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Maryam Moody  
'Good Enough' Nanny:  
Socioeconomic Disparity & Power  
in the Nanny-Employer Dyad

## ABSTRACT

Because nannies are typically of lower socioeconomic status than their employers, unique power dynamics develop in the relationships between parents and secondary caregivers. This empirical study explored childcare providers' experiences of these dynamics by examining how similarity and difference in the nanny-employer dyad impacted the employer's management style. *Sample.* The quantitative, exploratory method utilized an anonymous online questionnaire to reach a broad sample of current and former nannies (N=167). *Methods.* Demographic data on participants' and employers' socioeconomic identities were collected and compared with management style indicators. *Findings.* The results suggested that similarity and difference in the dyad, both relational and socioeconomic, impact nannies' experiences of their employers' management strategies. Participants who perceived themselves as similar to their employers experienced more autonomy and less surveillance at work, received better compensation, and were more likely to work for very wealthy employers. Nannies who experienced more surveillance and less autonomy tended to be those who spent more time with children over a long employment term, and those whose education level was similar to that of their employers. Winnicott's (1953) theory of object usage and Benjamin's (1988) theory of intersubjective recognition were applied to the findings to explore the implications for internal object relationships in the nanny-employer dyad. Relevance to clinical social work was also discussed.

**'GOOD ENOUGH' NANNY:  
SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITY & POWER  
IN THE NANNY-EMPLOYER DYAD**

A project based upon independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2015

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

This study will explore the impact of socioeconomic disparity on the dynamics of the relationship between childcare providers and the parents who employ them. The purpose of this research is to determine how the similarity or dissimilarity in social status within the parent-nanny dyad affects the dynamics of this relationship. This study will focus exclusively on childcare providers' perceptions and experiences. Empirical data on nannies' race, class status, education, age, and other socioeconomic identities will be collected. In addition, caregivers will be surveyed about similarities and differences between themselves and their employers, and about their experience of the power dynamics in their work. Data collected will be interpreted deductively by applying the theoretical perspectives of Winnicott (1953, 1957, 1969, 1971) and Benjamin (1988, 1990, 1993, 1995, 2004, 2009).

#### **Need for the Proposed Study**

In social work literature, the attachment bonds between children and caregivers have been examined primarily in the context of research on mother-infant dyads (Bowlby, 1960, 1982, 1986; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Tracy, Lamb, & Salter Ainsworth, 1976). The experiences of working mothers who employ nannies have, likewise, been documented (Davis & Hyams, 2006). However, the experiences of the nannies themselves are underrepresented in the clinical literature. The bulk of research on secondary caregivers focuses on infant-adult interactions (Howes & Matheson, 1992), while the nanny's view of the employment relationship has been



neglected. In particular, the impact of socioeconomic disparity on the nanny-employer dyad has been inadequately explored. Since commodified (paid) childcare is a widespread phenomenon, the power dynamics inherent in domestic work are relevant to social work research (Scheftel, 2012, and Hegeman, 2015). This study will address these gaps in the literature in order to enhance both clinical insight and advocacy efforts on behalf of childcare providers.

A distinctive feature of the relationships between nannies and parent-employers is that they are nearly always cross-class dyads. After all, the employer can afford to pay for childcare, while the caregiver is supporting herself by providing it (Cox, 2011). This socioeconomic inequality may be compounded by disparity in race or ethnicity with profound implications for the nanny-employer relationship. Immigration status, citizenship, and language differences can further intensify the power differential (Romero, 2013). Although the nanny-employer relationship is an intimate one, Nare's (2012) research with migrant domestic workers in Italy indicates that proximity does not necessarily breed tolerance. She found that even daily contact between migrant workers and employers "does not alleviate prejudices in societies that offer little possibility of social advancement" (Nare, 2012, 363). Similarly, Abrantes (2014), Macdonald and Merrill (2009) have argued that the increasing segmentation of the domestic labor market by race, ethnicity, sex, and class is shaped by the feminization and devaluation of caring work. This suggests that the power dynamics of the nanny-employer relationship have consequences for social justice as well as intrapsychic significance.

### **Relevance to Clinical Social Work**

Botticelli (2006) has argued that the practice of psychotherapy is increasingly becoming a form of "caring work" (Botticelli, 2006). As in the therapeutic dyad, relationships between nannies and employers merit further analysis as an arena in which internalized object

relationships may be enacted in the context of commodified caring work. Robbins and Robbins-Milne (1998) have applied principles of mother-infant relating to therapist-client relationships, and Newby, Fischer, and Reinke (1993) have compared the archetypal nanny, Mary Poppins, to a family systems therapist. The parallels these authors draw between the role of the therapist and that of the nanny suggest that research on nannies' experiences may inform clinical social work practice. In particular, a deeper understanding of the object relations in the nanny-employer relationship would be applicable to theoretical perspectives on other dyads.

The intended audience of this research comprises multiple groups. First, caregivers who seek a context for their experiences of the nanny-employer relationship may benefit from the findings. Second, parents who wish to understand the variables influencing their expectations and attitudes toward nannies may appreciate the results of this research. Advocates for domestic workers may use this study to better analyze the factors underlying exploitation and subjugation of childcare providers. Finally, psychotherapists may find applications to clinical work in the study of the conditions in which subject-subject and subject-object relationships develop.

### **Key Terms**

Commodified caregiving consists of an agreement between two adults in which money is exchanged for the provision of childcare services. This study will focus on the experiences of nannies, which are defined as adults over age 18 of any gender who were paid to care for at least one child for a minimum of one week within the last ten years. Professional caregivers are sometimes called nannies or babysitters; this study will use "caregiver" and "nanny" to refer to non-relatives hired to care for children in their parents' homes. Since 95% of these caregivers are female (Greenhouse, 2012) this study will use the pronoun "she" to refer to them.

For the purposes of this study, the word "employer" is operationalized to indicate the

parent or other legal guardian with whom the hired caregiver mainly interacts and whom the child treats as an attachment figure. The caregiving relationship is understood to be a formal situation in which a non-parent adult takes temporary responsibility for a child. A child is defined as a person age five or younger who is related biologically and/or legally to the employer. The study will be restricted to children age five and under because a relatively new member of the family system disrupts patterns of relating in such a way that they become more visible, allowing them to be studied more easily.

To summarize, the research question this study will address is: how does a discrepancy in socioeconomic status affect the relationship between nannies and their employers? Is there a connection between socioeconomic disparity and the nanny's experience of her employer's management style? How do similarity and dissimilarity affect the development of trust and recognition in the relationship? In other words, what factors make a nanny 'good enough' to be treated as an equal subject by her employer? These questions will be explored using empirical data collected from participants regarding their own socioeconomic status, their employer's socioeconomic status, and the dynamics of the relationship between the parent and the caregiver. Winnicott's theory of object usage and Benjamin's thinking on the development of intersubjectivity will be applied to interpret the results.

## **Hypothesis**

In seeking to extend Winnicott's concept of "good-enough mother" to nannies, this study asks: 'what makes a nanny good enough?' To answer this, it investigates the impact of socioeconomic disparity on the employer's management style. Macdonald (2010) outlines three styles used by employers to manage caregivers: micromanaging the nanny ("puppeteer"), treating the nanny as an expert ("paranormal"), and collaborating with the nanny as an equal

(“partnership”). This study examines, from the caregiver’s perspective, how socioeconomic and relational factors affect employers’ tendency to relate to nannies using one of these strategies.

I hypothesize that socioeconomic disparity in the nanny-employer dyad will be associated with the management style the employer uses. The management style can be thought to reveal the degree to which the nanny is trusted and treated as an equal subject. Given this, I will examine the implications of the findings for internal object relationships in the nanny-employer dyad. Winnicott's concepts of the transitional object (Winnicott, 1953) and object usage (Winnicott, 1971) will be considered to determine whether the dynamics of these management strategies constitute the use of an object. In addition, Benjamin’s theory of the development of recognition in intersubjective relationships will be applied to the management styles.

I conclude that when a parent hires a nanny, developmental tensions are reactivated and power struggles arise. To resolve these, some employers may turn to puppeteer or paranormal management strategies in order to collapse the dyad into a hierarchy. They use caregivers as objects, preserving their own sense of subjectivity through distance or control. By contrast, other employers may need to view the nanny as a capable and equal subject in order to come to trust her. In these dyads, I argue that power struggles are a necessary precursor to mutual recognition because destruction of the nanny/object allows for an intersubjective relationship to develop.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

Nannies and their employers have been depicted in both professional literature and in popular culture, yet the nanny's lived experience of this relationship is rarely studied in its own right. A significant exception is the research of Macdonald (1998, 2009, 2010). In *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering*, Macdonald presented the results of a decade of field work with immigrant and American-born nannies, European au pairs, and the parents who employ them. Through in-depth interviews with 30 parents and 50 childcare providers, Macdonald explored the ways in which race, class, age, education, and immigration status impact the nanny-employer relationship. Her research reveals the "deep-seated differences in class-based beliefs about parenting" (Macdonald, 2010, 4) that arise when a lower-class woman is paid to care for a wealthy family's children. In particular, Macdonald's work demonstrated how the dynamics of the nanny-employer relationship are rooted in socioeconomic disparity, in the societal devaluation of caregiving work, and in employers' insecurity about their own identities as parents.

#### **Shadows, Surrogates, Intensive & Competitive Mothering**

Macdonald theorized that upper-class parents feel caught between the demands of their careers and their desire to live up to the ideology of what Hays (1996) termed "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996). In her landmark book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, Hays defined intensive mothering as the "child centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing,

labor intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, 69) ideology in which a class-privileged mother is expected to relinquish her own subjectivity to meet her child’s needs. Drawing on Hays, Macdonald suggested that upper-class parents attempt to achieve the “ideal of the ever-present, continually attentive, at-home mother” (Macdonald, 2009, 414) by hiring nannies to act as a ‘shadow mothers’ in their stead. This compromise allows them to fulfill their commitment to individualized childcare while also pursuing demanding careers.

In exploring the ways in which parent-employers relate to childcare providers, Macdonald identified three distinct “management strategies” or styles: “puppeteer,” “paranormal,” and “partnership.” These strategies are characterized by the degree of trust between nanny and employer, the direction of communication in the relationship, the nanny’s level of autonomy, and whether employers make decisions unilaterally or jointly. While “puppeteer” parents micromanage their employees, “paranormal” parents cede much of their autonomy to the nanny. Macdonald’s research showed that only those parent-employers who approach childcare as a “partnership” with a shared balance of power are able to sustain a mutually satisfactory relationship. She found that the process of forming an equal partnership between nanny and employer “resulted in less anxious mothers and more satisfied workers” (Macdonald, 2010, 170). This study builds on Macdonald’s research by surveying nannies in order to determine what role socioeconomic disparity plays in the nanny’s experience of her employer’s management strategy.

In order to understand the impact of socioeconomic factors on the nanny-employer dyad, it is useful to explore how race and class intersect with commodified caring work. Taylor (2011) complicated Hays’ idea of “intensive mothering” by showing how the phenomenon of home-based, child-centered parenting is shaped by race and class. Examining the practice of gestational

surrogacy, Taylor pointed out that women considered by mainstream American society to be 'unfit' mothers (such as immigrants, women of color, and low-income women) are nevertheless hired by class-privileged parents to act as “genetic or gestational surrogates” (Taylor, 2011, 905). Taylor saw this contradiction replicated in childcare work and argued that it is a form of exploitation for class-privileged parents to pay socially marginalized women to perform intensive mothering labor in their stead.

Cox (2011) extended Taylor’s line of thinking by interpreting the practice of individualized childcare as a way of reproducing social class. She coined the term “competitive mothering” (Cox, 2011, 1) to describe how class-privileged parents attempt to reproduce their economic capital by hiring low-paid nannies to provide the type of childcare they believe will “assure their children’s place in society” (Romero, 2002, 836). Cox pointed out that the employers’ use of marginalized women’s labor for the purpose of “competitive mothering” is accomplished “at the cost of the mothering projects (and children) of the women they employ” (Cox, 2011, 2). This echoes Collins (1999), who brought attention to the African-American, Latina, and Asian-American nannies who have throughout American history worked long hours apart from their families “to ensure their children’s physical survival” (Collins, 1999, 203).

While Taylor and Cox demonstrated that the dynamics of nanny-employer relationships are inseparable from the socioeconomic factors that shape them, neither author explored the inherent paradox in parents’ selection of “surrogates” who are so socioeconomically dissimilar. Indeed, the very first decision parent-employers make in regard to nannies—the hiring decision—can indicate a preference for similarity or difference in the “shadow mother.” Busch’s (2013) mixed-methods study examined domestic worker hiring practices in London through a combination of interviews with employers and analysis of nanny job advertisements. Just as Cox

predicted, Busch found that wealthy parents chose individualized nanny care as part of an overall strategy to gain a competitive advantage for their children. Specifically, a majority of employers sought “a form of care they felt was an adequate replacement for their own presence” (Busch, 2013, 549). In some cases, this meant that Busch’s participants sought foreign-born nannies with similar levels of education to their own because they found it “easier to relate to people of a higher social class” (Busch, 2013, 548). Yet Busch also found that many upper-class parents preferred to hire immigrant nannies because the difference in nationality established the caregiver as low enough in status “to do the 'dirty work' of the home” (Busch, 2013, 542).

Similar dynamics are in place in North America. Writing about the phenomenon of migrant workers in the US domestic service sector, Romero (2002) highlighted the contradiction between xenophobic anti-immigrant policies in the United States and the widespread hiring of immigrant women as domestic workers. Like Taylor and Cox, she argued that upper-class employers exploit immigrants’ reproductive labor to reproduce their own economic privilege. Romero hypothesized that this incongruous bond is sustained by cultural myths that venerate the ‘nurturing’ provided by immigrants and women of color while simultaneously devaluing them as subjects. She concluded that hiring a nanny allows middle- and upper-class parents to enhance their own social status while simultaneously shifting the less desirable domestic tasks and the “burden of sexism” (Romero, 2002, 833) onto low-paid female workers. Romero created the term “third-world assisted reproduction” (Romero, 2002, 813) to describe the phenomenon of immigrant nannies caring for wealthy children.

### **Domestic Mistreatment**

The history of domestic labor in the United States is inseparable from the history of American immigration. In the US, it is estimated that at least 201,000 professional childcare



providers work in their employers' homes, many of whom are immigrants (Shierholz, 2013, 4). Writing about the experiences of Caribbean-born nannies in New York City, Brown (2011) documented how immigrant women experience both economic 'push' factors from their home countries as well as familial and economic 'pull' factors drawing them to the United States. Brown's work demonstrates how immigrant women's low-wage domestic labor—cooking, cleaning, and childcare—enables middle-class parents to work at higher-paid jobs outside the home (Brown, 2011). Likewise, Romero has argued that the practice of “purchasing the caretaking and domestic labor of immigrant women commodifies reproductive labor and reflects, reinforces, and intensifies social inequalities” (Romero, 2002, 835).

Yet while hiring immigrants to perform housekeeping and childrearing tasks allows class-privileged women to maintain demanding careers, this practice does little to enhance the overall class status of female domestic laborers. As Wrigley (1999) argued, the practice of individualized childcare leaves both gender inequalities and capitalist economic structures unchallenged. Hiring “shadow mothers” to stay home and care for children makes it possible for employers to continue their “time-honored ways of structuring their employees' days and careers” (Wrigley, 1999, 173) to suit corporate interests. Instead of providing subsidized childcare, employers shift the economic burden onto parents and nannies.

Nannies, housekeepers, maids, and other domestic workers fall into one of the lowest income brackets in the United States, earning a maximum of \$21,000 annually (Bui, 2014). Among household workers, childcare providers generally earn the most: according to the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) survey, nannies' median hourly wage of \$11 in 2011 was \$1 greater than that of housecleaners or caregivers for elderly/disabled adults (Burnham & Theodore, 2012, 18). However, this figure varies based on race and job type. A

significant portion of nannies live in their employers' homes, and this work is compensated at far less than minimum wage (an average of \$6.76 per hour, according to the NDWA survey). In addition, nannies of different racial/ethnic backgrounds earn different median incomes. For example, Latina nannies earn, on average, only \$8.57 per hour for providing childcare, while white nannies earn an average of \$12.55 to do the same work (Burnham & Theodore, 2012, 18). Across all racial groups, a 2013 survey of nannies found more than half of respondents had not received a raise in the previous year (International Nanny Association, 2013).

These disparities reflect broader trends in pay rates for all domestic workers of color as compared with white workers. In general, white household employees earn \$1-2 more per hour than their Latina, Black, Asian, and "Other" counterparts, with an average hourly wage of \$12.13 (Burnham & Theodore, 2012, 18). White workers' pay remains consistent across all household occupations, but domestic workers of color earn varying amounts depending on whether they are cleaning a home, caring for a child, or providing care for an older adult. For example, Black nannies made \$12.71 an hour for childcare work, but only \$10.89 an hour for housecleaning (Burnham & Theodore, 2012, 18). The opposite was true for Latina nannies, who earned \$8.57 per hour for childcare (the lowest wage of any nanny group) but were paid an average of \$10 an hour for housecleaning (Burnham & Theodore, 2012, 18). The lowest paid domestic workers of all were Asian- or Other-identified caregivers for disabled and older adults; these employees earned only \$8.33 an hour (Burnham & Theodore, 2012, 18).

### **Exclusion & Exploitation**

In the United States, economic exploitation of domestic workers is perpetuated by policies that differentiate them from other types of employees, making them a legally unprotected class. Nannies and other domestic laborers (such as housecleaners and eldercare

providers) have historically been omitted from federal workplace protections (Panagiotopoulos, 2013). Childcare workers were excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, which protects the rights of employees to organize and bargain collectively, and from the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which sets minimum health and safety standards. The small size of their 'work site' (the household) means that neither the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, nor the Americans with Disabilities Act, nor the Age Discrimination in Employment Act applies to them. Perhaps most ironically, childcare workers are excluded from the Family and Medical Leave Act because the law only applies to employers with 50 or more employees.

Advocacy groups argue that immigration status and racial/ethnic identity "lie at the core of many of these exclusions" (National Domestic Workers Alliance, n.d., 5), which have effectively legalized workplace discrimination against domestic employees. The few legal protections nannies share with other workers include: Social Security (if they pay into it), and Unemployment Insurance, but this too is contingent on wages paid and length of employment. The Fair Labor Standards Act, which sets federal minimum wage and overtime standards, was amended in 1974 to include domestic workers. However, most legal and political protections for domestic employees' have been rendered toothless by globalization, which has dramatically "undercut workers' ability to organize" (National Domestic Workers Alliance, n.d., 5). For example, overtime law still does not cover live-in employees. And minimum wage requirements do not apply to childcare workers who provide "babysitting services" on a "casual" basis.

Andrew and Newman (2012) analyzed the cultural rhetoric underlying domestic workers' exclusion from workplace protections. They noted that while "gendered and classed discourses around caring labour" (Andrew & Newman, 2012, 242) portray caregiving as low skilled labor, the work actually requires "a high degree of responsibility and emotional engagement" (Andrew

& Newman, 2012, 243). Echoing Romero and Hays, the authors posited that exploitation of childcare workers is made possible by cultural emphasis on the “satisfaction” supposedly inherent in caring labor. They argued that this fulfillment is in fact “*constructed* by maternalist discourses within our culture that require women to devote themselves selflessly to the raising of children” (Andrew & Newman, 2012, 243, emphasis original).

Panagiotopoulos (2013) extended Andrew and Newman’s analysis, examining what she calls “the conditions of domination and captivity” (Panagiotopoulos, 2013, 19) in domestic labor. Citing the intersecting socioeconomic and political pressures that keep childcare workers in the service sector, she showed how isolation, vulnerability, and loss of autonomy collude to place domestic employees at heightened risk of abuse by employers. Panagiotopoulos compared the treatment of nannies with that of sex workers and domestic violence survivors, for whom isolation and proximity can also lead to a blurring of boundaries. She chronicled the ways in which exploitation is perpetuated by employers’ day-to-day management of domestic workers, who face not only physical abuse but also “covert and subtle forms of discrimination” (Panagiotopoulos, 2013, 18). For example, Panagiotopoulos pointed out how lack of privacy and control over one’s own body can “break down a worker’s autonomy in the most intrusive ways” (Panagiotopoulos, 2013, 19). Restricted bathroom breaks and meal times, interrupted sleep, limited food choices and constantly shifting expectations from employers can be daily “experiences of degradation” (Panagiotopoulos, 2013, 19) for household employees.

Panagiotopoulos noted that foreign-born domestic workers are more likely to be hired for roles without defined job descriptions, such as live-in positions, which offer less autonomy and authority over children. She argued that immigrant childcare providers are especially vulnerable to the effects of isolation, close supervision, low or inconsistent wages, and lack of workplace

protection. Immigrant nannies also have more to lose in cases of sexual assault, physical abuse, pressure to perform excessive workloads, and exploitation based on resident status (for example, threats of deportation).

In her research on London parent-employers, many of who preferred to hire migrant workers as nannies, Busch (2013) contended that such “relationships of subordination” should be viewed as more deliberate than natural (i.e., not simply attributable to the effects of immigration policy and global inequality). Abrantes (2014) came to a similar conclusion after interviewing managers of domestic service providers in Lisbon, Portugal. According to Abrantes, participants’ justification of their discriminatory management practices revealed “corporate discourses of legitimation in which gender is entwined with other elements of differentiation such as ethnicity, age or education” (Abrantes 2014, 2). Abrantes concluded that: “the nexus of patriarchal and colonial power relations could not be better illustrated” (Abrantes, 2014, 2) than in the hierarchical relationships between domestic employees and their wealthy employers. This study will examine nannies’ perceptions of that relationship in order to determine how socioeconomic disparity (or similarity) impacts their experiences.

### **Domestic Discomfort: The Cross-Class Employment Relationship**

The authors presented so far have illuminated the economic and political context for the power dynamics that unfold in domestic employment relationships. But what are caregivers’ experiences of these daily dynamics? Nannies’ perspectives remain elusive, in part because narrative portrayals of the nanny-employer relationship are generally written from the employer’s point of view. One of the best examples is a collection of essays entitled *Searching for Mary Poppins*, written by mother-employers about their bonds’ with their children’s nannies (Davis & Hyams, 2006). In the collection, contributors write about hiring and firing nannies,

about how they navigate differing cultural beliefs about parenting, and about their efforts to maintain a self-identity as ‘the mother’ while also employing a nanny. The essays in the book showcase the variety of ways parents cope with the “emotional loss of control over childcare” (Davis & Hyams, 2006, xxii) that occurs in commodified caregiving.

The employers’ perspectives reveal relationships with nannies that are, as contributor Susan Cheever put it, “as volatile, passionate, and complicated as many marriages” (Cheever, 2006, 78). Nearly every contributor touched upon the contradictory themes in the parent-nanny dynamic: dependence and autonomy, identity and insecurity, difference and similarity. The nanny was often portrayed as kind, loving, and selfless in her devotion to the family, yet also as furtive and unpredictable. She appeared to be both the most significant person in the employer’s life—“more important than my friends, more supportive than my family, and more relied on than my husband”—and yet simultaneously a household employee with “no real power” (Cheever, 2006, 78) who could be fired at any moment.

These essays provide insight into the complex internal dynamics underlying parent-employers’ management strategies. The feeling of vulnerability as a new parent, combined with the recognition that they can never know the nanny as intimately as she knows them, seems for many employers to be a source of tension. For example, Cheever recounted her realization that while the nanny “washed my lingerie, and she heard me fight with my husband . . . I had barely met her children or her family and had never been to her home” (Cheever, 2006, 76). Other authors articulated fears that the caregiver might leave: to work for another employer, to move to another country, or to have children of her own.

In order to reconcile these contradictions and “soften the reality of the situation,” Cheever argued that employers “create a kind of mythology of friendship” (Cheever, 2006, 78). Indeed,

several contributors seemed to take pains to highlight the similarities between themselves and the nannies they employed. One described the nanny as “a mother, like me” (Budhos, 2006, 98); another asserted that “if you squinted, I could pass for her older sister” (Schappell, 2006, 136). However, still other employers wrote about having chosen certain nannies because of the *dissimilarity* between them. For example, one employer stated a preference for a Spanish-speaking nanny because she “wouldn’t make me nervous with personal chitchat” (Adams, 2006, 53). Another professed her desire to hire a young caregiver so that she “wouldn’t have to worry about having another adult, someone who might already be a mother or grandmother in my house, watching me, possibly judging not only my housekeeping, but my pathetic mothering skills” (Schappell, 2006, 130).

Gottesfeld’s (2012) exploratory qualitative research supports many of these themes with empirical data. In interviews with 11 mother-employers, Gottesfeld identified three significant intrapsychic factors which affected how participants felt about the nannies they employed. These were: the nature of their relationships with their own mothers, their identities as professionals and as mothers, and the ways they interpreted the bond between child and nanny. Like the essays in Davis and Hyams’ book, Gottesfeld’s research revealed the prevalence of guilt, anxiety, and tension between dependence and autonomy in parents’ relationships with paid caregivers. This research study explores nannies’ experiences of these intrapsychic tensions in order to determine how difference and similarity impact the nanny-employer relationship.

### **Difference & Similarity in the Nanny-Employer Dyad**

In addition to relational factors such as age and whether or not the nanny is a parent, socioeconomic disparities also appear to impact employers’ hiring practices and management styles. For example, in “The Best Laid Plans,” white employer Elisa Schappell described herself

as “a liberal without a racist bone in my body” and recalled feeling hesitant to ask the Caribbean-born nanny “to do things because she wasn’t just like me” (Schappell, 2006, 127, 136). Instead, Schappell decided to hire “an Irish girl” in order to “avoid the guilt and the uncomfortable feelings I was dreading” (Schappell, 2006, 130). But she found herself unable to supervise this young white nanny “simply because she *was* like me” (Schappell, 2006, 136).

Contributors to Davis and Hyams’ collection also wrestled with economic factors. Hiring a nanny was often depicted a sign of rising class status; many described the decision as one they could barely afford, but nevertheless managed to pull off because they were unwilling to forgo their career goals. Some acknowledged that the women they hired did not have that choice. For example, an employer of South Asian (Indian) descent described the “sharp undercurrent of guilt” (Budhos, 2006, 94) she felt toward her half-Indian nanny, and wrote that “the real difference between us” was “how much I felt I had control over my own destiny” (Budhos, 2006, 97). Schappell, likewise, stated that “the idea of employing someone who in her home country worked as a nurse or a scientist or a school principal but here couldn’t get a green card, was awful” and recounted “feeling that what she was doing, the job she had, was a bum deal” (Schappell, 2006, 127, 132-3). For these contributors, economic disparity was a source of deep discomfort in relationships with nannies. As Cheever put it: “it’s our similarities rather than our differences that make the situation so painful” (Cheever, 2006, 79).

However, researchers Gorbán and Tizziani (2014) argued that this sense of discomfort need not be an inherent aspect of domestic labor. Gorbán and Tizziani interviewed 12 employers and 20 housekeepers and nannies in Buenos Aires, Argentina. They concluded that the difficult working conditions, low salaries, and lack of legal protection reported by domestic workers reflected the profound disparities between their social and economic position and that of their



employers. Gorbán and Tizziani proposed that this disparity was reinforced by the way in which employers reinforced class-based oppression in their everyday interactions with domestic employees. The authors contended that daily enactment of hierarchy, more than the underlying inequality, was the source of the discomfort in the relationship.

Drawing on Romero, Gorbán and Tizziani proposed that employers attempt to restrict domestic employees' autonomy out of a desire to "handle the threat" posed by the presence of a lower-class (and often darker-skinned) worker within the intimacy of the home. They suggested that by exercising management strategies that demonstrate control over employees, employers "construct the social inferiority" with which they treat domestic workers. These findings parallel those of Anderson and Hughes (2010), who interviewed 20 self-employed Canadian domestic workers about their job satisfaction, pay, and working conditions. Anderson and Hughes found that while nannies worked long hours for little pay, their job satisfaction correlated less to wages and more to the level of autonomy they experienced as household employees.

Wrigley (1999) proposed that these dynamics of domination and subordination in the nanny-employer dyad arise from the historical structure of household employment relationships, in which "servants offer employers loyalty and deference" (Wrigley, 1999, 170) in exchange for economic security. She suggested that in modern-day domestic labor, both parties still expect the relationship to "transcend [mainstream] employment obligations" (Wrigley, 1999, 162). For example, employers require nannies to be deeply emotionally invested in children and expect them to be available outside of normal work hours, while nannies often assume employers will lend them money or help them obtain citizenship.

Wrigley's research, which interviews with 155 parents and childcare providers in two major US metropolitan areas, revealed how socioeconomic disparity plays out in the power

dynamics of the nanny-employer dyad. Because caregiving values are profoundly shaped by education, occupation, class status, and culture, Wrigley found that parents and nannies from different socioeconomic backgrounds often hold “different definitions of quality childcare” (Wrigley, 1999, 162). She noted that class-privileged parents “implicitly see the caregiver as substituting for the mother” (Wrigley 1999, 172), and thus expect the nanny to “accept the basic child-rearing framework they create” (Wrigley, 1999, 164). This is an example of what Macdonald termed the “paranormal” management style, in which communication is minimal and employers assume that the nanny will naturally enact the family’s childrearing values. While the majority of the caregivers Wrigley surveyed reported they frequently disagreed with employers’ childrearing practices, they rarely expressed these beliefs in order to preserve their jobs.

Wrigley’s research also revealed that prior to hiring a nanny, upper-class parents often hold “egalitarian ideals” about cross-class employment relationships. These ideals then come into conflict with the reality of the socioeconomic inequality in the nanny-employer dyad. This contradiction can exacerbate the discomfort felt by parent-employers when they realize that their egalitarian values are at odds with their class-informed definitions of ‘quality’ childcare. For example, if employers become aware that a nanny’s style differs from their own, they may interpret this as a threat to their authority and act to limit the caregiver’s autonomy. Because upper-class parent-employers often expect a high degree of control over their children’s care, this may lead them to micromanage the nanny (an example of the “puppeteer” management style).

### **Domestic Distrust: Surveillance of Nannies**

The tension between economic and relational subservience and parents’ egalitarian ideals is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenon of nanny surveillance (e.g., ‘nanny cams’). Nelson (2009) examined 1,043 postings from the online forum “I Saw Your Nanny” regarding

professional caregivers' behavior in 201 incidents across 21 states. The incidents fell into several broad categories, ranging from nannies heard gossiping about their employers to those who were seen physically harming children. The majority of the complaints involved the nanny's perceived failure to be sufficiently polite: "the most common single criticism was that the nanny was gruff, impatient, or mean to the child" (Nelson, 2009, 117). The second most frequent type of posting involved a caregiver who ignored her charge; for example, briefly leaving a child unattended, keeping a child in a stroller, not interacting sufficiently with the child, or talking on the phone.

Nelson noted that two-thirds of the nannies described in these postings were identified by a racial or ethnic marker, such as language spoken, phenotypic appearance, skin tone, or hair color. She also found that observers posting on "I Saw Your Nanny" frequently invoked class-based identifiers such as the nanny's "deportment, build, makeup (or its absence), and style of dress" (Nelson, 2009, 114), or the type of store where she shopped. Nelson drew associations between race- and class-based markers assigned to nannies and the types of behaviors for which they were cited. For example, she found that "nannies are more often perceived as being gruff if they are black, engaging in too much sociability if they are Hispanic, and having character flaws if they are white" (Nelson, 2009, 129). Nelson posited that observers critique nanny behaviors based on their own caregiving values, which have been shaped by race and class biases. She concluded that in cases of surveillance, "the offense is in the eye of the beholder" and that "a nanny's race/ethnicity determines which form of problematic behavior the observer perceives" (Nelson, 2009, 120-121).

Nelson's research shows how class-based and racially constructed definitions of quality childcare may lead some parent-employers to manage their anxiety about their children's vulnerability through surveillance "while leaving unexamined the broader social policies that

produce these vulnerabilities” (Nelson, 2009, 109). The nanny surveillance phenomenon suggests that socioeconomic disparity in the nanny-employer dyad can foster tremendous anxiety, such that parent-employers place more trust in secret cameras and in anonymous online postings than in their children’s caregivers. Like Wrigley and Macdonald, Nelson’s work highlights the racial and class-based tensions inherent in domestic employment relationships, which may find expression publicly (online) or privately (in exploitive working conditions, secret surveillance, or management strategies). The following authors explore these tensions by applying psychodynamic and attachment theories to the intrapsychic experiences of nannies and employers.

### **Nanny as Placeholder**

Scheftel (2012) applied a psychoanalytic lens to the nanny-employer relationship, arguing that a nanny functions in object relations terms as a psychic “placeholder.” Drawing on case material, Scheftel used the nanny’s intermediary role to explain her adult patients’ tendency to scotomatize, or obscure through forgetting, their traumatic experiences of childhood separation. She argued that the nanny exists in “an undefined space between mother and child” (Scheftel, 2012, 262) where she stands in for (i.e., holds the place of) the parent during a period of separation. As such, the nanny engenders ambivalent tension in both parents and children because her presence is linked with the primary caregiver's departure. Scheftel concluded that scotomatization is the result of the “actual, reality-based power of the nanny as a placeholder for parents in their absence” (Scheftel, 2012, 251). As a “placeholder,” the nanny is not the parent, yet she is neither *not* the parent. She is, as Macdonald put it, a temporary “shadow mother.” This raises the question: when class-privileged parents hire nannies to stand in for them, what are the psychological implications?

Winnicott wrote that an infant's mother is the ideal attachment figure, due to her "unresented preoccupation with the one infant" (Winnicott, 1971, 14). Nevertheless, a number of empirical studies have since confirmed that children can develop healthy attachment bonds with professional caregivers (van IJzendoorn, Sagi, & Labermon, 1992). In fact, recent data show that when children are securely attached to primary caregivers, healthy bonds with secondary attachment figures augment the primary attachment relationship, allowing babies and toddlers to better tolerate separation (Bowlby, 2007). Researchers have demonstrated that having multiple secondary attachment figures improves resilience, socioemotional functioning, and long-term mental health (Bowlby, 2007; van IJzendoorn, Sagi, & Labermon, 1992). Still, the question of how primary and secondary caregivers relate to *one another* remains an open one.

Macdonald (1998) has written that parents who subscribe to the ideology of intensive mothering view paid childcare as "at best a necessary evil" (Macdonald, 1998, 26) and at worst a threat to the mother's identity. Scheftel, likewise, cautioned that the nanny's position as placeholder puts her "at risk for becoming an invisible scrim...for the mother's split-off and intolerable fantasies of herself and her child" (Scheftel, 2012, 262). Indeed, most of the authors cited so far have demonstrated how class-based mothering ideologies often give rise to anxiety, ambivalence, and guilt. How does the parent's experience of separation from her child impact her relationship with the nanny, her hired "placeholder"? And how might socioeconomic factors in the nanny-employer dyad affect the way the parent manages this experience of separation?

### **Separation Anxiety & Transitional Object Usage**

In his 1960 paper on "Separation Anxiety," Bowlby proposed that in order to protect against intrapsychic trauma, the infant "develops a safety device which leads to anxiety behavior being exhibited" (Bowlby, 1960, 92) upon separation from the parent. The anxious protests of a

child during separation “ensure that he is not parted from [the mother] for too long” (Bowlby, 1960, 92). While Bowlby’s theories were drawn from mother-infant interactions, a recent qualitative study suggests that childhood attachment theory is applicable to adult separation experiences. In one of the largest longitudinal studies of human development to date, Fraley and colleagues (2013) tracked a cohort of 707 children and parents from birth to age 18 to assess the impact of various childhood factors on adult attachment styles. The authors found that childhood measures of social competence, maternal sensitivity, and friendship quality were most indicative of attachment styles in adulthood. Evidence that adult relational patterns are based on childhood attachment experiences suggests that adults, too, may react to separation with a form of what Bowlby termed “primary anxiety.”

In order to understand how adults manage this separation anxiety, it is useful to revisit the concepts of primary maternal preoccupation, transitional phenomena and transitional objects proposed by Winnicott (1969, 1971). Winnicott coined the term “primary maternal preoccupation” to describe a new parent’s mental state of total absorption with her child. He believed this ability to “feel herself into her infant’s place” (Winnicott, 1992, 304) allowed a parent to intuit and fulfill the infant’s needs. While his theory was based on mothers and infants, Winnicott recognized that any adult with the capacity to “be ill in the sense of ‘primary maternal preoccupation’” (Winnicott, 1992, 304) could fill this role. The caregiver’s near-perfect gratification of the infant’s needs engenders a feeling of omnipotence in the child that Winnicott termed “illusion.” Although “*at the start* adaptation needs to be almost exact” (Winnicott, 1971, 14, italics original), over time this lessens as the infant learns to tolerate temporary frustration.

Winnicott wrote that transitional objects are an essential facilitator of infants’ developing ability to tolerate separation from caregivers. He described the transitional object as “the original

not-me possession” (Winnicott, 1953), meaning that it is neither part of the infant (i.e. an internal representation) nor is it experienced as external and separate. By standing in for a comforting part-object, such as the breast, the transitional object functions as “a defense against anxiety” (Winnicott, 1971, 5). Rather than itself being transitional, the transitional object allows the infant a continuity of experience during temporary periods of separation. In so doing, the object facilitates the infant’s transition from total merger with the caregiver to a state of inter-relatedness.

As infants develop, Winnicott observed that they shift from relating to objects to “using” them. Rather than experiencing an object as a projected part of the self, the infant gradually becomes able to recognize that the object belongs to external reality. To shift from object relating to object usage, Winnicott wrote that infants undertake a three-part process. First, the infant first “assumes rights over the object” (Winnicott, 1953, 90) and relates to it as if it were a part of himself. Next, the infant slowly begins to recognize that the object is outside his area of control; at this point, the object is said to be “in process of being found” by the infant (Winnicott, 1971, 126). Finally, the “subject [infant] *destroys* object” and the object “survives destruction” (Winnicott, 1971, 126, emphasis original). In this process we see that in order to be *used* in a more sophisticated way by the infant, the object “must survive instinctual loving, and also hating” (Winnicott, 1953, 90), to the point of destruction. Through the process of destroying the object, the infant comes to recognize its own separate subjectivity. From this, the subject-object dynamic—or, as Winnicott put it, “life in the world of objects” (Winnicott, 1971, 121)—is born.

Benjamin (1988) applied Winnicott’s theory of object usage to adult relationships, with a particular focus on gender and power. In *The Bonds of Love*, she used the mother-infant bond to trace the roots of social dominance to subject-object relations. Benjamin viewed transitional

objects and transitional experiences as “a means of passage toward the awareness of others” (Benjamin, 1988, 41). She argued that in both infancy and adulthood, the ability to sense one’s own subjectivity and recognize others’ separateness requires the process of object usage that Winnicott outlined. Benjamin wrote that: “the object is *in fantasy* always being destroyed . . . it is vital that he [object] be affected, so that I know that I exist—but not completely destroyed, so that I know he also exists” (Benjamin 1988, 38). Applying this concept to adult dynamics, how might adults (nannies and employers) re-enact the process of object relating, destruction, and usage in order to establish one another’s existence and establish an interpersonal relationship?

### **Summary**

From the literature discussed here, it is clear that relationships between parent-employers and nannies are deeply rooted in power dynamics that are both intrapsychically and socioculturally bound. Nelson, Wrigley, and others have shown how race and class profoundly impact the dynamics of the nanny-employer dyad. This research will assess whether socioeconomic similarity and difference impacts the way employers manage their discomfort in cross-class employment relationships. Research on these relationships so far has been primarily qualitative and has focused on the experiences of live-in nannies and au pairs. The impact of differences in socioeconomic status (i.e., race, class, education level, age, income) has not been adequately studied. This study will fill the gap by exploring how socioeconomic disparity affects the relationship between professional childcare providers and their employers. I hypothesize that disparity leads employers to choose certain management strategies in an attempt to manage their own separation anxiety and the identity threat posed by the nanny’s “placeholder” position. The following chapters will explore the methodology and results, and discuss the study findings in relation to concepts of “intensive” and “competitive” mothering, with a focus on object relations.



Benjamin opened *The Bonds of Love* by acknowledging the negligible attention that has been given to the subjectivity of mothers throughout psychoanalytic literature. The mother, she pointed out, has been portrayed by theorists primarily as “the baby's vehicle for growth, an *object* of the baby's needs” (Benjamin, 1988, 23, emphasis added). Only recently has a mother been recognized as “another subject with a purpose apart from her existence for her child” (Benjamin, 1988, 24). Similarly, the child-centered ideology of intensive mothering leaves little room for the parent's experience. This child-centered paradigm prioritizes nurturance while devaluing the subjectivity of the caregiver who provides that nurturance. Benjamin argued that just as the child's ability to recognize the mother's separate subjectivity represents a developmental achievement, so must psychoanalytic theory evolve to accept “that from the beginning there are always (at least) two subjects” (Benjamin, 1988, 24).

Building on Benjamin's assertion of the importance of seeing a mother as a separate and valid subject, this research explores the degree to which a nanny-employer likewise allows for the *nanny's* subjectivity. Within the ideology of intensive mothering in which the caregiver is expected to be a kind of “shadow mother,” does a parent-employer view the nanny as a separate subject, ‘relate’ to her as an object, or ‘use’ her in the more sophisticated (Winnicottian) sense? This study aims to identify the relational and professional complexities that underlie the intensity of the interactions with between parents and nannies, and to understand how socioeconomic factors may impact these relationships. Under what circumstances is the caregiver used as an object or recognized as an equal subject? By surveying nannies about their employers' management styles, this study examines the relationship between socioeconomic disparity and employer behavior—in particular, employers' tendency to relate to nannies as subjects or objects.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

This explanatory quantitative study sought to determine if, how, and to what degree the relationship between parents and nannies is impacted by the disparity in their socioeconomic status. A review of the literature revealed little quantitative research on the experiences of childcare providers, and very few studies focusing on nannies' experiences of their relationships with employers. The aim of this study was to determine how socioeconomic disparity in the nanny-employer relationship relates to the use of "puppeteer" and "paranormal" (Macdonald 2012) management strategies by employers. Specifically, the current study questioned nannies about employer behaviors and attitudes and assessed nannies' sense of autonomy in order to address the question: *how do socioeconomic differences affect nannies' experiences of the relationship between themselves and their employers?* Additional questions included: 1) "Is there a relationship between disparity in socioeconomic status and the level of control the nanny experiences over her work (i.e., degree of close monitoring and maternal gatekeeping behaviors)?" and 2) Are particular social, racial/ethnic, or class status markers associated with greater or lesser autonomy experienced by nannies? Finally, the study also addressed the question of whether the nanny's experience of her employer's management strategy was related to certain relational factors, such as the age of the youngest child, whether the nanny lived in the employer's home, the duration of employment, whether the nanny was herself a parent, etc.

This quantitative study was both exploratory and explanatory. Because the power dynamics of nanny-employer relations have not been studied empirically, this research was exploratory. It was also explanatory, because the impact of socioeconomic factors on relationships is assumed to exist and to be measurable (Engel & Schutt, 2013). While qualitative research would provide a deeper understanding of parent-nanny dynamic, the work of Macdonald (2010) had already covered this terrain. Thus, a quantitative method was chosen.

The goal of the study was to determine if a relationship existed between two variables. The independent variable was the disparity in socioeconomic status, as indicated by demographic data (racial/ethnic identity, age, education, occupation, wages, residential status, first language and birth nation) reported by participants about themselves and their employers. The dependent variable was the nanny's experience of her employer's management style. The employer's management style was assessed through participant reports of employers' use of three indicators of the "puppeteer" and "paranormal" styles described by Macdonald (2010). These three indicators were "maternal gatekeeping" (Fagan & Barnett, 2003), "close monitoring" (George & Zhou, 2001) behavior, and the level of "work control" (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) nannies reported having over their daily activities. The origin and application of these indicators will be described in great depth later in this chapter.

### **Study Design**

The relationship between socioeconomic dissimilarity and management style was studied by means of a survey of childcare providers. This study utilized an anonymous online questionnaire and a broad sample of current and former nannies (N=167) to gather information about the impact of socioeconomic disparity on the employee-employer relationship. The domains of data collection are summarized below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Domains of Data Collection**

<p><b>I. Screening questions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Average number of hours worked per week</li><li>2. Total length of time working for employer</li><li>3. Location of caregiving (nanny's home or employer's home)</li><li>4. Nanny's age at start of employment</li><li>5. Age of youngest child in nanny's care at start of employment</li></ol>
<p><b>II. Independent variables</b></p> <p><b>A. Socioeconomic Disparity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Age difference between employer and nanny at the start of employment</li><li>2. Educational disparity between employer and nanny</li><li>3. Employer's occupation (an indicator of employer's class bracket)</li><li>4. Similarity of birth nation (a marker of immigration status disparity)</li><li>5. Language status disparity (whether employer and nanny speak the same first language)</li><li>6. Homeownership status disparity (whether employer and nanny both own or rent their homes, or employer owns a home while nanny rents)</li><li>7. Nanny's compensation (hourly wage and any benefits provided)</li></ol> <p><b>B. Relational Factors</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Length of employment and number of hours worked per week</li><li>2. Age of youngest child at the start of employment</li><li>3. Nanny's parental status during employment (parent, pregnant, childless)</li><li>4. Type of position (live-in or live-out)</li><li>5. Use of the possessive article ("my") by employer, when referring to the nanny</li><li>6. Nanny's reported perceived similarity with employer (Likert scale)</li></ol>
<p><b>III. Dependent variables</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Close Monitoring score (rated on Likert scale)</li><li>2. Maternal Gatekeeping score (perceived by nanny, rated on Likert scale)</li><li>3. Work Control score (rated on Likert scale)</li></ol>

**Sample**

The target sample for this study was professional childcare providers, both current and former. To be eligible for participation, nannies were screened on the basis of five questions

pertaining to their longest employment experience. Criteria for inclusion required that participants had been employed as a nanny, babysitter, au pair, or any other type of paid childcare provider for a child who was not related to them, and that they were at least 18 years of age at the time of beginning to provide care (and, therefore, at the time of participation in the study). In addition, eligibility criteria required that participants' longest employment experience lasted at least one week, involved at least eight hours of childcare per week, occurred in the employer's home, and was with a child aged 5 or younger. Nannies were excluded whose longest employment experience lasted less than one week, consisted of less than 8 hours per week, took place in the nanny's home, or was for a child aged 6 or older. To gather the most consistent, precise, and in-depth results, nannies were asked to respond to all questions based on the same (longest) employment experience and to keep the same employer in mind while answering all survey questions.

This study used snowball sampling, a type of non-probability purposive sampling without pre-determined strata. While random selection generates a more representative sample, snowball sampling was chosen for this study because childcare providers, as a group, can be difficult to access. Snowball sampling made it feasible to reach theoretical saturation by asking participants to refer others. An online survey gave the study the potential to reach a geographically diverse pool of participants. To promote diversity of respondents, the study was open to participants of all genders, sexual orientations, immigration statuses, racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds, religions, physical abilities, and economic statuses.

### **Recruitment**

The recruitment process involved outreach via social media websites and online job forums (e.g., Facebook, Craigslist, Nanny Island), personal emails to professional contacts of the

researcher, and word-of-mouth outreach to current and former nannies in the researcher's professional circle. In addition, the researcher sent outreach emails to 68 professional groups and non-profit organizations providing support and advocacy for nannies and other domestic workers (see Appendix A for a list of organizations). All online postings, outreach emails, and direct messages to potential participants included a description of the research study and a link to the study website. All communications also included a request that recipients forward information about the survey on to others.

The words "nanny," "babysitter," and "childcare provider" were used interchangeably in all recruitment materials in order to access a broader group of participants. While "nanny" is a commonly used term in the academic literature, in practice it can refer to a very specific type of full-time live-in work. In addition, childcare workers who do not identify as female may not use the word "nanny" because it connotes femininity. In the interest of gathering a diverse group of participants, multiple terms were used to describe professional childcare providers. This allowed the study to reach childcare providers of all genders, both part-time and full-time, live-in as well as live-out, including those who may not have defined themselves professionally as caregivers but had worked in the field in the past.

### **Participation**

The study website (see Appendix B) contained a description of the study, eligibility criteria and confidentiality information, the opportunity to contact the researcher directly, and a link to the online questionnaire. It was made clear on the website that there was no possible link between email addresses used to contact the researcher and the data collected anonymously in the online survey. Clicking on the link to the questionnaire directed potential participants to a "Welcome" page that explained the purpose of the study, its anonymous and confidential nature,

the length of time expected to complete the survey, and a means of contacting the researcher. Clicking “next” brought participants to an “Eligibility” page, where the criteria for inclusion and exclusion were re-stated in simple language. After clicking “next,” participants arrived at the “Informed Consent” page, where they were asked to read the informed consent (Appendix C) and required to click “I Agree” in order to continue. Participants then reached the five required screening questions, which constituted the beginning of the survey instrument (Appendix D). Those who failed to meet eligibility criteria for any of the screening questions were directed to a screen thanking them for their participation. Those who met the screening criteria were able to continue the survey.

Of the 202 individuals who consented to take the survey, 27 were disqualified, either because they did not meet the screening criteria or because they failed to complete significant sections of the survey (e.g., the demographic information). In addition, 8 participants gave consent to participate but did not complete any of the questions. The minimum sample size for this online survey was 50; the final sample comprised 167 participants. Complete demographic information for participants is found in Chapter IV.

### **Limitations & Biases**

In evaluating the methodology used, it is important to consider sampling and recruitment biases, weaknesses in overall study design, limitations in the survey instrument itself, and researcher bias.

**Sampling biases.** The first sampling bias was lack of accessibility in recruitment of participants. All recruitment took place online and all outreach materials were written in English. In order to take part in the study, participants needed to have sufficient visual ability and manual dexterity to view the survey and type responses. Thus, participation required reliable Internet

access, sufficient computing ability to navigate an online questionnaire, and the capacity to read and respond in English, in addition to physical abilities. No accommodations were provided to participants in these areas. These limitations might have ruled out childcare providers who were unable to participate due to lack of language proficiency, physical limitations, or who did not have the resources to access the questionnaire online. Although the researcher worded survey questions as simply and clearly as possible, it is possible that participants who failed to complete the survey did so because they could not understand the questions. It is also possible that participants who did complete all the questions still answered inaccurately due to their marginal ability to navigate the survey for either language, technical, or physical reasons. The median time to complete the 46-question survey was 8 minutes and 12 seconds. However, it is possible that those who abandoned it may have struggled for far longer before giving up. Finally, participants may have been uncomfortable with the content or nature of the survey questions or the length of the survey itself. These limitations inadvertently excluded participants who were unable to understand the survey questions or who found the content or length of the survey to be a barrier.

Another potential source of bias is that some subjects were recruited from a pool of nannies in San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles who were affiliated with an on-call childcare service. The researcher acknowledges having a prior relationship with this on-call agency. The service does not employ caregivers; rather, nannies operate as independent contractors and the agency links them to parents in exchange for a commission from the wages parents pay. Drawing some subjects from this pool may have resulted in sampling bias, as all participants who were affiliated with the childcare service had to meet certain criteria in order to access caregiving jobs through the agency. This may have resulted in overrepresentation of a certain sub-set of nannies that are more likely to want to work for, and to be selected by, an on-call childcare service. The



method of snowball sampling was chosen to address this problem by widening the group of participants beyond the original recruitment pool. In addition, considerable efforts were made to promote the survey to workers' advocacy organizations, community-based nanny groups, and in online forums where childcare providers congregate. Nevertheless, is it still possible that sampling bias occurred and it may have affected the survey results.

**Limitations of study design.** The study design chosen has several weaknesses. Because it was anonymous, the researcher could not ask follow-up questions or collect additional information from participants after the survey was complete. Nor was it possible to verify any of the information participants provided. And because it was online and did not collect IP addresses, it is impossible to know where respondents were located geographically. Sampling was based on responses and the nonprobability sample obtained is not representative. Results are difficult to generalize to a broader population of nannies because those who have only cared for school-age children, childcare providers who work out of their own homes, and nannies who have only worked on a short-term basis were screened out. In addition, snowball sampling without using pre-determined strata led to some categories of participants being inadvertently excluded. For example, 89% of participants self-identified their race as Caucasian or white, while data from the 2004-2010 American Community Survey (a yearly Census Bureau survey) shows that at least half of nannies identify as a race other than white (Burnham & Theodore, 2012, 11).

**Instrument limitations.** The instrument developed for the survey was designed by the researcher, so an element of investigator bias was present. Although the researcher conducted pre-testing, several limitations persisted. First, the survey did not ask where (geographically) participants had worked. As a result, it is impossible to determine if nannies provided childcare

in rural areas, cities, or suburbs—or even if they worked in the United States. In addition, although the study information indicated that only nannies who had worked in the past ten years were eligible to participate, the screening questions were not set up in such a way as to exclude nannies who had not worked in the past ten years. For this reason, it would be difficult to locate the findings in a specific historical context, or use the results of this study to show trends over time. Finally, because the instrument questions were not randomized, order bias may have affected the results.

**Researcher bias.** Finally, another significant source of bias is that the researcher worked as a professional childcare provider for a number of years. These experiences may have biased the questions selected for inclusion in the measurement instrument, their wording, and/or their order. These experiences may also have affected analysis of the survey results. The researcher attempted to mitigate the impact of her personal connection to the material by obtaining input on the study from professors at the School for Social Work, by pre-testing the survey, and by working with a research analyst to interpret the results. In addition, the researcher relied on professional networks and public forums for recruitment.

### **Ethics & Safeguards**

This study was designed and implemented with approval from the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (Appendix E). Risks and benefits of participation were evaluated according to the ethical principles and federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research. All potential risks and benefits were explicitly explained to participants as part of the informed consent process.

**Mitigation of risk.** Overall, this study posed little risk to participants. The online survey collected information on participants' personal characteristics (demographic and socioeconomic)

and employment experiences. Socioeconomic information collected in the survey included racial / ethnic identity, age, highest education level achieved, residential status, and hourly wage. Data collection was anonymous because surveymonkey was configured to eliminate all identifying information, including IP addresses. Data was coded and stored in a password-protected Excel file, which will be destroyed after three years. Analysis of the data was conducted with statistical consultation from a faculty member of Smith College School for Social Work. Information provided by participants was accessible only to the researcher and this faculty member, who signed a confidentiality agreement.

Although nannies as a group are not a vulnerable population, undocumented and documented immigrant workers comprise a sizable proportion of childcare providers. For this reason, the principle of respect for persons was inherent in the survey design. The instrument did not query participants on their citizenship, immigration status, country of birth, or first language. Rather, to assess the disparity in status between nannies and employers, participants were asked whether their first language and birth country were the same as that of their employer. Respondents had the opportunity to choose “yes,” “no,” or “don’t know” as answers to both of these questions. Participants also had the option to skip these questions.

**Benefits of participation.** There were no tangible benefits to nannies for participating in the study. However, upon completion of the survey, respondents’ answers were presented to them; this offered the opportunity to develop greater insight into their professional experiences. In addition, nannies who chose to contact the researcher to receive the results of the study had the option of learning the wages, benefits, and related types of compensation that other childcare providers receive. Since most caregivers are separated from each other due to the nature of the work, many do not know what others nannies earn or what benefits they receive. By collecting

this information and distributing it to those who wish to receive it, this study offers research subjects a way to benefit directly from their participation. Finally, this research project advances the rights of nannies as a group by focusing on their experiences, increasing visibility and enhancing advocacy efforts.

### **Data Collection**

Recruitment began in October 2014, following approval for the study from the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee. The study website and online questionnaire were activated and responses were recorded on surveymonkey. Participants were not given any incentives for completing the survey. Data collection continued until March 2015, when the online survey was closed.

**Measurement instrument.** The survey collected quantitative data using 46 questions, which were a mix of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions. The measurement instrument was created by combining five screening questions, 21 questions assessing disparities between participants and employers, and three pre-existing questionnaires with previously established measures of internal consistency. Demographic questions were based on Olsen's two quantitative study of nannies (1991, 1994) and were intended to gather markers of nannies' sociocultural location at the time that they worked for a specific employer. The three pre-existing questionnaires were: the Maternal Gatekeeping Scale developed by Fagan and Barnett (2003), which has a reliability coefficient of .93 and was designed to measure gatekeeping behavior in heterosexual two-parent families; the Close Monitoring Scale developed by George and Zhou (2001), which has a reliability coefficient of .69 and measures the degree to which supervisors micromanage their subordinates; and the Work Control Measure developed by Karasek and Theorell (1990), which assesses the degree to which employees have agency in their work.

All pre-existing measurement instruments used in the survey were kept intact to maintain validity (no questions omitted), and the original order of all three was preserved. However, several minor changes to each instrument were necessary for clarity. First, the Close Monitoring Scale and the Work Control Measure were mixed (alternating questions). The phrase “my supervisor” was changed to “my employer” in the Close Monitoring Scale. And in one question from the Close Monitoring Scale, the space left blank for “company name” was filled in with “this family” (e.g., “It is clear to me that to get ahead in working for this family, I need to do exactly what I am told”). In addition, the Close Monitoring Scale was changed from a 7-point to a 5-point Likert rating system for uniformity with the other two measures.

Finally, several changes were made to the Maternal Gatekeeping Scale. This instrument was originally developed “to assess the degree to which mothers restrict access of their children to the father” (Fagan & Barnett, 2003, 1029) in heterosexual families. Since the present study assessed maternal gatekeeping behaviors with paid caregivers, the word “father” was changed to “nanny” (e.g.: “If my child(ren)'s feelings are hurt, I think that I should comfort them, not their nanny”). In addition, participants were instructed to indicate the degree to which they believed their employer would agree or disagree with the scale statements. This was a change from the original context of the survey instrument, in which mothers were surveyed about their own behaviors. Since the purpose of this study was to gather information on management strategies from the perspective of the employee, this change supported the goal of data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was collected using a codebook developed for the study (Appendix F). Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the data. Univariate and bivariate analyses (correlations and t-tests) were used to summarize the data and examine the impact of

socioeconomic factors on the nannies' experience of their employers' management strategy. The results of these statistical analyses are presented in Chapter IV.

### **Summary**

The goal of this study was to improve understanding of power dynamics in cross-class domestic employment relationships. In US society, socioeconomic identities such as class, race, and immigration status are used to judge some women as unfit to be mothers (Cox, 2011). Yet women with low socioeconomic status nevertheless find work as “shadow mothers” for class-privileged parents. The purpose of this research was to determine whether the socioeconomic disparity between parent-employers and nannies was associated with their employers’ use of certain management strategies.

Due to the limitations of the study discussed in this chapter, the findings are not generalizable to a larger group of childcare providers. However, this research affords greater insight into cross-class relationships in which money is exchanged for caring labor. For instance, employer behaviors such as maternal gatekeeping, close monitoring, and level of work control can be examined to determine whether nannies who are socioeconomically dissimilar to their employers are treated more as objects or as separate subjects. In addition, empirical knowledge about the dynamics of the nanny-employer dyad can be applied to clinical social work relationships.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

This research was an exploratory study using a quantitative methods design. The purpose was to determine whether socioeconomic disparity in the nanny-employer dyad affected the nanny’s experience of the employer’s management style. An additional area of interest was the impact of relational factors in the employment relationship on the nanny’s perception of her employer’s management strategy. The goal of the study was to improve social workers’ understanding of childcare providers’ experiences of domestic employment dynamics.

Analysis of the data revealed ten significant data trends. Of these, the strongest correlations were between participants’ perceived similarity to their employers and their scores on the Work Control and Close Monitoring measures. In general, respondents who perceived themselves as similar to their employers experienced less scrutiny and evaluation (close monitoring) and reported greater autonomy in their work (work control). Table 2, below, summarizes all ten correlations.

**Table 2: Significant Correlations**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Test(s)</i>	<i>Result(s)</i>	<i>Specificity</i>
Length of Employment	CM score	How does the length of employment impact CM score?	Pearson’s r	Significant Positive weak correlation	r=.221, p=.004, two-tailed
Cumulative Contact	CM score	How does cumulative nanny-child contact impact CM score?	Pearson’s r	Significant Positive weak correlation	r=.223, p=.004, two-tailed

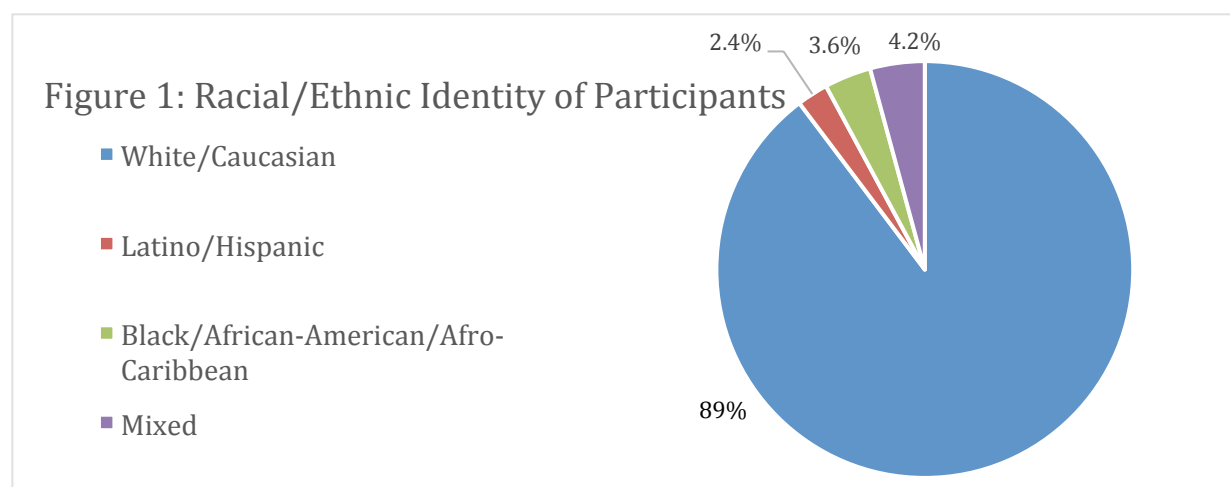
Perceived Similarity	CM score	How does perceived similarity impact CM score?	Pearson's r	Significant negative moderate correlation	$r = -.426$ , $p = .000$ , two-tailed
Perceived Similarity	WC score	How does perceived similarity impact WC score?	Pearson's r	Significant positive moderate correlation	$r = -.393$ , $p = .000$ , two-tailed
Perceived Similarity	MG score	How does perceived similarity impact MG score?	Pearson's r	Significant negative weak correlation	$r = -.234$ , $p = .002$ , two-tailed
Educational Disparity	WC score	Does degree of educational disparity affect WC score?	t-test	Significant difference in WC by educational disparity. Those with similar education had a lower mean WC score ( $m = 26.34$ ) than those with disparity ( $m = 28.23$ )	$t(34.97) = 2.110$ , $p = .042$ .
Employer Income Status	WC score	Do nannies working for the wealthiest employers report higher WC scores than other nannies?	t-test	Significant difference: nannies of employers with very high incomes had higher mean WC total ( $m = 28.41$ ) than the others ( $m = 27.11$ )	$t(165) = 2.246$ , $p = .026$ .
Total Benefits	WC score	How does number of benefits received relate to WC score?	Pearson's r	Significant positive weak correlation	$r = .263$ , $p = .001$ , two-tailed
Total Benefits	MG score	How does number of benefits received relate to MG score?	Pearson's r	Significant negative weak correlation	$r = -.202$ , $p = .009$ , two-tailed
Cumulative Compensation	WC score	How does cumulative compensation relate to CM?	Pearson's r	Significant positive weak correlation	$r = .225$ , $p = .003$ , two-tailed



This chapter will discuss the meaning of these findings and explore their implications. It will also summarize the demographics of participants and the descriptive information gathered from study subjects.

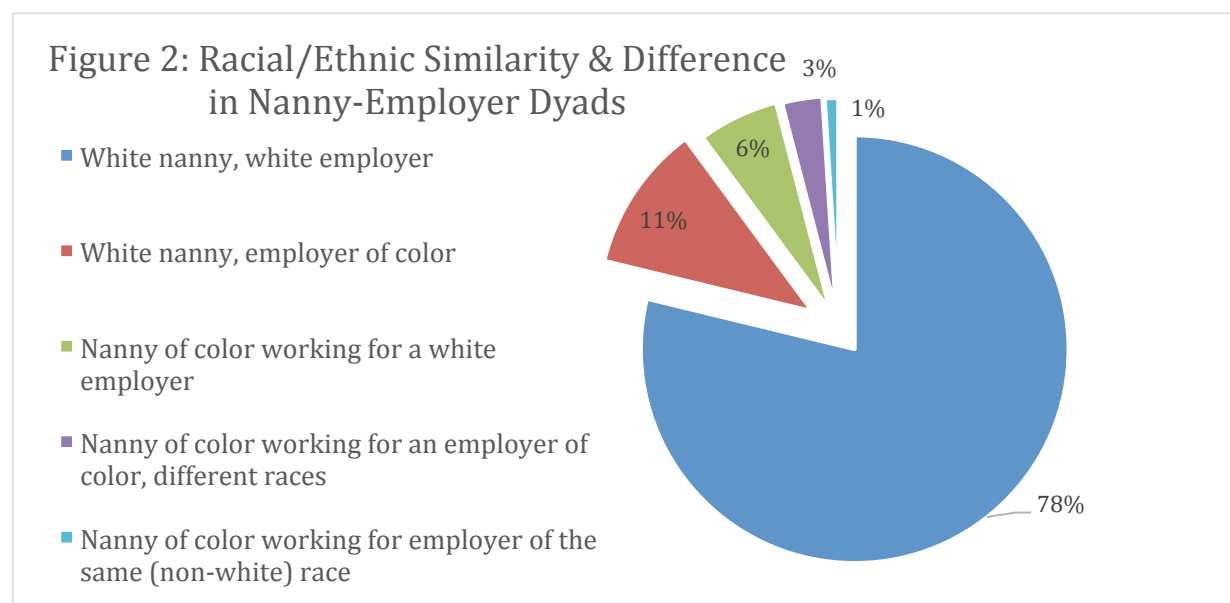
### Demographics & Descriptive Statistics

**Socioeconomic data.** Participants were asked to provide their own racial or ethnic identity, as well as their perception of their employer’s racial/ethnic identity. The majority (89%) of respondents identified as white or Caucasian. The other racial/ethnic groups represented in the survey sample were Latino/Hispanic nannies (2.4%), Black/African-American/Afro-Caribbean nannies (3.6%), and those who described themselves as “mixed” (4.2%). The majority (84%) of employers were identified by participants as white or Caucasian. Employers of color were described as Latino/Hispanic (1.2%), Black/African-American/Afro-Caribbean (1.8%), East Asian or Asian American (2.4%), South Asian (3.6%), Middle Eastern or Arab American (1.2%), mixed race (3%) or “other” (3%). See Figure 1 below for a depiction of participants’ racial/ethnic identities.

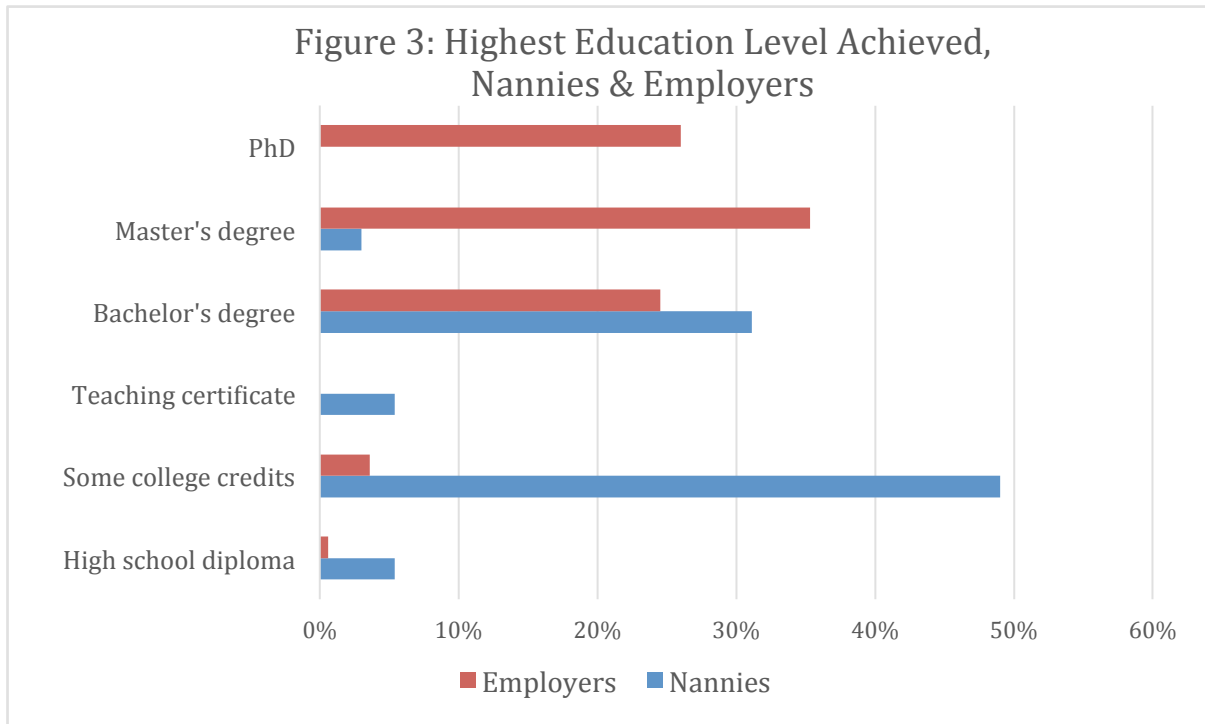


Thus, most nanny-employer pairs (79%) were of the same race, which was white in all except two cases. Similarly, in terms of language and immigration status, the majority of employers and

nannies spoke the same first language (92%) and were born in the same country (84%). However, a significant minority (21%) of dyads were cross-racial. Of these, about half (11%) consisted of a white nanny working for an employer of color, and nearly a third (6%) were composed of a Latina, Black, or mixed-race nanny working for a white employer. In 3% of all dyads, a non-white nanny was working for an employer who was also a person of color but who belonged to a different racial/ethnic group. Figure 2, below, displays these racial/ethnic pairings.



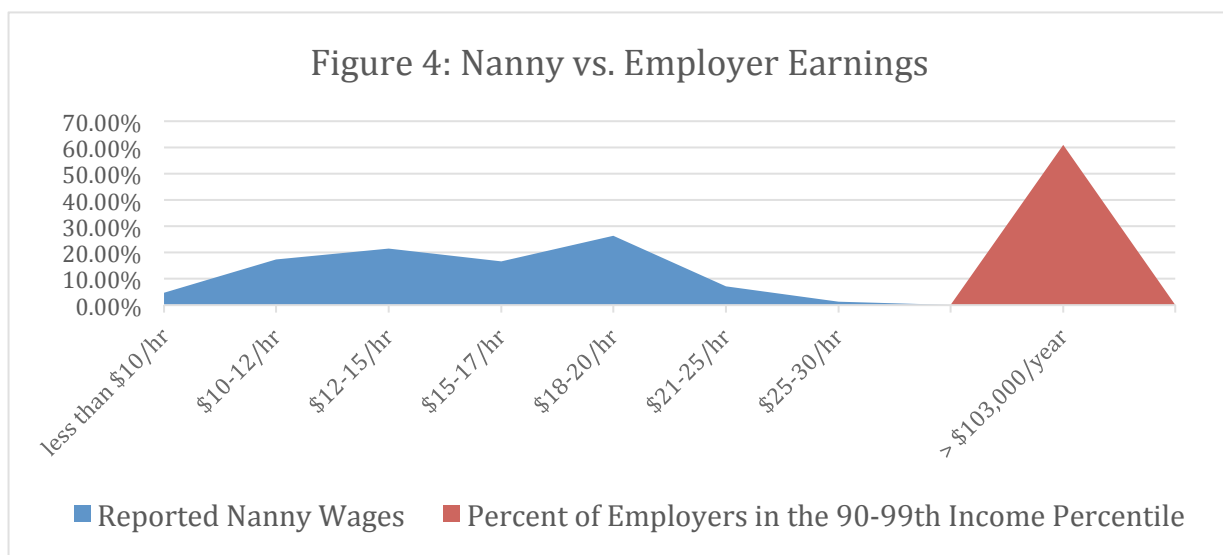
Participants were surveyed on the highest education level they had achieved at the start of their longest period of nanny employment. They were also asked to report their employer’s highest level of education. The majority of nannies (80%) had completed some college credits or had attained a bachelor’s degree. An additional 5% held a teaching certificate. Only 3% had earned a master’s degree at the time of their employment, and none of them held a PhD. By contrast, 61% of employers had advanced degrees: 35% had master’s degrees, and 26% held PhDs. None held teaching certificates. 5% of respondents did not know their employer’s education level. See Figure 3 for a comparison of nannies’ and employers’ education levels.



In order to compare the incomes of nannies and employers, participants were asked about their compensation in terms of wages and benefits. Only a small portion (8%) of respondents reported earning more than \$20/hour. The vast majority were paid between \$10-20 per hour: 40% earned between \$10-15/hr. and 43% earned \$15-20/hr. 6% reported having been paid less than \$10 an hour for their work. This is consistent with the results of a 2013 survey by the International Nanny Association, which found that the median wage was \$16 per hour (International Nanny Association, 2013). Less-educated nannies made as little as \$10.38 hourly, while those with more than twenty years of experience earned an average of \$18.90 per hour (International Nanny Association, 2013).

In order to gather more information about employers' socioeconomic status, participants were asked to state their employers' occupation(s). Some respondents reported one employer occupation, while others reported two. Participants' answers were compared with the "most popular jobs" for the highest-earning individuals in the most recent American Community

Survey, a yearly Census Bureau survey. The researcher identified nine occupations which appeared only or primarily in the top two income brackets, meaning they had annual incomes in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher (greater than \$103,000 per year). These were: other financial specialists and managers, physicians, chief executives, salespersons, lawyers, accountants and auditors, marketing and advertising managers, and technology professionals. More than half (61%) of survey participants reported that their employers held jobs which matched one of these nine occupations. The most common top-percentile employer occupations were physicians and attorneys: 20% of respondents reported working for at least one physician, and another 14% reported working for at least one attorney. 14% of all respondents worked for dual-income couples in which both parents' occupations belonged to the top earning brackets. These brackets are the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile—with annual incomes of \$103,000 to \$207,000—and the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile, for individuals earning more than \$207,000 per year. By contrast, the highest-paid nannies received about \$40,000 in annual gross income (assuming a 40-hour workweek and 50 paid weeks per year), and most participants reported earning far less. Figure 4 shows the distribution of nanny wages compared with estimated employer earnings.

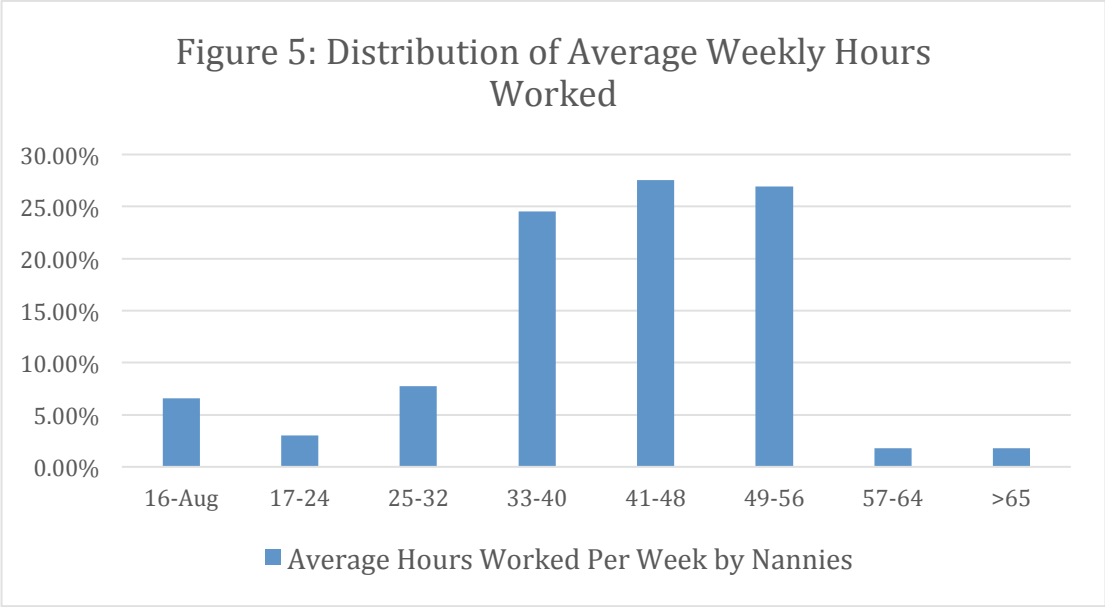


Like wages, benefits reported by participants varied widely. Of the total respondents, 14% reported receiving no employment benefits at all. The most common benefit provided was paid holidays, which 72% of all respondents received. 70% also reported having paid vacation time, and 56% said they had paid sick time. Other benefits reported included: reimbursement for vehicle use (38%), use of the employer's vehicle (30%), contributions to the nanny's health insurance premium (20%), reimbursements for educational expenses (12%), stipends for public transportation (5%), a cell phone allowance (4%), and contributions to a retirement plan (1.8%).

Corresponding with their lower incomes, nannies reported lower rates of homeownership than employers. Of those who worked on a live-out basis, 66% rented their residence, while 19% were homeowners. An additional 15% responded "not applicable," implying that they neither rented nor owned (some may have been live-in employees). By contrast, participants reported that 86% of their employers owned their own homes; only 14% were renters. Thus, a disparity in homeownership was present in 44% of nanny-employer dyads. In all of these cases except one, the employer was a homeowner and the nanny was a renter. In 26% of cases, the employer and nanny had the same homeownership status (i.e., both rented, or both owned).

**Relational data.** In addition to data on nannies' and employers' socioeconomic status, participants were also asked to provide information about their employment experience. At the outset of the survey, respondents were asked to bring to mind their longest period of employment with a single family, and to answer all questions based on this same employment experience. All respondents worked in their employer's homes, but very few (5%) lived with their employers. Most (83%) of participants described jobs that lasted more than one year. Nearly two-thirds (64%) reported having worked for their employer for more than two years, while 19% of respondents described a work experience which lasted between one and two years. Employment

was mostly full-time or close to full-time: 80% of respondents worked at least 33 hours a week. A quarter worked between 33-40 hours per week, more than one-quarter worked between 41-48 hours per week, and 27% worked between 49-56 hours per week. Figure 5 below shows the distribution of hours worked by nannies.

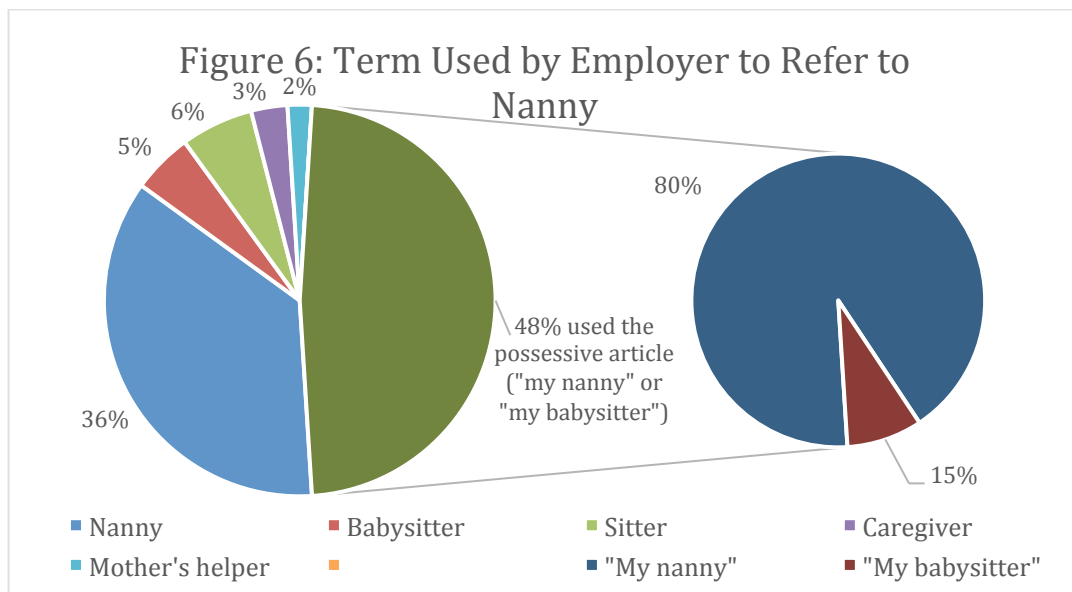


Median age at start of employment for nannies was 28, while for employers it was 36. Employers’ ages ranged from 27 to 48, while nannies’ range was wider, from 18 to 56 years old. 21% of employers hired nannies older than they were, while 78% hired nannies that were younger. For employers who were older than the nannies they employed, the median degree of difference between ages was 11 years; for nannies who were older than their employers, the median difference in ages was 9 years. The majority of nannies (84%) were childless. 13% were already parents themselves at the start of employment, and 3% were pregnant or became a parent during the course of their employment. 70% of participants cared for infants, meaning that they began working for their employers when the employer’s youngest child was less than 1 year old.

Participants were asked to answer three questions about the degree of similarity between themselves and their employers. These were adapted from the Perceived Similarity to Leader

scale (van Quaakebeke, van Knippenberg, & Brodbeck, 2011), and they asked respondents to rate the extent to which they were “like” or “similar to” their employers. For example, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: “My employer and I are in a lot of respects very similar” and “In appearance, my employer and I are very different” (reverse coded). The questions were scored on a Likert scale, with a maximum possible result of 15 (high level of reported similarity) and a lowest possible result of 3 (very dissimilar). Scores ranged from 4-15 with a median of 10, indicating that the majority of nannies rated themselves as at least somewhat similar to their employers.

Finally, respondents were asked to choose the manner in which they most often heard their employers address them. The choices offered were: “nanny,” “my nanny,” “babysitter,” “my babysitter,” “sitter,” “au pair,” “mother’s helper,” and “caregiver.” Participants could choose only one answer. Nearly all respondents reported having been called either “nanny” or “my nanny” (80%). 15% reported having been called “babysitter,” “my babysitter,” or “sitter.” Nearly half of all participants (48%) reported that their employers most often used the possessive article “my” in referring to them, as indicated by Figure 6.



## **Management Style Assessments**

Finally, information on nannies' experiences of their employers' management styles was gathered by means of three pre-existing instruments. These were the Work Control survey, the Close Monitoring scale, and Maternal Gatekeeping questionnaire (see Chapter Three for further information on these instruments). Questions from these were mixed together, but the original order for each instrument was preserved. All three were scored separately based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The Work Control scale assessed the extent to which respondents felt that their jobs matched their skill and education levels, the degree to which their work offered them autonomy and flexibility, and whether or not they felt overqualified for their jobs. The highest possible score on the eight-question scale was 40, and the lowest possible score was 8, with higher scores reflecting more work control. Participants' scores ranged between 17-35, with a median of 28, indicating that most were at least somewhat satisfied with their level of work control.

The Close Monitoring scale assessed whether respondents felt that their supervisors were "always looking over my shoulder" (George & Zhou, 2001). The six Likert-scale questions assessed the frequency of evaluation, the extent of micromanaging, and the degree to which employees felt that their behavior was scrutinized. The maximum possible score was 30, and the lowest was 6, with higher results indicating more monitoring. Participants' scores covered this entire range; some nannies rated their level of monitoring as very low (6), while others reported that they were constantly watched (30). The median score was 16, just two points below the middle of the range, indicating that that close monitoring was far from a universal experience.

The Maternal Gatekeeping scale was originally developed for use with heterosexual mothers in order to measure self-reported gatekeeping levels between parents. In this study, the



survey instrument instructed participants to use a 5-point Likert scale to answer the nine questions *as they imagined their employers* would answer them. For example, nannies were asked whether they thought their employers would prefer to maintain control in a variety of parenting situations, such as play time, clothing choice, discipline, attending to children's medical care, talking with children's teachers, etc. The highest possible score was 45, and the lowest possible score was 9. Participants' results ranged from 13-43, though only one participant scored 43; if this response were eliminated as an outlier, the highest end of the reported range would be 39. The median maternal gatekeeping score was 26, indicating that a majority of respondents rated their employers' gatekeeping behavior in the middle of the range.

### **Inferential Statistics**

In order to determine relationships between independent and dependent variables, 54 statistical analyses were run. These included Pearson's  $r$  (product moment correlation coefficient), t-tests, and one-way analyses of variance. Each relational factor variable was compared with participants' scores on the Work Control, Close Monitoring, and Maternal Gatekeeping measures. In addition, each variable measuring socioeconomic disparity between nanny and employer was also compared with all three measures. Correlation tests found ten significant relationships between variables, of which two were moderate and eight were weak, and t-tests revealed two significant associations between sub-groups and variables.

**Socioeconomic variables.** The socioeconomic factors found to impact nannies' scores on the three measures were: educational disparity, disparity in income status, benefits received by nannies, and the cumulative compensation (wages plus benefits) reported by nannies. No evidence was found for relationships between any other socioeconomic variables and scores on the Work Control, Close Monitoring, or Maternal Gatekeeping measures.

The degree of disparity between nannies' education and that of their employers was assessed by determining the difference between the levels of education each had achieved. Each level was assigned a value, ranging from 1 (high school diploma) to 7 (PhD). A t-test was run to determine whether the degree of educational disparity impacted the nanny's work control score. A significant difference ( $t(34.97)=2.11$ ,  $p=0.042$ ) in work control scores was found based on educational achievement level. When the nanny had achieved an equal or higher level of education than her employer, her mean work control score (26.34) was about two points lower than the mean work control score in more disparate dyads (28.23). In other words, nannies with comparable educational backgrounds to their employers seemed to experience less autonomy in their work than did nannies who were at an educational disadvantage relative to their employers.

Disparity in income status was assessed by querying participants on their employers' occupations. The wealthiest employers were identified by participants' reports of their employers' occupations; employers were considered wealthy if their occupations were among the nine "most popular jobs" for the highest-earning individuals in the most recent American Community Survey. A t-test was run to determine if work control scores for nannies of the wealthiest employers were different than those of all other employers. A significant difference ( $t(165)=2.25$ ,  $p=0.026$ ) was found between the two groups. Nannies of employers with very high incomes reported higher mean work control scores ( $m=28.41$ ) than nannies of less-wealthy employers ( $m=27.11$ ).

The number of different benefits (e.g. paid vacation, sick time, cell phone allowance, etc.) nannies reported receiving from employers correlated with their scores on the Work Control and Maternal Gatekeeping measures. A Pearson's  $r$  test found a significant positive weak correlation ( $r=0.26$ ,  $p=0.001$ , two tailed) between the number of benefits received and the work control

score, meaning that nannies who received more benefits also experienced higher levels of autonomy and flexibility in their work. Similarly, a Pearson’s r test found a significant negative weak correlation ( $r = -0.20$ ,  $p = 0.009$ , two tailed) between number of benefits received and the maternal gatekeeping score. This indicates that nannies that received more benefits also experienced less gatekeeping from their employers. Figure 7 (below) shows the relationship between benefits and scores on both measures.



Finally, an additional comparison of nannies’ compensation revealed a relationship between participants’ “cumulative compensation” and their reported level of work control. For this test, participants were assigned a cumulative compensation score based on their hourly wage bracket (e.g., 1=<\$10 per hour, 2=\$10-12 per hour, etc.) and the number of distinct benefits

received. These values were summed, such that the highest-scoring nannies were those who earned the greatest hourly wage and received the most benefits. A Pearson's  $r$  test was run to determine if cumulative compensation was associated with the degree of work control the nanny experienced, and a significant positive weak correlation was found ( $r=0.23$ ,  $p=0.003$ , two tailed). This suggests that nannies whose employers compensate them higher also report a greater sense of control over their work.

**Relational variables.** The relational factors found to impact nannies' scores on the three measures were: length of employment, cumulative nanny-child contact, and perceived similarity between nanny and employer. No evidence was found for relationships between any other relational variables and scores on the Work Control, Close Monitoring, and Maternal Gatekeeping measures.

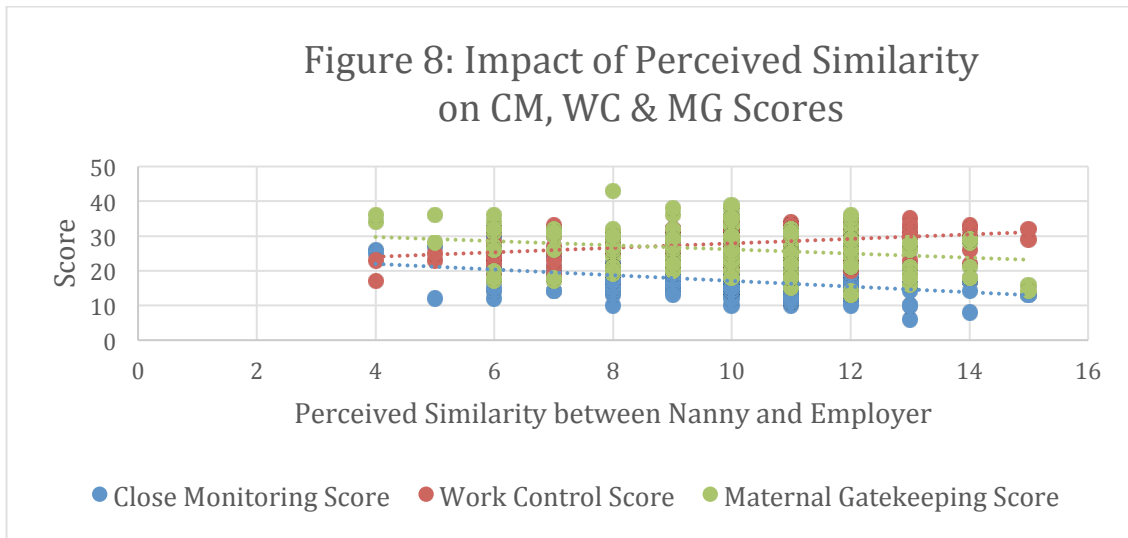
To determine if the length of employment impacted the Close Monitoring score, a Pearson's  $r$  test was run. There was a significant positive weak correlation ( $r=0.22$ ,  $p=0.004$ , two tailed) between length of employment and degree of close monitoring reported by nannies. This suggests that employment terms of more than two years were associated with reports of greater evaluation and scrutiny. However, there was no correlation found between the number of hours worked per week by nannies and their scores on any of the measures.

An additional comparison revealed that the number of hours worked per week does impact the nanny's experience of close monitoring, but only over the course of long-term employment. For this test, participants were assigned a cumulative nanny-child contact score, based on the bracket of their weekly hours worked (e.g., 1=<8, 2=8-16, 3=17-24, etc.) and the bracket of employment length (e.g., 5=6-12 months, 6=1-2 years, 7=more than 2 years). These values were summed to describe the "cumulative contact" between nanny and child over the

course of employment. The highest-scoring participants were those who worked the most hours per week over the longest period of time. A Pearson's  $r$  test was run to determine if cumulative nanny-child contact was associated with the degree of close monitoring the nanny experienced, and a significant positive weak correlation was found ( $r=0.22$ ,  $p=0.004$ , two tailed). This suggests that nannies who spend more daily time with children on a long-term basis experience more close monitoring.

Three Pearson's  $r$  analyses were performed to determine if nannies' reported similarity between themselves and their employers was associated with their scores on Work Control, Close Monitoring, and Maternal Gatekeeping measures. A significant negative moderate correlation ( $r= -0.43$ ,  $p=0.000$ , two tailed) was found between perceived similarity and level of close monitoring. This suggests that nannies who felt themselves to be more similar to their employers also reported experiencing less scrutiny and evaluation. This could reflect a phenomenon on the part of employers, in which employers place more trust in caregivers whom they appear similar to themselves.

In a related finding, a significant negative weak correlation ( $r= -0.23$ ,  $p=0.002$ , two tailed) was found between perceived similarity and level of maternal gatekeeping. This indicates that greater similarity in the nanny-employer dyad is associated with less gatekeeping on behalf of employers, perhaps due to greater levels of trust. Finally, a significant positive moderate correlation ( $r=-0.39$ ,  $p=0.000$ , two tailed) was found between perceived similarity and level of work control. This supports the previous findings, indicating that nannies that rated themselves as similar to their employers also reported experiencing more autonomy in their work. All three correlations are displayed in Figure 8, below.



**Limitations**

The descriptive and demographic data reveal a number of sampling limitations. The relatively homogenous subject pool, composed of white nannies working for white employers, cannot be generalized to the broader population of nannies. According to a 2013 report by the Economic Policy Institute, 64% of nannies in the United States are white, whereas 89% of the participants in this study identified as white or Caucasian. This indicates that the study findings may disproportionately represent the experiences of white nannies. It is likely that the survey method chosen—snowball sampling without pre-determined strata—led to an overrepresentation of white nannies.

Similarly, the majority of nannies in the study reported that they spoke the same first language (92%) and were born in the same country (84%) as their employers. This finding differs from the larger population of domestic workers. The 2012 National Domestic Workers Alliance study surveyed more than two thousand housecleaners, maids, and nannies and found that 46% were immigrants and 35% were noncitizens (Greenhouse, 2012). However, the wording of the present survey made it difficult to discern the exact nature of respondents’ first language or immigration history. For example, it is possible that participants were citizens and

their employers were immigrants, or vice versa, or that either nannies or employers were born in different countries but spoke the same first language. Unfortunately, these details are impossible to determine because the survey phrasing was made deliberately vague to protect the vulnerable population of undocumented workers.

The employment benefits reported by participants in this study also differed somewhat from the results of the 2012 National Domestic Workers Alliance survey. That study found that just 18% of respondents received paid sick days, and that only 4% received health insurance coverage through their employers (Greenhouse, 2012). By contrast, the participants in this survey were better compensated. 56% reported they had “paid sick time” and 20% reported that their employers contributed to their health insurance premiums.

Additionally, recruitment bias may have led to a disproportionate number of respondents who reported that their employer most often used the term “nanny” or “my nanny” to refer to them. Because the term “nanny” was used in all the recruitment materials, it is possible that this led more subjects who self-identified as “nannies” to participate in the study. Had the term “babysitter” or “au pair” been used in the recruitment materials, the results might have been different. It is also possible that nannies were called “nanny” by employers because that was the term used in their job description. The question of what employers may be communicating when using various terms would be an area of future study. For the purposes of this survey, a significant difference was found between the experiences of nannies whose employers used possessive articles to refer to them (“my nanny”) compared with those whose employers did not.

While economic disparity was present in all participant-employer dyads, the childcare providers who participated in the survey were overall better compensated, more racially privileged, and less likely to be foreign-born than the typical nanny. Therefore, it is likely that

recruitment and sampling bias affected the results. Sampling was based on responses, meaning that only highly motivated participants were included. In addition, the snowball method of sampling without using pre-determined strata could have caused some racial/ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic groups to be underrepresented. An overly homogenous sample would reduce the potential number of associations observed between variables. Since the focus of the research was on disparity in the relationship between nannies and employers, this limitation may have diminished the degree of difference found in the nanny-employer dyads studied.

Finally, the research had a personal connection to the material, occupied multiple identities of socioeconomic privilege, and analyzed the data. Although participation was anonymous and subjects were recruited almost entirely online, it is notable that the demographic makeup of the subject pool resembled that of the researcher in terms of age, race, and education. This suggests that researcher bias may have played a role in influencing the sample. Due to these limitations in recruitment, sampling and positionality, the study sample does not accurately represent the population of nannies and the findings cannot be generalized to a broader group.

## **Summary**

This study examined the impact of two types of independent variables: socioeconomic disparity and relational factors. The impact of these variables on the nanny's experience of her employer's management style was measured by means of the three questionnaires. Scores on these measures constituted the dependent variables. The effects of socioeconomic variables were as follows: Educational disparity was associated with a significant difference in work control scores, such that nannies in more similar dyads reported less control over their work. Employer income status was also associated with a significant difference in work control scores, such that nannies for employers with very high incomes tended to report more control over their work than



the rest of the nanny group. Total benefits received by nannies were associated with two measures. More benefits were weakly correlated with higher work control scores and lower maternal gatekeeping measures. Finally, higher cumulative compensation (number of benefits plus wage bracket) was weakly correlated with nannies reporting more control over their work.

The effects of relational factors were as follows: Longer length of employment (more than two years versus less than two years) was weakly correlated with greater close monitoring by employers. Similarly, cumulative nanny-child contact was weakly correlated with more reported close monitoring. Perceived similarity between nanny and employer was associated with all three dependent variables: it was moderately correlated with lower close monitoring scores and higher work control scores, and it was weakly correlated with lower maternal gatekeeping scores.

Overall, the most significant socioeconomic influences were educational disparity in the nanny-employer dyad, high employer income, and the nanny's benefits and cumulative compensation. These variables tended to impact the work control score, which was involved in four correlations, and the maternal gatekeeping score. The most significant relational influences were the perceived similarity between nanny and employer, length of employment and cumulative nanny-child contact. These tended to impact the close monitoring score, which was involved in three out of the five relational correlations.

On the whole, the dependent variable most influenced by both socioeconomic and relational factors was the work control score, which was affected by five variables (educational disparity, high employer income, benefits, cumulative compensation, and perceived similarity). The least influenced score was the maternal gatekeeping, which was involved in only two correlations. Overall, the independent variables with the strongest effect appeared to be

perceived similarity (which impacted close monitoring and work control scores) and total benefits received (which impacted work control and maternal gatekeeping scores).

In conclusion, it appears that nannies who perceived themselves as being more similar to their employers reported less close monitoring, while the most closely watched nannies were those who worked for their employers for the longest and spent the most time with their charges. Likewise, nannies who felt similar to their employers and those who received more benefits reported less maternal gatekeeping. Participants who reported the most autonomy and flexibility on the job tended to work for very wealthy employers, and they were more highly compensated in terms of both wages and benefits. Those who reported greater work control perceived themselves as similar to their employers, but tended to have less education than their employers.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Macdonald (2010) describes the “paranormal” management strategy as one in which “trust is assumed” (Macdonald, 2010, 169). These employers give nannies a great deal of freedom: there is little monitoring or gatekeeping in these relationships, because the employer assumes that the nanny will “naturally’ make the same decisions that they would make” (Macdonald, 2010, 169). The study results support Macdonald’s theory that perceived similarity of nannies and employers contributes to a paranormal management dynamic. The findings show that nannies whose employers use paranormal management strategies (as indicated by high work control, low close monitoring and low maternal gatekeeping scores) tend to perceive themselves as similar to their employers. Nannies of paranormal employers also tend to be better paid and to receive more benefits, suggesting that they work for wealthier employers or perhaps that their employers are more inclined to view them as deserving of substantive compensation.

In contrast, the “puppeteer” management style is one in which trust is minimal, freedom

is limited, and decision-making is unilateral. These relationships are characterized by higher levels of close monitoring and maternal gatekeeping and lower work control scores. Macdonald posits that the reason for this strategy is because a lack of trust in the nanny precludes the employer from “granting [her] adult-level autonomy” (Macdonald, 2010, 169). This study found that longer employment terms and more cumulative nanny-child contact were associated with more close monitoring (one indicator of the puppeteer management style). In addition, similarity of education level was also found to be correlated with less work control. It is conceivable that when highly-educated nannies spend a lot of time with children, employers’ guilt about their inability to provide intensive mothering may lead them to develop a puppeteer management dynamic with the “shadow mother.” This and other potential explanations and implications for all of the study findings will be explored in Chapter V.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Discussion**

The subject of domestic work has attracted writers from many genres, from sociology to psychoanalysis. However, the nanny's experience of the cross-class employment relationship has been neglected in the clinical social work literature. This study updated Macdonald's (2010) groundbreaking work on nanny-employer relationships by applying her theory to a new area of focus: socioeconomic disparity. It explored how a variety of socioeconomic and relational factors impact the nanny-employer dyad, using the employer's management style as a window into the dynamic between the two. The data confirmed that similarity and difference in the dyad, both relational and socioeconomic, impact the nanny's experience of being managed.

The findings showed that nannies whose employers used 'paranormal' management strategies (as evidenced by high work control, low close monitoring and low maternal gatekeeping scores) were more likely to rate themselves as "similar" to or "like" their employers. Nannies of paranormal employers also tended to be better paid and received more benefits. In addition, very high employer incomes were associated with indicators of the paranormal management style. The findings also showed that longer employment terms and greater cumulative nanny-child contact were correlated with more close monitoring, a marker of the 'puppeteer' management style. Another indicator, work control, was associated with education level; nannies whose educational backgrounds were similar to those of their employers tended to report less autonomy in their work. In order to understand the meaning of these findings and

their relevance to clinical social work, it is useful to review Macdonald's management styles with an object relations lens.

This chapter will explore three distinct configurations of subject and object that appear in the management strategies outlined by Macdonald. 'Puppeteer' dyads consist of a nanny with little autonomy, and an employer whose gatekeeping and close monitoring suggest a lack of trust in secondary caregivers. These employers appear to be relating to nannies as objects—"shadow mothers" or placeholders for themselves. By contrast, in 'paranormal' dyads the nanny is more independent and receives less monitoring. In ceding their authority to that of the caregiver, it appears that paranormal employers treat nannies as placeholders for their own mothers, or perhaps as idealized mother-objects. Only in the rare "partnership" dyad did Macdonald observe two subjects collaborating with one another, with mutual respect and recognition of each other's influence. Rather than treating the nanny as an object, the employer trusts her as "a teammate who brings different, yet equally valuable, skills to their shared childrearing endeavor" (Macdonald, 2010, 170). This chapter will explore how similarity and difference may impact the object relationships that develop in each of the three management styles.

This study asked how socioeconomic disparity impacts the dynamics of cross-class relationships in which a woman of lower status is paid to care for the child of a wealthy parent. It investigated social, economic, and relational factors that might contribute to the development of a paranormal, puppeteer, or partnership management style. This chapter reviews the findings and their implications for clinical work. It applies theories of object relating and usage (as developed by Winnicott and elaborated by Benjamin) to the nanny-employer relationship, in order to examine the conditions under which an employer relates to a nanny as an object or as a subject. Finally, this chapter asks what lies beyond the margins of the caregiving dyad.

## **Nanny as Object**

Hegeman (2015) argued that “the role of nanny is uniquely complex stressful position” (Hegeman, 2015, 1), not only because of the stark power differential between caregiver and employer, but also because the nanny is asked “to tolerate ... the uncontrolled expressions of the most painful primitive emotions of the parents: unresolved idealizations, disappointments, abandonments, unmet needs” (Hegeman, 2015, 1). This quandary is exemplified by a scene in an essay from Davis and Hyams’ collection, in which the parent of an infant fantasizes about firing the immigrant nanny by screaming at her: “you not mother ... babies mine!” (Adams, 2006, 62). The employer’s fantasy demonstrates how the nanny’s placeholder role can put her “at risk for becoming an invisible scrim ... for the mother’s split-off and intolerable fantasies of herself and her child” (Scheftel, 2012, 262). Though paranormal and puppeteer dyads differ in terms of the nanny’s level of autonomy, in both we see the caregiver serving as a stand-in for her employer. These strategies position the nanny as a placeholder object rather than as an autonomous subject. In the puppeteer style, she is a ‘shadow mother’ (almost-as-good), and in the paranormal style, she is an idealized expert. Yet in both of these positions, the nanny serves as an object upon which the employer’s disavowed feelings of resentment, jealousy, worthlessness, and rage—about herself, toward her child, or about her own mother—can be projected and expressed.

Wrigley (1999) theorized that this subject-object placeholder dynamic is rooted in the ideology of intensive mothering. She pointed out that in order for a nanny to provide the kind of individualized care that upper-class employers want, she must be indistinguishable from the parent in terms of her nurturance, protectiveness, and love for the child. Yet these same nurturing, protective, and loving qualities pose a threat to the employer’s identity as the parent. For example, one contributor to Davis and Hyams’ book wrote that her children “cried for

Allison [the nanny], when they ought to have cried for Mommy” (Mitchard, 2006, 117).

Hegeman sums up this tension well, writing that “idealization of the role of ‘mother’ can lead to a sense of entitlement in the mother/employer of a nanny” (Hegeman, 2015, 2).

Wrigley proposed that employers’ ambivalence and guilt about spending time away from their children, and their desire to maintain an identity as the parent (subject), leads them to position the nanny as a placeholder (object). Her research confirmed that employers feel “conflicted both about leaving work and about leaving home,” as well as guilty for paying a caregiver to “do what they think they should be doing” (Wrigley, 1999, 172). In a similar vein, Stolorow (1994) argued that “situations of intense narcissistic injury and vulnerability” evoke intimacy-regulating defenses such as blame, shame, preoccupation and impulsivity (Stolorow, 1994, 7). Given these intrapsychic conflicts, it is conceivable that the presence of a nanny might provoke vulnerable feelings of insecurity and guilt in her employer, which are then defended against by establishing the nanny as an object.

For the nanny’s part, Wrigley points that professional caregivers are in the peculiar position of “selling their capacity to feel as well as their capacity to work” (Wrigley, 1999, 166). Similarly, Hegeman notes that the socioeconomic disparity between parents and nannies means that caregivers “must become adept at negotiating the binds and emotionally loaded tensions of these close relationships” (Hegeman, 2015, 4). Given parent-employers’ desire for nannies to be both part of the family and outside of it, professional caregivers must present themselves carefully in order to maintain the employment relationship. This complex transaction is at the heart of the nanny-employer dynamic. The caregiver positions herself as a non-threatening object: loving and caring, yet continually aware of her status as a paid placeholder.

## **Mother-object, Mother-subject**

Hoffman (2004) offers an alternate explanation for employers' tendency to view nannies as objects. His observational research, conducted with new mothers in a group setting, led him to conclude that his subjects "experience a sense of helplessness and anxiety and have difficulty tolerating aggression, ambivalence, and conflict" (Hoffman, 2004, 629). Hoffman suggested that this was due to the difficulty a new mother encounters in shifting from viewing herself "only as daughter (and thus helpless vis-à-vis her own child) to seeing herself as *the* mother (and thus competent)" (Hoffman, 2004, 635, emphasis in original). This transition from helpless daughter to capable mother represents a shift from being someone else's object (i.e., her own mother's baby) to being a subject (mother) in her own right. Hoffman argued that the conversion "from the daughter role to the mother role requires a great deal of psychic work" (Hoffman, 2002, 649). When a nanny is added to the dynamic, perhaps employers need to learn to navigate the changing constellations of subject and object in new ways.

Winnicott (1957) famously stated that "there is no such thing as a baby," by which he meant that the infant "cannot exist alone but is essentially part of a relationship" (Winnicott, 1957, 137) with its caregiver. In creating a baby, a new mother transforms into a parent. She begins to understand that she exists, from her baby's perspective, as an object within the infant's internal world of representations. But as Hoffman's research shows, new mothers may feel ambivalent about becoming mother-objects. Perhaps they long to go on being subjects, which conflicts with the baby's desire for a need-gratifying object. In this situation, class-privileged parents may turn to nannies to help them manage the competing needs for autonomy, subjectivity, nurturing, and identity within the caregiver-infant dyad. However, this presents a new dilemma for the new employer. She pays the nanny to perform the 'mothering' function, so



that she can be temporarily released from her role as the baby's object. Yet she does not want to be replaced—to have her subjectivity usurped or her identity as 'the mother' threatened. To resolve this dilemma, it is conceivable that employers choose to hire someone they can construct as an object, in the same way that they have become objects in their babies' minds.

Ehrensaft (2000) and Corbett (2001) described a similar phenomenon among lesbian mothers, noting a tendency to describe sperm donors and other "birth others" (Ehrensaft, 2000) in part-object terms. They noted that this defensive response sometimes conflicted with the children's need to view donors as whole objects. In the same way that a 'birth other' might represent a challenge to some parents' sense of their own legitimacy, the nanny might pose a similar threat. For example, children raised by nannies often view their secondary caregivers as maternal subjects, not placeholder objects. Given this, it is conceivable that employers might choose management styles which position themselves as subjects and nannies as objects in order to protect their 'parent' identity from the threat posed by the nanny.

Stolorow (1994) offered insight into this phenomenon with his depiction of the unconscious, which he described as made up of "affect states that have been evoked and faultily responded to within the child-caregiver system, and then defensively sequestered in an attempt to protect against retraumatization" (Stolorow, 1994, 6). Similarly, Hoffman noted that new parents can experience childrearing decisions as intrapsychic conflicts between themselves and their own internalized mother-objects. He observed that "new mothers can be preoccupied with their mothers and can replay their relationship with them transferentially with professionals and nannies" (Hoffman, 2004, 629). Drawing on Stern's (1995) concept of the "motherhood constellation," Hoffman conjectured that this "new psychic organization in the new mother" (Hoffman, 2004, 631) begins in pregnancy and in early primary maternal preoccupation. During

this time, her feelings toward her own mother become activated and intensified, and may be transferred onto other parental figures. For example, some of the mothers Hoffman observed projected “fantasied critical all-knowing mothers” (Hoffman, 2004, 640) onto group leaders, and that they often felt criticized by nannies. Stern coined the term “good grandmother transference” to describe how new mothers look to psychotherapists to gratify their “strong need to be valued, supported, aided, taught, and appreciated by an older maternal figure” (Hoffman, 2004, 643). In Hoffman’s study, he observed that the group leader often acted as a reassuring “stand-in for the mother’s mother” (Hoffman, 2004, 647), as in Stern’s ‘good grandmother transference.’

Intersubjective theory addresses how intrapsychic preoccupation with a mental object transforms into the relational capacity for “enjoying recognition with an other” (Benjamin, 1995, 3). Benjamin (1995) asked: “How does a child develop into a person who, as a parent, is able to recognize her or his own child?” (Benjamin, 1995, 3). Applying this question to the shift that Hoffman observed in new mothers, we might wonder how a parent’s internal representation of her own mother, and her concept of herself as a parent, could affect her ability to recognize the subjectivity of other caregivers. Benjamin wrote that “at the very moment we come to understand the meaning of *I, myself*, we are forced to see the limitations of that self” (Benjamin, 1995, 5, italics in original). At the very moment that a new parent establishes her identity, she must face its attendant vulnerability. She may be forced to realize her dependence on others whose presence both reifies and undermines her status as the primary caregiver. Perhaps, to cope with the anxiety of the mother/subject role, employers seek a new object as a placeholder upon which they externalize and work through their intrapsychic conflicts. The next section will take up the question of exactly what kind of object the employer needs the nanny to be.

## **Nanny as Transitional Object**

Writing about object use in his pediatric patients, Winnicott (1971) proposed that the transitional object is comforting precisely because it belongs to “a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged” (Winnicott, 1971, 17). He observed that “the infant assumes rights over the object” and that the transitional object “must never change, unless changed by the infant” (Winnicott, 1971, 7). The object is forced to endure “instinctual loving, and also hating,” even “pure aggression” (Winnicott, 1971, 7). Winnicott also observed that habits related to the transitional object persist into childhood, when the object provides soothing during times of anxiety or loneliness. In adolescence and adulthood the significance of the specific, tangible object lessens, but transitional ‘phenomena’ continue. Transitional experience becomes “diffused ... over the whole cultural field” (Winnicott, 1971, 7) in the form of creativity, spirituality, cultural practices, dreams and fantasy. Beginning with the assumption that transitional phenomena occur in adult relationships, this section will explore how aspects of transitional object use may be rearticulated in the nanny-employer dyad.

Winnicott emphasized that “it is not the object, of course, that is transitional” (Winnicott, 1971, 14). Rather, “the object represents the infant’s transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate” (Winnicott, 1971, 14). In a similar way, the nanny’s neutral role as a placeholder might represent, for the parent, a transitional space between home and work. This would allow the parent to alleviate her separation anxiety without interrupting her primary maternal preoccupation. Indeed, many of the authors in Davis and Hyams’ book described feelings of deep gratitude, trust, and love toward the nannies upon whom they depended—not unlike the toddler who insists on carrying a treasured stuffed animal everywhere she goes. In addition, a

number of the essays suggested that employers correspondingly experience the unique mix of possessiveness, aggression, and desire for control that also characterize infants' relationships with transitional objects. For example, one employer wrote about "vying for domestic territory and routine, irritation over tasks not accomplished in the ways I wanted, overindulgence or impatience with the children" (Neely, 2006, 37). Another recalled her surprise at smelling a new shampoo in her baby's hair, realizing her toddler had learned a nursery rhyme she had never heard, and seeing her child obey "rules that did not exist at our house" (Maynard, 2006, 68).

Many employers also wrote about feeling threatened by the nanny's relationship with their children, and of their fear that the nanny might usurp their role. One admitted she sought a caregiver who would "make sure that my daughter didn't love her more than she loved me" (Cheever, 2006, 76). Several professed a belief that children need only their 'true' mother, and expressed a wish to prove that they did not really 'need' a nanny. To manage this sense of maternal identity under siege, the nanny must assume a superposition akin to that of a parent: tolerating and surviving her employer's needs and whims, while also maintaining her own sense of self. In this position, she must be both real and not real, much like a transitional object. (In regard to the transitional object, Winnicott wrote that "we will never ask the question: 'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?'" [Winnicott, 1971, 17, italicized in original]). Just as the parent may be (in her child's mind) a part-object at some times, and at other times a whole object or a separate subject, the nanny can be seen as serving a similar role for her employer.

In many of the essays in Davis and Hyams' collection, the nanny is described as perfectly adapted to her employer's needs: she anticipates the parent's desires, senses her emotional states, and applies her own childcare expertise to make parenting easier for the employer. This brings to

mind Winnicott's idea of 'illusion,' in which the mother's "almost exact" (Winnicott, 1971, 14) gratification of her baby's desires causes the infant to imagine that he or she is omnipotent. However, while Winnicott wrote that "transitional phenomena represent the early stages of the use of illusion," he emphasized that "the mother's main task is gradually to disillusion the infant" (Winnicott, 1971, 15). Likewise, in the course of the many of Davis and Hyams' narratives, employers' gratitude toward nannies fades as they become more confident in their own skills and secure in their identities as parents. Nannies who excelled at being reassuring objects suddenly find themselves subject to their employers' aggression, resentment, or critique. It is at this point that "the typical tugs of war" (Neely, 2006, 37) between parents and nannies intensify and take on deeper meaning: they come to represent the process of object destruction.

### **Destruction & Survival of the Object**

If we assume that the nanny represents to the parent a sort of transitional object, then the nanny can be seen as participating in the employer's developmental shift between object relating and object usage. In order to accomplish this shift, Winnicott theorized that the subject first must establish the object as "outside the area of the subject's control ... an entity in its own right" (Winnicott, 1971, 120). In accepting its external nature, "the subject destroys the object" (ibid). If the object survives destruction, the subject emerges from this developmental process with a consolidated sense of self, a feeling of security and faith in its own subjectivity, and the capacity for object usage. Applying this sequence to the nanny-employer dyad, we can imagine that the outcome is similar when the nanny-object tolerates the employer-subject's aggression. If the caregiver can survive her employer's anxious distance (paranormal) or attempts at control (puppeteer)—she is destroyed as a transitional object and reestablished as one that can be 'used' in the Winnicottian sense.

“The object is always being destroyed,” Winnicott wrote. “This destruction becomes the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object; that is, an object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control” (Winnicott, 1971, 126). Hoffman’s research suggests that in early parenthood that real object might be the employer’s own mother, for whom the nanny (the transitional object) is asked to stand in. Benjamin wrote that “in real life ... there is no perfect process of destruction and survival; there is always also internalization” (Benjamin, 1995, 6), and perhaps the reverse is also true. The presence of an internalized mother-object could contribute to an employer’s tendency to treat the caregiver as an object. In other words, the nanny’s position as a new maternal object might reactivate unresolved conflicts internalized during the employer’s developmental process of object-destruction with her own mother.

Benjamin (1988), drawing on Winnicott, proposed that whereas in infancy object-destruction is instinctual, “in adulthood object-destruction includes the intention *to discover* if the other will survive” (Benjamin, 1988, 38, italics original). If we imagine that the nanny-employer dyad begins as a subject-object relationship, then the parent's management style toward the caregiver might be understood as an effort to discover if the nanny-object can survive and be ‘used.’ However, in the paranormal and puppeteer management styles the power differential seems to encumber this process. By instituting a hierarchy between nanny and employer, they exhibit what Benjamin (1995) described as “the unfortunate tendency to collapse other subjects into the rubric *objects*” (Benjamin, 1995, 1, emphasis original).

For example, in the paranormal strategy there is very little interaction or recognition between nanny and employer, making it difficult for the process of object destruction and survival to take place. Rather, the self-governing nanny eclipses the insecure parent, collapsing the dyad. And in the puppeteer strategy, high levels of monitoring and gatekeeping do not allow

enough space in the dyad for mutual recognition to occur. Instead, the relationship collapses into one of domination in order to preserve the employer's identity as only legitimate subject.

Benjamin (1993) argued that “relations of domination grow out of the breakdown of that paradoxical tension between recognition and negation/assertion” (Benjamin, 1993, 447). In the subject-object positions of the management styles explored so far, the nanny functions as a (transitional) object that can be related to, but not ‘used,’ because she cannot accomplish the process of destruction and survival. In these relationships there is either too much space or too little, interaction is avoided, and spontaneous gestures do not occur. The paranormal and puppeteer management strategies illustrate what Benjamin (1995) described as “the difficulty each subject has in recognizing the other as an equivalent center of experience” (Benjamin, 1995, 1). Without a real mutuality—back and forth, responsiveness and recognition—in the dyad, neither can ‘use’ the other in the Winnicottian sense.

### **Application to Findings**

**Paranormal dyads.** The paranormal management strategy appears to arise in part from employers' lack of confidence in themselves and reluctance to “act on their own convictions” (Hoffman, 2004, 651). Hoffman observed that new mothers experienced anxiety and helplessness about their ability to be good caregivers, and often expressed doubt about themselves as parents. Because of this, he found that new mothers often assumed “that someone else ... knows how to be a mother better” and believed “that their own mothers or nannies or professionals would do a much better job with the baby” (Hoffman, 2004, 634). The paranormal perspective appears in many of the essays in Davis and Hyams' collection. Paranormal contributors wrote of feeling helpless and dependent at the outset of the nanny-employer relationship, and seemed to idealize nannies' skill in proportion to their own self-doubt. For

example, one parent recalled that “in searching for someone to teach me how to take care of a baby, I thought it wise to ... seek the services of a paid professional” (Adams, 2006, 51). Another praised the nanny who “gently parented me into being a mother” (Cheever, 2006, 76). This placement of the nanny in the role of teacher, consultant, and even surrogate parent exemplifies the paranormal management strategy.

Hoffman identified two distinct varieties of new mothers within the category Macdonald termed ‘paranormal.’ The first type believed that “only other people, particularly ‘professional experts,’ know the right answers” (Hoffman, 2004, 651). Hoffman observed aspects of Stern’s ‘good grandmother transference’ in this “displacement of ‘expertise’ onto the nannies” (Hoffman, 2004, 642). In this type, he noted that the professional caregiver seemed to represent “a stand-in for the mother’s mother, who knows the right answer” (Hoffman, 2004, 642). While parents in the first category were characterized by their faith in outside experts, those in the second category idealized their own mothers. “Convinced that they are not real mothers and that only their own mothers are” (Hoffman, 2004, 651), and fearing they “could never be as good a mother as her mother was or is” (Hoffman, 2004, 630), these parents “constantly seek advice and try to find the ‘right’ way to parent in an attempt to perfect their childrearing and their children” (Hoffman, 2004, 651). In both types, the idealized mother-object appears to loom large in the internal constellation of mother, child, grandmother, and nanny.

Macdonald theorized that a perception of similarity between nannies and employers was a factor in the development of the paranormal management dynamic. The findings from this study support Macdonald’s theory. Nannies who perceived themselves as more similar to their employers reported less close monitoring and more autonomy, which are indicators of the excessively trusting paranormal strategy. In addition, these participants also reported receiving



higher pay and more benefits, and they tended to work for very wealthy employers.

Nannies' experience of greater trust in dyads with a higher degree of perceived similarity suggests multiple conflicting conclusions. On the one hand, it is possible that employers prefer to hire nannies whom they view as similar to them, and that they tend to trust caregivers whom they perceive as similar. If similarity is linked with recognition, then employers might view a socioeconomically dissimilar nanny as less of a trustworthy subject, and this would affect her management of the 'shadow mother.' This could also explain the phenomenon of exploitation in many domestic employment dyads, which Wrigley, Gorbán and Tizziani have argued is linked with socioeconomic disparity.

However, it is also possible that participants whose employers recognized them as autonomous and capable subjects, and who compensated them accordingly, were consequently more likely to rate themselves as "similar" to those employers. In addition, it is impossible to determine whether nannies who rated themselves as similar happened to work for wealthier employers, or if wealthier employers are more likely to hire caregivers they perceive as similar to them. The data did show that nannies of employers with very high incomes reported greater control over their work, suggesting that the wealthiest employers are more likely to use a paranormal management style. Since the study did not interview employers or address hiring decisions, causality cannot be established. However, the findings do indicate that recognition, perceived similarity, and trust all play a role in paranormal dyad dynamics.

Finally, it is also possible that perceived similarity does not indicate the presence of recognition or trust at all. Rather, it could represent the negation of difference. After all, perceived similarity is just that—a perception of likeness, which could very well be projection. Aron and Lechich (2012) caution that "mutuality ... does not imply symmetry or equality" (Aron

& Lechich, 2012, 215), and we must be careful not to equate the two. The paranormal management style might preserve the appearance of trust by avoiding acknowledgment of disparity. Ignorance of difference does not necessarily equal recognition of similarity. Ironically, in assuming that a socioeconomically similar ('like me') nanny is a trusted subject, the employer might fail to recognize the nanny's actual subjectivity, which includes all the ways she is separate, different, and not quite 'like me.'

However, the fantasy of sameness seems especially difficult to maintain in domestic employment relationships, which are inherently intimate and cross-class. Eventually the dissimilarity between subject and object must become apparent; employer and nanny must each face that the other is unlike them in fundamental ways. What happens when the assumption of similarity breaks down? Does the tentative trust disintegrate—or might the opportunity for authenticity allow for the development of recognition (the partnership style)? This question will be explored later in the chapter.

**Puppeteer dyads.** At first glance, the puppeteer strategy appears to be the inverse of the paranormal style. While paranormal employers minimize surveillance and gatekeeping and encourage nannies' autonomy, puppeteer employers monitor and micromanage nannies. This study's findings showed that indicators of the puppeteer management style were associated with longer employment terms (more than two years) and higher cumulative nanny-child contact (i.e., the most hours per week over the longest period of time). In other words, nannies who had worked for the same employer for several years, spending many hours each week with children, reported less autonomy and more close monitoring by employers. In addition, participants who had achieved comparable education levels to their employers reported experiencing less control over their work than those who were not as well-educated as their employers.

The work of Hegeman (2015) and Hoffman helps to place these findings in systemic and intrapsychic context. Hegeman proposed that “the commodification of the caregiver relationship may itself be a parental defense against the parental reaction to the helplessness of infants and children—parents may have the illusion that they can control the nanny and thus themselves have more control” (Hegeman, 2015, 1). In other words, upper-class employers hire nannies with the unconscious goal of attaining a greater degree of power in parenting. They may at first try to accomplish this by choosing caregivers who seem similar to them. However, when disparity in the relationship (economic or relational) becomes apparent, the employer may realize that the nanny is not really similar, and the trust between them breaks down. This progression might be more likely to occur over a longer employment period.

Macdonald’s research suggested that puppeteer relationships that lasted longer than one year “did not necessarily change, or, at most, puppeteer management would evolve into paranormal management as the employer felt less anxious” (Macdonald, 2010, 172). This study’s findings both confirm and contest Macdonald’s. Employment terms greater than two years were associated with puppeteer qualities, suggesting that as time goes on, especially when the nanny works a large number of hours, the puppeteer strategy becomes fixed. Particularly when the nanny is similar to the employer in terms of education level, feelings of parental guilt and insecurity may predominate, and the employer may have an increasingly difficult time containing her anxiety in regard to the caregiver. Perhaps the nanny stirs the parent’s oedipal anxieties, or activates possessive feelings toward the other (the child, or the employer’s own mother). Given these dynamics, it is conceivable that the employer might maintain or develop a puppeteer management strategy toward the ‘shadow mother’ in order to defend against her feelings, maintain contact with the child, and preserve the illusion of intensive mothering.

Hoffman offers a slightly different explanation. He suggests that the employer views the nanny as “her own jealous mother, who feels she is the only one who knows how to be maternal and thus wants to take over the childrearing” (Hoffman, 2004, 642). He describes a defensive response in which “the new mother may aspire to be a better mother than her own mother” (Hoffman, 2004, 630). In projecting her own internalized mother-object onto the caregiver, the employer can be seen as trying to use the nanny in the same way that the infant uses the parent. Just as the mother’s breast becomes a “symbolic third ... an object that the mother doesn’t control” (Benjamin, 2009, 443) but which the infant interacts with, so might the employer seek to develop the nanny-object into a ‘shared third.’ By attempting to control and destroy the nanny-object in the way that an infant does, the parent might be trying to see if the ‘third’ can survive.

Finally, there is yet another way to interpret why longer employment terms and greater nanny-child contact are associated with traits of the puppeteer management strategy. While in the paranormal style the nanny’s ‘expert’ status balances her ‘employee’ position to create a fragile trust, the puppeteer style establishes a clear hierarchy. Monitoring and gatekeeping reinforce the nanny’s relative lack of autonomy. From the study results, it is conceivable to conclude that the puppeteer style’s hierarchical arrangement and defined roles allow for more stable, and therefore longer lasting, employment relationships. However, this association does not imply causality; just as in the clinical relationship, the therapist’s countertransference might be either the catalyst for the client’s transference, the reaction to it, or both, it is likewise difficult to sort out the relative impact of nanny and employer on the nanny’s experience of the dyad.

### **Nanny as Subject**

So far, the nanny has been likened to a (transitional) object, with attention to the sequence of object destruction, survival, and usage within the nanny-employer relationship. This emphasis

on nanny-as-object inadvertently imitates the clinical literature, in which the nanny's subjective experience has long been overlooked. Hegeman argued that this omission contributes to the societal and intrapsychic projections onto the nanny, writing that "denial of recognition of her importance influences her transferences and transferences to her" (Hegeman, 2015, 1). Because the intention of this study is to expand the traditional focus on the mother-infant dyad to include other caregivers as valid subjects, it is important to consider the idea that the nanny might represent something other than an object to her employer.

Unlike an infant's object-representations, dynamics between adults are nuanced and there is often a capacity for recognition. Benjamin proposed that this recognition of other other's subjectivity is essential to the subject's sense of self, writing that "the other must be recognized as a subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity" (Benjamin, 1995, 2). Applying this concept to the nanny-employer relationship, it follows that the employer cannot fully feel like a true subject until the nanny is recognized as one, too. Wrigley offers an example that illustrates the importance of the nanny's subjectivity to her employer. Recounting an interview with a parent who had a mutually satisfactory employment relationship with a nanny named Lydia, Wrigley noted that "the mother's genuine liking for Lydia rested on a bedrock of self-interest. She thought if Lydia was not happy, she would not do a good job" (Wrigley, 1999, 168). Wrigley concluded that parents need nannies to be more than selfless objects. For their children's benefit and for their own, employers seek caregivers who "are whole human beings" and who exercise their own "initiative, judgment, and motivation" (Wrigley, 1999, 164).

Benjamin (1988) argued that "mutual recognition cannot be achieved through obedience, though identification with the other's power, or through repression. It requires finally, contact with the other" (Benjamin, 1988, 40). Perhaps, in making contact with the nanny and recognizing

her subjectivity, the employer affirms the reality of her own identity as a parent. In watching the nanny-subject care for the baby, the employer is reassured that she can survive her own transformation from daughter-object to mother-subject. Viewed from this perspective, the process of object destruction and survival establishes the nanny not as an object for use, but as a subject whom the employer can recognize and relate to in a mature way.

### **Threats to the Nanny's Subjectivity**

The nanny's position as a subject appears to be a challenging one for employers to maintain. Freed's (1998) article in an upper-class lifestyle magazine, entitled "How to Treat Your Nanny," offers a window into the tension between the desire to control the nanny and the need to recognize her subjectivity. Freed begins with an anecdote in which her young child accidentally calls her by the nanny's name. She acknowledges that "some mothers are jealous when their children call the baby sitter 'Mommy' or otherwise demonstrate filial attachment" (Freed, 1998), but claims that she does not share this feeling. This opening position captures the defensiveness and anxiety felt by those parent-employers for whom the nanny-child bond can represent a threat to the parent's identity. Freed's underlying sense of vulnerability becomes apparent when she mentions homicidal nanny Louise Woodward and cautions that when hiring a caregiver, "there's no ignoring the fact that we're taking a gamble" (Freed, 1998).

Freed boasts about having given the nanny a day off for a religious holiday and reminds readers to pay the nanny "more than the cleaning woman, for God's sake" (Freed, 1998). These anecdotes, coupled with the title of the essay, would seem to support the conclusion that the nanny represents an object to employers such as Freed. However, later in the column Freed exhorts readers to treat the nanny as part of the family. She argues that this recognition is necessary precisely because of the nanny's role as a maternal placeholder. Freed contends that

the nanny's job is to "be your surrogate and look after what you prize most in the world ... to bond with your children—indeed, love them" (Freed, 1998). To underscore her point that a nanny is "not just any employee," she emphasizes the similarities between herself and the nanny she employs, describing them as "just a couple of working girls" (Freed, 1998). She highlights the nanny's superior experience ("ten years on me"), calls the nanny her "partner in parenting," and expresses gratitude that the nanny "makes my life, such as I have arranged it, possible" (Freed, 1998). However, her recognition of the nanny's expertise and contribution is short-lived. Near the end of the piece, Freed reasserts her position in the hierarchy, writing: "I am the manager; she works for me. Ultimately, what I say goes" (Freed, 1998).

The contrasting refrains of this essay speak to the same essential dilemma faced by the mothers Wrigley interviewed. Caught between the desire to "respect the caregiver yet have the children raised as [they] wished" (Wrigley, 1999, 168), parent-employers in Wrigley's study responded by treating nannies in a variety of ways that cannot be classified as entirely subject-object or subject-subject relations. Some micromanaged their employees but granted them "authority within a narrow sphere," while others gave nannies a great deal of leeway but covertly tried to "reinforce middle-class values in other ways" (Wrigley, 1999, 168). These strategies illustrate the lure of subject-object dynamics, or what Benjamin (2004) terms "doer-done to" roles. It is clear from these vignettes that the collaborative relationship is difficult to maintain, given the tensions that threaten to collapse a relationship of mutuality (a subject-subject bond) into one composed of a dominant subject ("doer") and a subjugated object ("done-to").

Writing about these tensions, Benjamin (1995) draws on Hegel to explain how the roots of this tension lie in the conflict between the desire for independence and the need for recognition. "In trying to establish itself as an independent entity," she writes, "the self must yet

recognize the other as a subject like itself in order to be recognized by the other” (Benjamin, 1995, 4). This is the paradox in which employers of nannies find themselves. The management strategy they choose represents their attempt to resolve the tension between nanny-as-object and nanny-as-subject. Whether it succeeds in finding a balance of recognition and independence (as in partnership), or fails (as in the puppeteer and paranormal styles) appears to depend on the employer’s ability to internalize the nanny as an object or as separate subject.

### **Social Devaluation of Nannies**

In addition to these intrapsychic factors, socioeconomic disparity and the societal devaluation of caregiving work also contribute to the difficulty in recognizing nannies’ subjectivity. Botticelli (2006) has argued that power in society is linked with not needing to perform caregiving, as evidenced by the fact that “to be powerful is to not have to concern oneself with the question of whether and how one will be taken care of” (Botticelli, 2006, 77). He proposed that the devaluation of caregiving work “goes hand in hand with the fact that traditionally women do it” (Botticelli, 2006, 74), and that “the value of care is kept low by its association with ‘lesser’ social values” (Botticelli, 2006, 77) such as intimacy, privacy, vulnerability and dependence. Botticelli describes domestic workers as “virtual slaves” (Botticelli, 2006, 72) and views nannies as objects of exchange whose reproductive labor (cooking, cleaning, childrearing) is bought or traded like property. While the argument may seem contentious, it cannot be disputed that the social devaluation of nannies’ work contributes to their lack of recognition as subjects.

In addition to the devaluation of her profession, the nanny also must contend with the socioeconomic disparity between herself and her employer. Hegeman has written that “the nanny relationship brings the income inequality of this society into sharp relief” (Hegeman, 2015, 4).



Since “those with the most power and social influence” (Wrigley, 1999, 173) tend to choose individualized, home-based care, income disparity is omnipresent in nanny-employer dyads. For example, this study found that the highest-paid nannies made barely a fifth of the gross annual income that the highest-paid employers earned. Layton (2002) proposed that the presence of inequality challenges “the healthy desire to hold wishes for both assertion and recognition in tension” (Layton, 2002, 196). Since a majority of nannies are women of color, this economic inequality is compounded by racism and sexism, further destabilizing the nanny’s social position.

Socioeconomic disparity and the societal devaluation of caregiving work affect not only employers’ attitude toward nannies’ subjectivity, but also the hiring practices of the domestic labor market. Researchers Macdonald and Merrill (2009) observed that employers of nannies have “very specific ... ideas about the ‘type’ of person who should care for their children” (Macdonald & Merrill, 2009, 121). They found that these ideas varied by region, but were invariably informed by socioeconomic factors. The researchers concluded that race, ethnicity, gender, age, and social class functioned as “signifiers” for employers, indicating “the kinds of emotional labor ... they believe a worker can successfully perform” (Macdonald & Merrill, 2009, 125). They argued that segmentation in domestic work is “hardly accidental” because caring labor is shaped by “the meanings inherent in particular services and cultural assumptions about who can best provide them” (Macdonald & Merrill, 2009, 115). By evaluating the nanny’s labor potential according to racial, class, and gender classifications, employers assess her in terms of object-categories, rather than recognizing her as a unique and equal subject.

As the range of threats to the nanny’s subjectivity demonstrates, the position of nanny-as-subject is a fragile one. Yet while the nanny certainly vulnerable to becoming “invisible and disenfranchised because she is shut out by cultural values and economic devaluation” (Hegeman,

2015, 1), the nuanced reality of everyday power dynamics do not fit neatly into the binary of doer and done-to. In such “complementary” relationships, Benjamin points out that “each person can play only one role at a time: one person is recognized, the other negated, one is subject, the other object” (Benjamin, 1995, 7). As an alternative, she offers a new paradigm: intersubjective thirdness, in which each party recognizes the other as a legitimate subject in her own right. Benjamin suggests that subjugation occurs when this mutual recognition breaks down into subject and object, doer and done to. Only through object destruction and survival can subject-object relationships “move beyond the realm of submission and retaliation to a realm of mutual respect” (Benjamin, 1988, 39). The next section will explore the dynamics of dyads in this realm.

### **Development of the Partnership Strategy**

**Partnership through mutual recognition.** While this study did not specifically solicit indicators of the partnership management style, evidence of it may be inferred from nannies’ scores on the three instruments. For work control, the median score was higher than the middle of the range, suggesting that most participants experienced at least moderate amounts of autonomy and independence in their work. Scores were similar for maternal gatekeeping, with a majority of nannies rating their employers’ behavior in the middle of the range. For close monitoring, there was an extremely broad range of responses but the median score was slightly below the middle of the range. This suggests that while surveillance of nannies varies widely according to management style, there was a significant group of respondents who experienced lower-than-average levels of monitoring.

Viewed from an intersubjective perspective, both the paranormal and puppeteer management styles appear to consist of an active, ‘expert,’ or controlling role, complemented by a passive, ‘novice,’ or ‘done-to’ role. In contrast to the splitting observed in these strategies, the

partnership style requires the employer to achieve Klein's 'depressive position,' in which "the subject attains a sense of history and of responsibility for destructiveness as well as an acceptance of loss and an appreciation of the independent existence of the Other" (Benjamin, 2006, 117). For her part, the nanny must also possess the ability to tolerate her employer's inevitable projections. The mid-range scores on the three indicators suggest that many of the participants surveyed belonged to dyads that had evolved beyond doer-done to dynamics.

In these partnership dyads, there exists an interplay between two subjects—what Benjamin described as "a tension that requires the equal magnetism of both sides" (Benjamin, 1995, 4). This study found the puppeteer management style was associated with longer employment terms and more cumulative nanny-child contact. In shorter-term employments or dyads with less overall contact between nanny and child, it is possible that there is more space for trust to develop into partnership. Perhaps, since the employer can maintain her identity as the primary caregiver, the nanny seems like less of a threat; both can enjoy what Benjamin (1990) terms the "joy of intersubjective attunement" (Benjamin, 1990, 38). This sense that "this other can share my feeling" (ibid) allows for the partnership style to emerge.

**Partnership through power struggle.** Yet in addition to joy, partnership dyads may also involve conflict. Benjamin (1995) considered the power struggle "inherent in subject-subject relations" (Benjamin, 1995, 8) because "the confrontation with the other's subjectivity and with the limits of self-assertion is difficult to negotiate" (Benjamin, 1995, 5). Freed's essay illustrates this difficulty. She acknowledges "competition" between herself and the nanny, and admits to a history of conflict between them about grocery receipts, the daily diary, and the weekly log sheet she required the nanny to keep (Freed, 1998). Looking at this power struggle from a developmental perspective, there seems to be a parallel between the challenges articulated by

Freed and the ‘rapprochement’ stage of Mahler’s separation-individuation theory of child development.

In this stage, which Mahler believed occurs between 15 and 24 months of age, the toddler gains independence but must learn to tolerate the resulting separation from the parent.

Benjamin describes rapprochement as “the crisis of recognizing the other” (Benjamin, 1995, 5).

In the face of her child’s will and subjectivity, the parent is forced to recognize that her toddler is not longer “the mother’s own mental fantasy, no longer *her* object” (ibid). Responding to a child at this developmental stage, the parent must balance her own subjectivity with that of her toddler—“to balance assertion and recognition” (Benjamin, 1995, 5). What is unique about rapprochement is that both child and parent are asked to perform the same task at the same time. Each must survive acceptance of the other’s independence.

In the nanny-employer relationship, the nanny can be seen as performing a similar function for her employer as the parent does in rapprochement. Like a parent, she must respect the autonomy of her employer while also maintaining her own. And like the parent, she must tolerate the employer’s helplessness, aggression, and desire for control. Viewed from this perspective, the hierarchical relationship that can develop between employer and nanny echoes the toddler’s initial response to helplessness. Early in rapprochement, the toddler undergoes an experience of “losing omnipotence” in which he or she is faced with the reality of dependence on a parent who is “an outside, uncontrollable being” (Benjamin, 1993, 449).

Benjamin (2009) has called mutual recognition “the counterbalance to omnipotence” (Benjamin, 2009, 443), but she also notes that it is “a capacity of individual development that is only unevenly realized” (Benjamin, 1990, 35). More often, the discovery of difference and of conflicting needs results in power struggle, due to the “breakdown of recognition between self

and other” (Benjamin, 1995, 7). If the parent is unable to balance the competing needs for independence of herself and her child, then “omnipotence continues, attributed either to the mother or the self; in neither case can we say that the development of mutual recognition has been furthered” (Benjamin, 1995, 5). Between nannies and employers, the same process can be said to occur: omnipotence in the parent gives rise to the puppeteer management strategy, while omnipotence in the nanny underlies the paranormal style.

First (1988) proposed that the experience of separateness in toddlerhood creates the foundation for the achievement of mutuality in adulthood. In rapprochement, the child’s initial reaction to separation is “characterized by the spirit of pure retaliation and reversal—‘I’ll do to you what you do to me’” (Benjamin, 1995, 7). But through symbolic play and imagination, “gradually the child begins to identify with the mother’s subjective experience” and “moves from a retaliatory world of control to a world of mutual understanding and shared feeling” (Benjamin, 1995, 7). Just as the toddler must learn to recognize the parent’s subjectivity in rapprochement, so might a new parent need to acquire this skill in relation to a nanny. From this perspective, paranormal and puppeteer management strategies seem to represent developmental stages on the way to the partnership style. If as Benjamin (1995) proposed, “complementarity is a step on the road to mutuality” (Benjamin 1995, 8), then the employer’s ability to trust the nanny as an equally capable caregiver is a developmental milestone. Illustrating this, Freed concludes her essay by acknowledging that: “there is, after all, more than one way to load the dishwasher. And, I’ve even come to see, more than one way to raise my children” (Freed, 1998).

**Partnership through object usage.** Winnicott theorized that when ‘relating’ to an object, the subject experiences it as part of its own mind or even under its own control. In order to learn to “use” the object, the subject must come to realize that it is “an entity in its own right”

which exists “outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control” (Winnicott, 1971, 120).

Winnicott wrote that “object usage involves consideration of the nature of the object” (Winnicott, 1971, 126), demonstrating that recognition is a key feature of the transition from object relating to object usage. Benjamin elaborated this idea to show how recognition of the other’s subjectivity is contingent on the process of object usage. So far, the partnership style has been equated with the intersubjective (subject-subject) dynamic, and has been likened to Benjamin’s concept of mutual recognition. But how exactly does the achievement of object usage allow for the development of the partnership style?

Axelmann’s (2009) research on limit seeking and setting in parents and children offers some insight into this question. Axelmann termed omnipotence “the key feature” of object relating, which he described as “a one sided, self-focused way of interacting that is inflated with fantasy and desire” (Axelmann, 2009, 96). Axelmann argued that limit seeking, “destructive behavior on the part of the child, and survival on the part of the object” (Axelmann, 2009, 96) are essential elements of the transition between object relating and object usage. In addition, he proposed that effective limit setting is the “critical parental task” for parents of children in this developmental stage (Axelmann, 2009, 102).

Commenting on Winnicott, Benjamin (1993) wrote that: “the subject through destruction (and the object’s survival) creates reality” (Benjamin, 1993, 450-451). Perhaps the employer’s relationship with the nanny-object represents a repetition of the developmental process of object-destruction, object-survival, and object-usage. Like the transition to object usage, early parenthood involves separation, vulnerability, dependence, loss of omnipotence, and the creation of a new reality. For the employer, limit-seeking or limit-setting might represent an attempt to determine if the nanny can survive. Each needs the other to survive the experience of limit-

setting in order to reach a balance of power. In attacking the shadow mother, the parent can be seen as trying to destroy the object in order to confirm that she, the parent herself, exists. When the nanny survives, the parent is reassured that she can, too. “In this way,” Winnicott wrote, “a world of shared reality is created which the subject can use and which can feed back other-than-me substance into the subject” (Winnicott, 1971, 127).

For Benjamin, the achievement of shared reality through recognition “completes the picture of separation and explains what there is beyond internalization” (Benjamin, 1995, 7). However, she also cautions that “when shared reality does not survive destruction, then complementary structures and ‘relating’ to the inner object predominate” (Benjamin, 1995, 7). This suggests that if the nanny does not survive the process of object-destruction, a relationship of domination (the puppeteer style) could develop in which the employer’s subjectivity becomes the only valid subjectivity. Likewise, if the employer is unable to feel sufficiently reassured of her own validity as a subject and as the parent, then a self-negating style (the paranormal strategy) might develop. The puppeteer and paranormal management styles can be seen as failed attempts on the way to object usage, in which lack of mutual recognition leads the relationship to collapse into a doer-done to hierarchy.

The articulation of object relating and object usage in the three management styles suggests that the capacity for mutual recognition may constitute a developmental task not only of early childhood, but also in adulthood. In early parenthood, the establishment of a partnership style between nanny and employer represents the successful completion of this task: both subjects survive and mutually recognize one another. As Benjamin (1995) describes, “the outcome of this process is ... love, the sense of discovering the other. (‘I destroyed you!’ ‘I love you!’)” (Benjamin, 1995, 6). In partnership relationships, recognition depends on object usage,

which requires limit-seeking and limit-setting (object destruction). Only through destruction, survival, and use of the object can the employer let go of “omnipotence,” a process that is “necessary for developing a capacity to experience the other as a separate self” (Aron & Lechich, 2012, 216). From this perspective, object usage in the nanny-employer relationship allows for the development of the intersubjective dynamic from which the partnership style emerges. In this way, partnership represents one solution to what Benjamin described as “the paradox of recognition ... a *constant tension* between recognizing the other and asserting the self” (Benjamin, 1995, 5, italics in original). By maintaining this tension without collapsing into doer-done to hierarchy, the partnership dyad keeps alive the possibility of intersubjective relating.

### **Relevance to Clinical Social Work**

Winnicott stated that difficulties with the transition to object usage are “the most irksome of all the early failures that come for mending” (Winnicott, 1971, 120) in psychotherapy. Indeed, many of the developmental junctures explored so far (transitional objects, object-destruction and survival, the use of an object, and mutual recognition) are resurrected and worked through in the clinical relationship. Just as the parent might watch the nanny to see how the nanny survives, psychotherapy clients observe “the ways in which their analysts deal with their own inevitable conflicts as well as conflicts of interest between themselves and their patients” (Aron & Lechich, 2012, 215). In many ways, the role of a psychotherapist and that of a nanny are quite similar. Both must cultivate a ‘holding environment’ in which they are “really playing, with an open, curious, careless freedom to the interaction” (Weksler, 2015, 22) while also paying attention to pace and timing. From this perspective, the nanny can be likened to what Ogden (1994) termed the “intersubjective analytic third”—a type of transitional space that permits the other to be freed from habitual patterns of relating into more creative ones.



Freud may have called nursemaids “worthless female material,” but today the psychotherapy profession is widely considered to be a form of caring work. And at the same time that ideas of care and the concept of caring labor have “gained salience as defining features of our practice” (Botticelli, 2006, 71), the field of psychotherapy has also become more female-dominated (Carey, 2011). Given that the concept of care has historically been under-theorized in the clinical literature, it is especially important to address the role of socioeconomic disparities in a profession increasingly carried out by women. Botticelli argued that to the degree that clinical work involves nurturing, “it becomes susceptible to the devaluation to which such work has perennially been subject” (Botticelli, 2006, 74). As a result, the issues intrinsic to commodified care work are becoming relevant to the practice of psychotherapy.

Admittedly, the roles of nanny and psychotherapist are very different. As a childcare professional, the nanny cannot directly explore her employer’s intrapsychic realm, just as a therapist cannot perform embodied acts of caregiving. Furthermore, the power dynamic in the nanny-employer relationship is more extreme due to the inherent socioeconomic disparity between the two. However, childcare and clinical work both involve the provision of care within the context of a dyad (or triad). Botticelli argues that “aspects of the work performed by nannies and maids can at times resemble psychotherapy” and that “as analysts we too, like domestic workers, are involved in providing care” (Botticelli, 2006, 73). He points out that both childcare and psychotherapeutic dyads are “mutual but asymmetrical” (Aron, 1996) relationships in which an illusion of altruism is maintained. Like nannies, therapists may downplay “the effort of providing care . . . as it is important for the care receiver to feel that the giver is doing it because she really wants to do it” (Botticelli, 2006, 73). At times, this illusion of altruism may obscure the commodified nature of the relationship.

Hegeman argues that the nanny-employer bond is fundamentally a commercial one: “the exchange of money for time and attention, rather than the person-to-person relationship regulated by emotional bonds which we idealize” (Hegeman, 2015, 2). Yet at the same time, the therapist-client and nanny-employer dyads are more than just a financial transactions. They are more like kinship relationships, defined not by biology but by the intentional forging of bonds between one subject and another. But is that ‘other’ an object, or a separate subject? Perhaps it is more important that this question be asked than that it be answered. Aron & Lechich proposed that intersubjective recognition depends on the maintenance of the tension “between subjects relating to others as objects and relating to them as subjects, between wanting to dominate another and wanting to know that person” (Aron & Lechich, 2012, 216). Similarly, Benjamin argued that power dynamics need not be resolved, but can continue to exist as a continuous breaking down and renewal of tension between subjects. This intersubjective ‘play,’ which seems to occur in the partnership dyad, may also be present in the clinical encounter. “What we find in the good hour,” writes Benjamin, is “a sustained tension” (Benjamin, 1995, 9). This tension allows for creativity and recognition. It is, “in part, what is therapeutic about the relationship” (Benjamin, 1995, 9).

### **Beyond the Caregiving Dyad**

The beginning of this chapter explored the dynamics of doer-done to relationships, in which “complementary twoness” (Aron & Lechich, 2012, 219) can form a polarizing binary. Examining the partnership style, it also examined ways in which other positions might be possible. But what if those other positions are in fact the norm, and the dyad is an illusion? What if there is always a ‘third’ in the twoness? After all, children cared for by nannies grow up within a non-dyadic matrix of relationships. Multiple caregivers share a primary maternal preoccupation toward a child, who might not be oriented toward a single caretaking adult. In this way, the

nanny's presence challenges the primacy of the two-parent dyad, as well as the model of a single primary caregiver.

**The illusion of the dyad.** The omission of nannies' experiences from the clinical social work literature reflects the privileging of two dyads: the mother-infant dyad and the heterosexual dyadic family unit. The mother-father binary (the original dyad in developmental psychology) has only recently been expanded to acknowledge same-sex couples and single parents as legitimate caregivers, but the parent-infant pair is still considered central to development. In exploring the borders of the caregiving dyad, it is important to consider that the primacy of the parent-infant bond is maintained in part by a social discourse that privileges biology.

Dyadic models composed of a primary caregiver and a single infant assume that care provision is inherently individualistic. Botticelli has argued that in using the mother-infant dyad as the template for the psychotherapeutic caring relationship, relational theory overlooks the possibility that "the psychoanalytic couple (mother-child, analyst-patient, adult-romantic) is a reified form" (Botticelli, 2006, 78). Indeed, throughout this chapter the nanny-employer relationship has been characterized as a dyad, when in fact it is a triad. After all, there would be no relationship between these two adults were it not for the child for whom the nanny is paid to care. Similarly, Stern (1995) proposed the concept of a "new psychic triad" made up of mother, baby, and mother's mother. Acceptance of the presence of the employer's own internalized mother-object further disrupts the illusion of the mother-infant dyad, revealing that our earliest relationships are crowded with many subjects and objects, both mental and embodied.

Thinking about non-dyadic relationships brings to mind Freud's idea of "family romance" (Freud, 1909, 237), in which the child reacts to disappointment by fantasizing about an idealized caregiver who replaces one or both parents. The concept of family romance, by

definition, ruptures the two-parent dyad (as well as the parent-child dyad) by bringing in an imagined third caregiver. Like this fantasy, the nanny's presence challenges the preeminence of the parental dyad in the traditional family model. As an other around which the child might orient when seeking a parental substitute, nannies can disrupt the oedipal dynamic. The oedipal triangle requires the child's preoccupation with the mother's other objects of interest. If we imagine that these could include not only the second parent but also a nanny, or the mother's job (among others), this literally changes the shape of the oedipal dynamic.

**The illusion of a primary caregiver.** The privileging of couples, pairs, and other dyads appears to stem from the idealization of the mother-infant dyad. However, even this relationship is not as it seems. Hegeman writes that “rather than being one-to-one maternal-infant as theory assumes, family attachment systems may be multiple and fluid” (Hegeman, 2015, 1). The existence of multiple attachments undercuts the idealized normativity of the mother-infant dyad. Yet in reality, multiple non-dyadic relationships, such as with siblings and extended family members, are normal for children. Unfortunately, research on child development, clinical theory, and even psychodynamic literature “tend to assume that children's attachment is to the parents, even when children spend as much as 16 hours a day with non-parent caregivers” (Hegeman, 2015, 2).

The illusion of a single primary caregiver is intrinsically related to what Oakley (1974) termed the “myth of motherhood:” the belief that “all women need to be mothers, all mothers need their children, all children need their mothers” (Oakley, 1974, 187). This myth leaves no room for non-maternal caregivers and makes paid childcare seem like “at best a necessary evil” (Macdonald, 1998, 26). Since the myth of motherhood places caregiving at the heart of employers' identities, and because of the value placed on intensive mothering, hiring a nanny

threatens to “fundamentally challenge our understanding of what it means to mother” (Macdonald, 1998, 260). In the context of devalued care work, attachment to identity as ‘the mother’ is important because it is a position of relative social value. Viewed through this lens, the nanny embodies a potential assault to her employer’s sense of efficacy, legitimacy, even identity. Given these circumstances, it is plausible that employers would adopt puppeteer or paranormal management strategies, which preserve their position as mother-subjects.

### **Summary**

For most of its history, “psychoanalysis has considered analysts only as objects” (Aron, 1991, 32), and has viewed mothers the same way. But just as “denial of the mother’s subjectivity ... profoundly impedes our ability to see the world as inhabited by equal subjects” (Benjamin, 1995, 2), so too has prior research on nannies focused on the employer’s subjectivity at the expense of the nanny’s. Benjamin (1990) declared that “where objects were, subjects must be” (Benjamin, 1990, 34). This study sought to apply her paradigm to nannies, by exploring nannies’ experiences of cross-class caregiving relationships. It asked, essentially, who is the nanny for: the parent (“my nanny”), or the child (“my baby’s nanny”)? How does her employer perceive her—as a transitional object, an object for use, a subject—and why?

Benjamin (1995) argued that “the psychoanalytic process should be understood as occurring between subjects rather than within the individual” (Benjamin, 1995, 1), and this study asked whether the nanny-employer dynamic might be understood in the same way. To explore this possibility, it first illustrated the many ways in which the nanny can be construed as an object. Findings from the quantitative survey suggested that the two subject-object management strategies, puppeteer and paranormal, were influenced by both socioeconomic and relational factors. In each of these, the nanny represents a different kind of object—but in both, the

employer's subjectivity is privileged in order to preserve her position as the primary caregiver. Paranormal styles were associated with high employer income, superior compensation for nannies, and greater perceived similarity between employers and nannies. Puppeteer styles appeared to arise in the context of longer employment terms, more nanny-child contact over time, and similar education levels between nannies and employers.

Hegeman proposed that the "unconscious replicates the power relationships in the society, including splits around dominance and submission, which get played out in childcare with important consequences for development" (Hegeman, 2015, 1). In both the puppeteer and paranormal styles, the "tension between asserting self and recognizing the other breaks down and manifests as conflict" (Benjamin, 1995, 4) or as distance. The ubiquity of these strategies illustrates the difficulty of maintaining mutuality in the nanny-employer relationship. While the parent wants her child to have a nanny who is a subject, the employer also needs the nanny to be a certain kind of other: perhaps an object, a separate subject, or a transitional object for herself or for her child. The dilemma for the employer is that in order to recognize the nanny's subjectivity, she must acknowledge the socioeconomic inequality and power differences between them.

This chapter demonstrated that when a parent hires a nanny, the developmental tensions of rapprochement can be reactivated, giving rise to power struggles. Seeking to resolve this tension, employers may turn to paranormal or puppeteer management strategies to collapse the dyad into a doer-done to hierarchy. But in partnership dyads, the employer's ambivalence about domination and her ability to see the nanny's subjectivity keep this tension alive between them. Partnership demands mutual recognition and mutual influence, and the power struggles between employer and nanny at first appear to impede these. But rather than preventing the development of partnership, this chapter argued that these power struggles are a necessary precursor to mutual

recognition. The mental or literal “act of negating or obliterating the object” allows the subject to determine “whether the real other survives” (Benjamin, 1995, 6). Destruction of the nanny-object allows the employer to “go beyond relating to the object through identification” toward real recognition. This demonstrates how intersubjectivity depends on object destruction and survival.

In seeking to extend Winnicott’s idea of “good-enough mother” to nannies, this study asked ‘what makes a nanny good enough?’ To answer this, it explored the conditions under which a nanny is trusted by her employer and treated as an equal subject. However, there are a number of related questions that this project did not address and which are relevant for future study. For example, Hegeman asked: “how do nannies cope internally with the complex conflicts stirred up in these intimate situations?” (Hegeman, 2015, 4). Exploration of this would generate important insights into nannies’ intrapsychic worlds. A related issue is whether the nanny views her employer as an object or as a subject. This study has assumed that the nanny relates to the parent as a subject, but this may not be the case. A deeper examination of nannies’ intrapsychic object relationships, perhaps in the form of a qualitative study, would address these questions.

Finally, a major limitation of this research study is that by limiting participation to caregivers, it only takes into account the nanny’s perspective on the dyad. A more balanced study would offer greater insight into the nanny-employer relationship by examining how both parties co-create the management style that develops. Benjamin argues that subjugation is “a two-way process, a system involving the participation of those who submit to power as well as those who exercise it” (Benjamin, 1988, 5). She proposes that both subject and object participate in perpetuating relationships of dominance and submission through their mutual influence on one another (Benjamin, 2004). If this is so, then how might the nanny contribute to the development of an authoritarian dynamic?

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## Appendix A

### List of Organizations

The following organizations, groups, and online forums were contacted and/or utilized in recruitment of participants.

1. Ann Arbor Nannies
2. Association of DC Area Nannies (ADCAN)
3. Austin Nanny Connection
4. Boston Area Nanny Support Group
5. Boston Area Nanny Group
6. Bay Area Nanny Association
7. Boston Area Nannies
8. Brandywine Valley Nannies
9. Central Florida Nannies
10. CincyNanny
11. Columbus Nanny Network
12. Chicago Professional Nanny Association
13. Cambridge Nanny Group (Chicago Metro Area)
14. Chicago Nanny Group
15. Delaware Valley Nanny Group
16. DEMA
17. DFW Nannies
18. Domestic Worker United
19. Denver Area Nanny Association
20. East Bay Area Nannies (Allyson Reed)
21. Emerald City Nannies (Seattle)
22. GOAEYC
23. Hand in Hand
24. Houston Nanny Connection
25. International Nanny Association
26. La Colectiva
27. Let's Play Seattle
28. Metro Detroit
29. Massachusetts Alliance of Professional Nannies
30. Metro Atlanta Nannies
31. Michigan Professional Nanny Association
32. NAEYC
33. NCSA
34. Nannies and Housekeepers USA
35. Nannies of Southwest Florida
36. Nannies of the Heartland
37. Nanny Circle
38. The Nanny Doctor

39. Nanny Island
40. Nanny Network of Richmond
41. National Association for Nanny Care
42. National Day Laborers Organizing Network
43. National Domestic Employers Network
44. National Domestic Workers Alliance
45. New Jersey Nannies
46. Nineras en Espanol
47. Northwest Nanny Association
48. Northwest Nannies Inc
49. North Atlanta Nannies Association
50. North Shore Professional Nanny Alliance
51. North Suburban Nannies
52. Portland Nanny B.A.S.H.
53. The Philadelphia Nanny Support Group
54. Professional Nannies of Arizona
55. Philly Nannies
56. Regarding Nannies
57. Smart Start NC
58. The South Bay Area Nanny Playgroup
59. Sacramento Area Nannies
60. SitterConnection
61. Smartsitting
62. Sweet Peas Nanny Agency
63. Twin Cities Professional Nannies
64. Triangle Area Nanny Group
65. Vermont Nanny Connection
66. Village Nannies
67. Westside Nannies
68. WWN

## **Appendix B**

### Study Website

The following text appeared on the study website:

Have you ever worked as a babysitter, childcare provider, or nanny? Interested in sharing your experience? Participate in an online survey that will help us find out about how socioeconomic differences affect relationships between childcare providers and their employers. If you are over 18 and have been paid to provide care for a minimum of one week for a child (age 5 or younger) that was not related to you, you are eligible to participate.

The experiences of childcare providers have been under-researched. This study looks at the impact of socioeconomic disparity on nanny-employer relations. The goal of this research is to improve understanding of power dynamics in cross-class employment relationships. We seek a diverse set of nannies with a minimum of one week's experience (at any point in the past ten years) providing childcare in an employer's home. The survey is available until March 2015 to adults (18 and over) who have cared for children age 5 and under.

Questions? Contact the researcher, Maryam Moody, at [mmoody@smith.edu](mailto:mmoody@smith.edu).

All results will be anonymous. No identifying information will be collected, and all data gathered will be kept strictly confidential and then destroyed. Participants who wish to receive the final results of the research are invited to contact the researcher via the email address provided above. Email addresses provided through contact with the researcher will not and cannot be linked to data collected anonymously via surveymonkey.

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

All participants agreed electronically to the following informed consent protocol prior to beginning the survey.

Dear Participant,

My name is Maryam Moody and I am an MSW candidate at Smith College School for Social Work (Northampton, MA) conducting research as part of my thesis. I am examining relationships between nannies and their employers. This study has been approved by the Smith College Human Subjects Review Committee and will be presented as a thesis at Smith College. It may also be used in presentations or publications on this topic. You were invited to participate because you have been employed as a childcare provider outside your own home, caring for a child aged five or younger, for at least one week in past ten years. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

#### **Procedures, Risks & Benefits**

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to answer about 45 questions about a childcare employment experience. The survey questions will take less than 10 minutes to complete. The survey will end with a number of demographic questions.

This study presents minimal risk to participants. Benefits to participation include: the opportunity to reflect upon and gain insight into your professional childcare experiences; the opportunity to learn about the wages, benefits, and other types of compensation other childcare providers receive (or have received in the past). The benefits to social work/society are: better understanding of the internal dynamics of relationships between nannies and employers, wider visibility for the experiences of childcare providers, and the potential for greater advocacy on behalf of domestic workers.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question, and you may withdraw from the study at any time before the end of the survey by clicking on the “Exit Survey” button that will appear on every page. If you exit before clicking the “Done” button at the end of the survey, any data you entered will be eliminated. Once you click “Done” however, I will not be able to remove your data because the anonymous nature of the survey will make it impossible to identify which responses are yours.

#### **Confidentiality**

Participation in this study is anonymous. I will not collect names, email addresses or other identifying data, and I have programmed SurveyMonkey not to record IP addresses. Survey responses will be encrypted by SurveyMonkey to ensure that the data is private and confidential. The data gathered will be kept confidential and will be accessible only

by me, by my research advisor, and by the data analyst. Data will only be shared in aggregate form and will be kept in a secured location for three years after the completion of the study as required by the MCKAS use agreement and Federal guidelines. After that the data will be destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature or purpose of this study or your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to receive a brief summary of the study with results and implications, please contact me at [mmoody@smith.edu](mailto:mmoody@smith.edu). You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subject Review Committee at Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, MA, at (413) 585-7974. Please keep a copy of the informed consent.

### **Consent**

Clicking “I consent” below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

BY CHECKING “I AGREE” AND CLICKING “NEXT” YOU ARE INDICATING THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION, THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS, AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

- I AGREE
- I DO NOT AGREE

NEXT

## Appendix D

### Survey Instrument

The following questions comprised the survey instrument. The first five questions were screening questions; if a participant's answers indicated that she did not meet survey criteria, she was led to exit the survey via a page thanking her for her participation.

*For all the questions in the survey, please bring to mind the employer for whom you worked for the **longest** amount of time. It could be the person you work for currently, or someone from the past.*

1. How long did you work for this employer? Or, if you are still working for this employer, how long have you worked for them?  
[less than 1 week, 1-4 weeks, 1-3 months, 3-6 months, 6-12 months, 1-2 years, more than 2 years]
2. Do / did you care for the children in your employer's home, or your own home?  
[my home / employers' home]
3. What is the average number of hours per week you work(ed) for this employer?  
[<8, 8, 8-16, 17-24, 25-32, 33-40, 41-48, 49-56, 57-64, >65]
4. How old was this employer's youngest child at the time you began to work for them?  
[<1 year, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, age 6 or older]
5. How old were you when you began to work for this employer?  
[fill in age between 18-100; <18 (ineligible)]

*Thinking about your experience working for this **same** employer, please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. 1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 indicates strong agreement.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. This job matches my education and experience.
7. It sometimes feels like my employer is always looking over my shoulder.
8. My job allows me to use my skills and abilities.
9. I am careful not to do things that my employer might disapprove of.
10. My employer and I are very similar in a lot of aspects.
11. My job matches what I like to do.
12. My employer keeps pretty close tabs on me.
13. I have skills from training or experience that I would like to use, but can't in this job.

14. It is clear to me that to get ahead in working for this family, I need to do exactly what I am told.
15. In appearance, my employer and I are very different. [reverse coded]
16. I am overqualified for the work that I do in this job. [reverse coded]
17. I have a flexible work schedule in this job.
18. My employer likes to see things done in a certain way.
19. In this work, I am mostly my own boss.
20. My work is constantly being evaluated.
21. Usually, my employer and I have the same opinion about things.
22. This job gives me the amount of independence I like.

*For the following questions, keep the same employer in mind, but please rate the degree to which you think **your employer would** agree or disagree with the following statements. 1 indicates strong disagreement, 5 indicates strong agreement.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

23. If my child(ren) need to be disciplined, I think that I am the one to discipline them, not their nanny.
24. If a choice has to be made about what clothing my child(ren) will wear, I think that I am the one to make that decision, not their nanny.
25. If someone needs to talk with my child(ren)'s teacher, I am the one to do it, not their nanny.
26. If my child(ren)'s feelings are hurt, I think that I should comfort them, not their nanny.
27. If my child(ren) have to go to the doctor, I think that I am the one to take them, not their nanny.
28. If a decision has to be made about who my child(ren) will play with (or spend time with), I think that I am the one to make that decision, not their nanny.
29. If a decision has to be made for my child(ren), I think that I am the one to make it, not their nanny.
30. If an adult needs to talk to my child(ren) about their behavior, I think that I am the one to do the talking, not their nanny.
31. If a decision has to be made about which TV shows my child(ren) should watch, I think that I am the one to make that decision, not their nanny.

*Finally, please answer the following questions about the **same** employment experience.*

32. At the time you began working for this employer, what was their age? If you were employed by a two-parent family, answer for the parent you interacted with most frequently. If you don't know the exact age, give your best guess.  
[drop-down menu of ages 18-65]

33. What was your perception of your employer's racial / ethnic identity?  
Check one: [1=Latino/Hispanic, 2=Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American, 3=East Asian or Asian American, 4=South Asian or Indian American, 5=Middle Eastern or Arab American, 6=Native American, Native Hawaiian, or Alaskan Native, 7=Mixed, 8=White, Caucasian / Euro-American, 9=other]
34. What is your racial / ethnic identity?  
Check one: [1=Latino/Hispanic, 2=Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American, 3=East Asian or Asian American, 4=South Asian or Indian American, 5=Middle Eastern or Arab American, 6=Native American, Native Hawaiian, or Alaskan Native, 7=Mixed, 8=White, Caucasian / Euro-American, 9=other]
35. At the time that you worked for this employer, what was the highest level of education you had attained?  
[high school, some college, bachelor's, some post-bachelor's, teaching certificate, master's, PhD]
36. What was the highest level of education that your employer had attained?  
[don't know, high school, some college, bachelor's, some post-bachelor's, teaching certificate, master's, PhD]
37. What was your employer's occupation?  
[fill in the blank]
38. Were you and your employer born in the same country?  
[yes/no/don't know]
39. Did you and your employer speak the same first language?  
[yes/no/don't know]
40. Did you have children of your own when you worked for this employer?  
[yes / no / I was pregnant or became a parent while working for this employer]
41. Was / is this a live-in or live-out position?  
[live-in, live-out]
42. If you work(ed) on a live-out basis, did you rent or own your home?  
[rent / own / not applicable]
43. Did your employer own or rent their home?  
[rent/own/don't know]
44. What were / are you paid for this job (per hr.)?  
[<\$10, \$10-12, \$12-15, \$15-17, \$18-20, \$21-25, \$25-30, >\$30]



45. Did / do you receive any of the following?

Check as many as apply: [paid holidays, paid vacation, paid sick time, public transport stipend, reimbursement for vehicle use, use of employer supplied vehicle, health insurance premium contribution, reimbursement for educational expenses, cell phone allowance, retirement plan, none of these]

46. How did / does your employer refer to you *most often*?

Check one: [nanny, babysitter, caregiver, au pair, mother's helper, sitter, "my nanny," "my babysitter"]

## Appendix E

### Human Subjects Review Committee Approval



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**School for Social Work**  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950  
F (413) 585-7994

October 30, 2014

Maryam Moody

Dear Maryam,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elaine Kersten". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Stacey Novack, Research Advisor

## Appendix F

### Codebook

The following codebook was used to analyze the survey results.

Q#	Variable	Variable Label	Value Labels
2	HowLong	Length of employment [screening question]	1=<1wk (ineligible), 2=1-4 weeks, 3=1-3 mos, 4=3-6mos, 5=6-12mos, 6=1-2 yrs, 7=more than 2 years
3	Location	Location of employment [screening question]	2=worked in employer's home; 1=worked out of own home (ineligible)
4	HoursWk	Hours worked per week	1=<8 (ineligible), 2=8-16, 3=17-24, 4=25-32, 5=33-40, 6=41-48, 7=49-56, 8=57-64, 9=>65
5	ChildAge	Age of youngest child [screening question]	0=<1y.o., 1=1yrs old, 2=2, 3=3, 4=4, 5=5, 6=>5 (ineligible)
6	Age	Age at initial employment	Fill in the blank (<18=ineligible)
7	WC1	Work Control 1/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
8	CM1	Close Monitoring 1/6	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
9	WC2	Work Control 2/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
10	CM2	Close Monitoring 2/6	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
11	PSL1	Perceived Similarity to Leader 1/3	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
12	WC3	Work Control 3/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
13	CM3	Close Monitoring 3/6	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
14	WC4	Work Control 4/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
15	CM4	Close Monitoring 4/6	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
16	PSL2	Perceived Similarity to Leader 2/3	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree); <b>reverse coded</b>
17	WC5	Work Control 5/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree); <b>reverse coded</b>
18	WC6	Work Control 6/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)

19	CM6	Close Monitoring 5/6	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
20	WC7	Work Control 7/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
21	CM6	Close Monitoring 6/6	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
22	PSL3	Perceived Similarity to Leader 3/3	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
23	WC8	Work Control 8/8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
24	MG1	Maternal Gatekeeping1	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
25	MG2	Maternal Gatekeeping2	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
26	MG3	Maternal Gatekeeping3	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
27	MG4	Maternal Gatekeeping4	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
28	MG5	Maternal Gatekeeping5	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
29	MG6	Maternal Gatekeeping6	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
30	MG7	Maternal Gatekeeping7	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
31	MG8	Maternal Gatekeeping8	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
32	MG9	Maternal Gatekeeping9	5 point Likert (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree)
33	EmpAge	Employer's age	Drop-down list 18-65
34	ERaceEth	Employer's (perceived) racial/ethnic identity	1=Latino/Hispanic, 2=Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American, 3=East Asian or Asian American, 4=South Asian or Indian American, 5=Middle Eastern or Arab American, 6=Native American, Native Hawaiian, or Alaskan Native, 7=Mixed, 8=White, Caucasian, or Euro-American, 9=other (option to fill-in "other")
35	NRaceEth	Nanny's racial/ethnic identity	1=Latino/Hispanic, 2=Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American, 3=East Asian or Asian American, 4=South Asian or Indian American, 5=Middle Eastern

			or Arab American, 6=Native American, Native Hawaiian, or Alaskan Native, 7=Mixed, 8=White, Caucasian, or Euro-American, 9=other (option to fill-in "other")
36	NEdLevel	Nanny's highest education level attained	1=high school diploma, 2=some college, 3=bachelor's, 4=some post-bachelors, 5=teaching certificate, 6=master's, 7=PhD
37	EEdLevel	Employer's highest education level attained	1=high school diploma, 2=some college, 3=bachelor's, 4=some post-bachelors, 5=teaching certificate, 6=master's, 7=PhD, 8=don't know
38	Occupation	Employer's occupation	Researcher-sorted into social class categories based on income bracket (see Methodology).
39	ImmStatSim	Similarity of birth nation	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
40	LangStatSim	Similarity of first language	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
41	Parent	Does nanny have her own kids?	1=has kids of own, 2=childless, 3=became a parent/pregnant while working
42	LiveIn	Live-in / live-out?	1=live in, 2=live-out
43	NOwnRent	Does nanny own or rent?	1=rent, 2=own, 3=n/a
44	EOwnRent	Does employer own or rent?	1=rent, 2=own, 3=don't know
45	Wages	Hourly wage earned	1=<\$10/hr, 2=\$10-12/hr, 3=\$12-15/hr, 4=\$15-17/hr, 5=\$18-20/hr, 6=\$21=25/hr, 7=\$25-30/hr, 8=>\$30/hh
46	Benefits	What benefits did nanny receive	0=none, 1=1 benefit checked, 2=2 benefits ... 1-holidays, 2-vacation, 3-sick time, 4-publictransit, 5-vehiclereimbursement, 6-useofemployervehicle, 7-healthinsurancecontribution, 8-educationexpense, 9-cellphone, 10-retirement
47	WhatCall	What employer calls nanny	1=nanny, 2=babysitter, 3=caregiver, 4=au pair, 5=mother's helper, 6=sitter, 7= "my nanny", 8= "my babysitter"