nanny as a friend or a family member?
In what ways do you see your nanny as an employee?

Please describe your nanny’s obligations to you and your family.
Please describe your obligations to your nanny.
Are there differences in the ways in which you and your nanny are obligated to one another?

Have you ever made or felt you were making sacrifices for your nanny? If so, please tell me about this.
How did you feel about this?
Has your nanny ever made sacrifices for you? If so, please tell me about this.

Has there ever been a time or times when you had to alter your schedule or life for your nanny?
How did you feel about this?
Has your nanny ever done so for you? If yes, please describe this.

Have you ever felt the need to stress the boundary between your family and your nanny?
If so, please tell me about this time.

Could you describe for me the similarities between your economic status and that of your nanny?
The differences?
How important are these similarities and differences to you?
Could you describe for me the benefits and disadvantages of this?

How does your relationship and your families relationship impact the care that your nanny provides for your children?

**Questions on educational aspects of care**
How important is it to you that your nanny engages in educational aspects of care with your child?

What aspects of the day or activities that your nanny takes part in with your children would you consider to be educational in nature? Please describe these activities.

Have you ever conveyed to your nanny that you would like her to participate in activities that are educational in nature with the children? If so, how did you go about this and what was the outcome?
Would you consider it your nannies job to be more of an emotional provider, an educational provider, or both, and why? How much of each do you expect?

Do you ever emphasize your nanny’s educational status or discuss it with your children?

Do you define your nanny as more of an educational caregiver, an emotional caregiver, or both? How much of each is expected by you?

**Relationship with children**

How would you describe your nanny’s relationship with your children?

How do you feel about this?

Is your nanny emotionally involved with your children? How do you feel about this?

Are your children emotionally involved with your nanny? How do you feel about this?

Does your nanny ever show too much affection or attachment?

What does your nanny offer to your children?

Is what she provides similar or different to what you would like her to offer?

Is the environment your nanny provides for your children similar or different to the one you provide? In what ways?

Is this important to you?

To what extent are you and your nanny in agreement about child care practices? Is this important to you? How do you handle this?

**Interaction with nanny**

Which parent hired your nanny?

Which parent has more contact and interaction with her?

Please describe the nature of each parent’s interaction with the nanny?

Probe: Does one parent play a greater role in certain aspects of work? What aspects?

Why makes the child rearing decisions in your family?

Who communicates them to your nanny and how do you go about this?

How much time do you spend interacting with your children while your nanny is present? Please describe this time.

Could you describe for me a situation in which both you and your nanny are present with the children and the interaction that occurs?

What is your role at this time? How did you decide on this?

What is your nanny’s role at this time? How did you decide on this?
Has this time ever caused confusion for you?
Has this time ever caused confusion for the children?
Has this time ever caused confusion for your nanny?

Probe: Do you take on the role of the primary caretaker or do you step back and let the nanny handle this time? How did you come to this practice?

Who spends more time interacting with your nanny, you or your spouse?

On average how much time would you say you spend per day interacting with your nanny? Tell me about this time.

Does your nanny ever stay once you return home? If so, please tell me about this time.

Are you and your spouse in agreement about what you expect from your nanny? Describe this.

What does your nanny do for you that sustains your family life?
Does your nanny do anything for you that you could not survive without?

**Occupation**

Do you see working as a nanny as a long-term career for your nanny?
Is this important to you – why/not?
Is it important to you that your children see the nanny in this way – why/not?

Have your nanny’s responsibilities changed in any way from the time she started working for you until now? If yes, how so?
Who initiated these changes? (i.e. adding hours, cooking, cleaning, educational activities, walking the dog, new births?)
Has there been an aspect of her work that you wished to change? If so, please explain.
Did you try to change it?

Can you tell me of a time or a way you have adapted to the needs of your nanny?
Has there been a time or a way she has adapted to your needs?

Have you ever given your nanny a raise? Can you describe for me how you came to the decision to do so?

Has your nanny ever asked you for financial support? If so, please tell me about this.

Has there ever been a time when your nanny relied on you for emotional support? If so, please tell me about this.
Have you ever relied on your nanny for emotional support? Please explain.

What services does your nanny provide for you and your family that you would not receive if she did not perform them?
What activities/tasks does your nanny engage in with your child/ren that you ask of her?  
How do you feel about each of these tasks?  
What activities does your nanny perform that she developed on her own?

Do you have friends who hire nannies?  
If so, does your nanny have contact with these nannies or with others who work as nannies?  
Is this important to you, why/not?

Questions about when the nanny is not required to be at work  
Do you have family in the area that you could use to look after your children?  
How often do you utilize them and in what capacity?  
If they don’t rely on them – why not?

Do you ever ask your nanny to watch your children beyond your set hours?  Describe these situations.

Does she ever watch the children over night?  
Do you call?

How often do you call when your nanny is working her regular schedule?  
Do you ever stop home unannounced?  If so, please describe this.

Does your nanny ever vacation with the family?  If so, please describe her roles on these vacations.  
Do you like this time, why/not?

Do you ever call your nanny when she is not at work?  If so, what are these calls about and how often do you talk?  
Does she ever call you?

Does your nanny ever stay after you return home for the day?  If so, could you tell me about this time?  (i.e. talking to parents or watching kids etc…)

Do your children ever ask about her or talk about her when she is not at work?  Tell me about this…  
How do you feel about this?

Wrap up  
Is there anything you would like to tell me that we have not discussed?

Possible questions to ask:  
Explore the pros/cons of being completely removed from or very close to the nanny in terms of social class and education  
Driving
Appendix B
Modern Day Mary Poppins: Uncovering the Work of Nannies and the Expectations of Employers
Informed Consent Form

I understand that by signing this consent form, I am agreeing to participate in a research study entitled, “Modern Day Mary Poppins: Uncovering the Work of Nannies and the Expectations of Employers.” This study will be conducted by Laura Bunyan, a doctoral student at the University at Albany, State University of New York. I understand that this is a research study to investigate the experiences of those who work as a nanny as well as those who employ a nanny.

As a participant in the study, I agree to participate in a qualitative interview that will last approximately ninety minutes, conducted by Laura Bunyan. During this interview, I will be asked questions regarding why I am working in this position or employing someone for this position, the types of tasks performed, the arrangement that exists between nanny and employer, and the relationships that are formed. I will be asked permission to allow this interview to be audio-taped.

After reading this form I understand that:
• All personal information obtained for the purpose of this study will be kept confidential.
• My name will not be included in any reports or publications resulting from this study.
• The researcher does not anticipate any risks other than minimal discomfort from answering questions.
• My participation or refusal to participate in this study will in no way adversely affect me.
• My participation is voluntary and I may refuse to answer questions or may withdraw from this study at any time.
• There are no physical risks in participating in this study.
• I will be given $20 to compensate me for my time.
• I will be given a copy of this consent form.

It is my right as a participant in this study to contact the Investigator. I may contact Laura Bunyan at (518) 669-8077. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant that have not been answered by the investigator or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University at Albany’s Office of Regulatory Research Compliance at (800) 365-9139 or by email at orrc@uamail.albany.edu

I, ______________________, agree/do not agree (circle one) to participate in this study. I have read and understand the information provided regarding this study.

I, ______________________, give permission/do not give permission (circle one) for the qualitative interview to be audio-taped for the purpose of transcribing.

Name __________________________________________ Signature________________________
Date __________________________
Appendix C

Nannies or Parents who hire a Nanny NEEDED
$20 Participants Needed for Interview Study $20

I am a graduate student working on a dissertation on nannies and employers. I am seeking participants for an interview study. If you:

(1) Work as a live-out nanny or employ a live-out nanny
(2) Are over the age of 18
(3) Are U.S. born or the nanny you employ is U.S. born
Then you qualify!

The interview will take 1 to 1.5 hours and will be done in a location of your choice. You will be given $20 to compensate for your time.
If you have any questions or would like to participate please contact Laura at: LB5523@albany.edu or 518-669-8077 (cell)
Attention: Parents who have a Nanny  
Participants Needed for Interview Study $20!!!

I am a graduate student working on my PhD in Sociology. I am seeking participants for an interview study. If you employ a **Live-out** Nanny/Babysitter who is:

(1) **Over 18 years of age**  
(2) **Does not have children of her own**  
(3) **Is U.S. born**

Then you qualify!  
The interview will be done in a location of your choice and will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.  
You will be given $20 to compensate for your time.  
If you have any questions or would like to participate please contact Laura at:  
**LB5523@albany.edu** or 518-669-8077 cell.
Seeking Parents to Discuss Child Care Challenges!  
$20 Participants Needed for Interview Study $20

I am a graduate student working on a dissertation on nannies and employers. I am seeking participants for an interview study. If you employ a **live-out** nanny/babysitter who:

1. Is over the age of 18  
2. Does not have children of their own  
3. Was born in the U.S.  

Then you qualify!

I will travel to meet you at a location of your choice. The will last approximately 1 hour. You will be given **$20** to compensate for your time.  
If you have any questions or would like to participate please contact Laura at:  
[LB5523@albany.edu](mailto:LB5523@albany.edu) or 518-669-8077.
Appendix D
Magazine Advertisement

Grad Student Seeks Parents that Employ a Nanny

I am a student working on my PhD in Sociology. I am seeking parents who hire a live-out nanny/babysitter for an interview. I am interested in hearing about your child care experience! I will travel to meet you at a location of your choice. The interview will be between 1 and 1.5 hours and will be anonymous and confidential. Participants will receive $20.

The study requirements are: The live-out nanny must be over 18 U.S. born and they cannot have children of their own. (I will only need to interview the parent, not the nanny)

Laura:
LB5523@albany.edu
(518)669-8077 (cell)