

"NEGOTIATING PARENTING AND PLACES OF CARE IN VANCOUVER, B.C."

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1995

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Geography)

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 1999

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Date August 30, 1999

### Abstract

The home as a site for childcare is linked to notions of 'good' parenting, and the employment of a nanny is often meant to create an extended family which enables a child to be nurtured in this private space. Qualitative interviews undertaken with fifty-one families and eleven nannies indicate that this childcare arrangement is complex and involves shifting and divergent constructions of what good parenting and good childcare are. This childcare arrangement often failed because of the complexities of the employer-employee relationship, and a failed attempt at familial attachment. A partial explanation as to why this fails is that some nannies view their employment as a 'bad' parenting strategy, and suggest that it is the parents who should be nurturing the children. This tension around the appropriateness of certain childcare strategies is indicative of discourses of proper parenting and maternal ideals, and is intimately connected to place.

Expanding on this theme, interviews were undertaken with ten daycares in the city of Vancouver to examine how discourses of proper parenting are reworked in a 'public' space. This inquiry introduces more directly issues of class, opportunity and the socialization of children. The maternal ideals expressed in the first part of the study are reworked, and sometimes abandoned, in the delivery of public childcare services. Further, there is a process of normalization that takes place in the designation and segregation of children based on age, and whether they are 'typical' or 'special needs'. I argue that greater attention to emotion is needed in the study of childcare, and greater appreciation of difference is needed in the delivery of childcare. This thesis also questions its original premise, that of looking at childcare as public and private options, and of seeing childcare as an employment strategy.

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## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the thorough and considered reviews given by Geraldine Pratt and Isabel Dyck. Thank-you Gerry for encouraging me to challenge the boundaries of what constitutes geography, and graduate studies. I wish also to thank all the parents and caregivers who shared their knowledge and time, and helped create this thesis.

I am thankful for my home and family. Alex and Sam lived this process in ways I wish I could have prevented, but through which confirmed for me that we are a family. I look forward to lazy week-ends with you both. My mother, Carol Bullock, has been a continual source of love and support and has made going back to school possible every time I did it.

Finally, a big thank you to Kamala Todd (who enabled me to survive the final weeks), Judy Tutchener, Bruce Braun, Nicola Hicks, Emmanuelle Arnaud, Stephanie Wood, Shirley Gordon, Tanya Lebar, Trevor Groves, Mona Mok and all the rest of my poor friends and neighbours who were constantly reminded of my albatross that is my thesis yet continued to be my friends, baby-sitters and drinking partners.

## Chapter 1: Good Parenting

It is often strange to me that I am writing a thesis on childcare. Prior to having a child my thesis goals might have been climate change, atmospheric ozone depletion, or attitudes towards the environment. Becoming a mother changed things. Having a child presented me with another way of seeing, and necessitated a series of adjustments and strategies in living daily life. It has challenged my work as a feminist, and as a geographer. As an academic I have become concerned about the lack of engagement with mothering, and the lack of inquiry into the daily lives of parents and children. My course work and my research have been shaped through my current role as mother, and I have allowed my academic work to fall distant third to my involvement with my child and my spouse.

My involvement with my supervisor's research on domestic workers allowed me to explore what was happening in my 'personal' life as mother and my 'public' life as student in complicated ways. I was brainstorming and theorizing about what is good childcare on one hand, and failing miserably at acquiring good childcare myself on the other. I was envisioning and articulating a feminist vision that I did not live, separating spheres that are inseparable. My personal struggles with childcare are why *this* thesis emerged. The process of looking for care and doing research is reflected in the length of time it took to generate a thesis, my reading of studies on childcare and domestic work relations, and the lens through which I present this research.

I have learned that childcare decisions are far from simple and unmediated. They are often made in the moment, are intimately connected to place and reflect the values, philosophies, hopes and concerns that we have as parents. Good parenting involves selecting good childcare. Defining

what good childcare is proves to be problematic once you try to create that situation. Most work done on childcare does not account for this complexity. In my research I have tried to explore some of the nuances of parenting and childcare. This thesis sorts through how and why parents choose the childcare path they do, the discourses that influence that path, and the bumps in the road that disrupt their childcare ideologies and, to a large extent, their personal identities. While dominant ideologies about *the* home and childcare are identifiable, the way in which parents and childcare workers work within and beyond dominant ideologies requires further inquiry. What counts as good parenting, and by extension good childcare, is negotiated in time and space, involves multiple discourses, and is an evolving question.

Childcare is often identified as an employment strategy that enables mothers to work productively and maintain careers. Research on childcare has tended to focus on the working environments of childcare workers or the availability of childcare for working mothers.

Childcare is more than an employment strategy. There are intimate, emotional and shifting geographies involved in the production of childcare and of good parenting. I have constructed my arguments within current feminist frameworks and have produced a local, partial, situated account that pays particular attention to issues of representation, emotion, social reproduction, and daily lives. In order to capture and demonstrate the complexity of childcare, I will unpack notions of parenting to consider moral geographies and emotion, and expand the geographies under consideration. This thesis looks at some of the discourses involved in this production, unpacks how parents negotiate their parenting and childcare decisions, and considers whether current childcare arrangements satisfy parents desire for good childcare.



In this introductory chapter I discuss the research project to demonstrate the evolution of the thesis topic statement and set up the following chapters. To do this, I describe the nanny project from which this thesis originated; discuss the feminist research methods which informed this process; situate this discussion in recent trends in feminist geography and what could be described as the geography of mothering; and finally outline the larger themes that are tackled in the remainder of the thesis. I argue that feminist engagement with the family has been lacking, as has Geography's attention to the home.

While the literature on childcare in Geography is at times concerned with what good childcare is, and what good employment is, it does not often look at the family as a site of social inquiry. The concept and social context of the family is very unstable and the ways in which parents interpret and enact notions of good parenting, both spatially and through time, is fascinating. By exploring the links between home, parenting and childcare I hope to open up the discussion to include the places, spaces, ideologies and sentiments that capture and represent our most intimate relations, and the places where we live.

### **The original study: Domestic Work relations in Vancouver**

I have been involved with the 'nanny project' since the summer of 1995, working as a research assistant with Professor Geraldine Pratt. This research project has been ongoing since May 1994 when Geraldine Pratt interviewed nanny agents in Vancouver around the live-in caregiver program. In 1995 fifty-two parents/ employers were interviewed about their childcare arrangements and experiences. In 1996 eleven nannies of British, Slovakian and Canadian origin were interviewed about their experiences as caregivers in Vancouver. Also in 1996, Gerry facilitated in-depth focus groups, and collaborated with the Philippines Women's Centre around

issues specifically related to the Live-in Caregiver Program, and the experiences of fifteen Filipina women coming to Canada to do domestic work<sup>1</sup>.

Parents who participated in the research were contacted through advertisements they placed in the 'childcare wanted' section of local newspapers<sup>2</sup> around Vancouver, dating back two years prior and up to and including the time of research. As such, most of the parents had had their current childcare arrangement for less than two years. The same is true of the nannies, many of whom were contacted through their advertisements looking for work and, as such, were often between jobs. The British nannies were contacted through snowballing and so they matched experiences with one another because they are of similar ages and length of tenure in Canada. The resulting sample provides an indication of the domestic worker scene in Vancouver but is not representative of the families using childcare in Vancouver, or of childcare providers in Vancouver. This is one of the first research projects to interview all the various interest groups in domestic work relations, and it provides an understanding of the dynamic between employers and employees.

The nanny project enables a comparison of the experiences of agents, parents and nannies in regard to their employment relations, working conditions, and the stereotypes involved in domestic work in Vancouver. To this end this research has enriched our understanding of the domestic worker labour market, the dynamics of international migration, and the formulation of identity through nannying work (Pratt, 1997a, 1997b, 1998). These were some of the initial

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<sup>1</sup> Geraldine Pratt has written extensively on the interviews with the Philippines Women's Centre and the interviews with the Agents. I do not draw on these interviews in this thesis, my concern is the relation between the parents and caregivers.

<sup>2</sup> Newspapers consulted include: The Courier, Vancouver Echo, Burnaby Now, North Shore News, Surrey Leader, and Tri-City News. Childcare Wanted and Childcare Available sections were consulted from 1993-1996.

goals and intentions of the research, but the interviews are so rich in detail that other stories can be told and explored. As parents, both researchers understood that the issues, influences and choices involved in childcare were more complex than 'finding cheap labour from abroad'. The nanny project research also reveals much about the attitudes parents have about childcare, and the cultural conditions in which nannies are employed for childcare.

I was attracted to the nanny project in the beginning because I was just considering childcare options myself and working out what kind of childcare I wanted for my son, who was then two years old. I had such a dreadful time with childcare in the two years that followed that my empathy and frustration level matched that of many of the parents interviewed. For this research being a mother mattered because I had a good sense of what parents were going through and the resources (not) available to them to access.

For those next two years (1997/98), as a result of my child being placed in the realm of 'special needs', I had intimate and close contact with most childcare affiliated boards and committees in the city: Vancouver Health Board, Ministry for Children and Families, Vancouver Neurological Society (Alan Cashmore), Parent and Child Education Centre (P.A.C.E.), Vancouver School Board, and Supported Childcare of Vancouver. From that experience I approached Geraldine Pratt about using part of the research from the 'nanny project' for a thesis which would combine the parent and nanny interviews and add some daycare interviews. So, in late 1998 and early 1999, I interviewed ten daycare workers about their values and attitudes toward childcare, and the families who use daycare. Thus, this thesis draws on the fifty-two interviews done with parents, the eleven interviews done with nannies, and ten interviews with daycare workers and

explores the evolving relationships and social constructions of home, family and education as well as discourses of class and gender.

### **A thematic thesis**

Much has been made in feminist theorizing in the last decade or so around challenging positivistic and masculinist ways of knowing (McDowell, 1993b; Rose, G., 1993). The emerging consensus is that as researchers and academics we strive to produce local knowledges that reflect our understanding of an issue; we do not present our findings as universal truth claims but as partial accounts. The problem that arises is how to go about doing this:

So, I think my problem, and 'our' problem is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to a faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness. Harding calls this necessary multiple desire a need for a successor science and a postmodern insistence on irreducible difference and radical multiplicity of local knowledges. All components of the desire are paradoxical and dangerous, and their combination is both contradictory and necessary (Haraway, 1991 "Situated Knowledges")

Feminists in various disciplines in the academy have called for the proliferation of these local knowledges and the culmination of these partial accounts has been productive. It is the path that I follow here. This thesis is grounded in a local geography that is complex, contradictory, and partial but nevertheless faithful to 'the real world' I perceive 'out there', and construct here. This thesis also connects up to other partial stories in other places to explore the larger story that is told in relation to women and childcare in the 'western' world. Throughout the thesis I will tack back and forth between theory and empirics to stress the partiality and situatedness of this account.

This last decade has also seen a greater acceptance and use of qualitative methods in human geography. A variety of methods (including: oral histories, content analysis, observation, and interviews) are used to gain a subjective understanding of social life. The 'everyday' is explored through a process of empirical research and theory building. Observable 'facts' are open to analysis, but are qualified by the context and the process. This research is decidedly qualitative in that themes were derived from open-ended interviews, and these interviews directed the movement to future interviews. The researchers were an active part of this movement as our daily lives and biases influenced the process. For example, the decision to conduct interviews with daycare workers came out of a shared frustration with daycare between myself and some of the participants, but was not part of the original research design. The arguments that I present here are a result of a dynamic process and are the culmination of much discussion, empathy, and reflection.

Each interview is unique and there is often not a consensus of people's perceptions or attitudes. Reading through the transcripts I nonetheless looked for trends, moments, familiarities and disjunctures. Each reading of the transcripts provides a different story. The best way to tackle this 'data set' is to respect those differences amongst participants, acknowledge the lack of consensus, and have faith that in the end the essence of what is being said can be translated. I have constructed this story but have attempted to allow this thesis to be participant driven -- the questions and themes emerged after the interviews. The 'subjects' are speaking, and have, to a large extent, defined the thesis statement. Relinquishing (some) control over the process has been empowering, but also terrifying. Continuous doubt that there is 'real' knowledge to be gained through interviews has plagued me, and I suspect my supervisor as well, all the way

through. Our field-notes are filled with talk of thematic crisis and uncertainty, as well as breakthroughs and glimpses that there is something to grab onto:

ER39: But what's the general consensus (of the over 40 interviews done)?

Interviewer GP: Well there isn't a consensus! I'm getting a bit nervous about this study here because it is like...

ER39: Everyone you talk to seems to have a different feeling around it, eh?

GP: Really different, I'm not quite sure what I'm going to write about, or...there isn't consensus!

ER39: Well, people are different, you know. *The importance of childcare and the importance of being at home, or not being at home, varies with each person.* Some people can just accept it as a way of life. But me, I'm just the paradox! My husband always says, "You drive me crazy-you're not happy at home and you're not happy at work" (mother, Surrey, 1995).

Ironically, this woman's last statement sums up the experience of many of the participants, provides consensus, and gives direction. That juggling between work and home is fraught with guilt, crisis, confusion, and anger and it provides the insight to understand the stories. Often the parents' home spaces and daily lives are paradoxical but they (we) are uncomfortable with the paradoxicity of their own creating<sup>3</sup>. This does not feel like an emancipatory space however. Most of the parents cold contacted (<90%) agreed to participate in the research process largely because they had had bad experiences and were look for solutions to their childcare problems. What unites the people interviewed is that everyone is looking for care, and most have been traumatized by their childcare experience. What comes out theoretically is that in negotiating childcare some parents quickly appeal to traditional roles and stereotypes, or 'professionals' to find the solution.

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<sup>3</sup> See Gillian Rose (1993) "Feminism & Geography" if you would like to know more on how this term is meant to be used.

The parents outlined, in great detail at times, the decision they made around creating 'home', and the thinking and actions that went into it. Often participants would theorize the issues that we were presenting and offer a complex analysis of domestic relations from their point of view:

ER18: I think the other thing about family, well this is just a reflection I have about people having guilt feelings about leaving their child with somebody else, and so I think it's a lot easier if you feel that that person is more a member of your family. Women who leave their children with their mothers while they go off to work tend to feel less guilty from the literature that I've read, because they are leaving them in the extended family, and you know, not with a stranger. So if you have embraced a nanny into a family, then it might negate some of your feelings that you're leaving your child (mother, west-side, 1995).

The experiences and expertise of parents contribute greatly to our understanding and theorizing around mothering. Their experience is knowledge. Many of the parents displayed a commitment to feminist values in the ways they conceived of the domestic realm, the value they placed on their work, and the consideration paid to their childcare worker. Some mothers would describe how their feminism, their conceptions of themselves, had changed since becoming a parent and having to consider childcare. This mother put her child in daycare as a commitment to her feminist beliefs and then had a change of heart:

ER37: And I have to admit too, that my politics got in the way. I had always held the belief that daycares were y'know, we should have lots more of them, that on-site company daycares are a really, really good thing to have, we should be supporting women in this way, and all this stuff that I used to believe. That after now having gone through the experience of it, if you can do something else, do it. If you can afford it or it's convenient or whatever do something else. My politics have completely changed on that, and I no longer share my views with very many people on it, because lots of people have the view that daycare is great, and I think that's great for them (mother, Surrey, 1995).

Later in the interview this mother talked about how she used her networks with other mothers to share information and experiences to find a better childcare arrangement: "(S)o I talked to the

mothers on how to do it, and the information that I got was that there's a glut of nannies on the market" (ER37). This exchange of information between women (a.k.a. gossip), is a crucial component of how women learn to parent, are made to comply with certain standards of care, and find out about different childcare options (Dyck, 1990).

There is a continuous negotiation of what is home and family, but within this there is also reconsideration of politics that comes when wrestling with these questions. I share shifting politics with this mother, and with many of the participants. Melding feminism and family challenges the way we parent *and* our personal politics. As feminist mothers we search for a politics, beyond the essentialism of maternal feminism, where our children are ever present. These feminisms are created through daily routines and life commitments. Feminism is lived through searching out ways to raise healthy, kind, good children, supporting other families with their choices, and expanding the definition of mother. So while our feminism suggests that daycare is emancipatory, our relationships to our homes and families can make them feel like strange places.

Parents enter into childcare arrangements that reflect something about how they want to parent; subsequent experiences can alter those paths and affect how parents come to feel about themselves as parents. In a broad sense parents frame their childcare decisions as a question between the tradition and safety of home, and the educational and social opportunities offered in group daycare. Answering this question involves other questions, such as: What is best for my child? Who am I as a parent? How will I be perceived? What is the most cost-effective option? This research and thesis work to illuminate all these issues to point out that the relationships and



choices are muddy. This complexity is an integral part to our understanding, not something to be cleaned up.

Shared understandings, experience as a knowledge claim, and the use of empathy, emotion and intuition as ways to create academic knowledge are crucial balancing acts if we are going to explore daily lives. This research could not have been done if empathy and care were not extended to the research design, the researchers, and the participants. Many of the contacts expressed surprise that this research was being done, and agreed to participate because they felt that childcare was a huge part of their lives and felt that no one was really interested in how significant the issues are. Most were glad that somebody 'cared' about their experiences. It is not just the parents who are caught up in the trauma of failed childcare; nannies and daycare workers also live and feel this trauma. This is expressed by a nanny, who I contacted through a previous respondent, and who was eager to tell her story:

EE10: This is real interesting you know because when Allison<sup>4</sup> told me that she was going to have an interview with somebody about you know, like everything we do as a living, I went "That's not possible, like any one cares, right, like nobody is even going to care anymore", you know they just don't usually, and so she said "Yeah, I had the interview", and I thought "Wow, I want to do that" (nanny, Slovakian, 1996).

I include this passage to introduce the notion of care because these narratives have this ethic of care in common, seemingly regardless of other ideological positions. This is in line with feminist methodological concerns that emotion be an integral part of our inquiry and our production of knowledge:

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<sup>4</sup> All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Just as observation directs, shapes, and partially defines emotion, so too emotion directs, shapes and even partially defines observation. Observation is not simply a passive process of absorbing impressions or recording stimuli; instead, it is an activity of selection and interpretation. What is selected and how it is interpreted are influenced by emotional attitudes (Jaggar, 1989, p154).

Accepting that emotions are an ever present, socially constructed, integral part of feminist epistemologies we can better explore daily lives and experiences but we also run the risk of exploiting those empathetic connections for our own purposes. As Judith Stacey warns: "the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach [perhaps] masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation" (91, p113). There is no way around Stacey's concern other than to avoid controversial discussions in our research, but this is a disservice to the process too. Sometimes being empathetic to something means exposing the nastier elements of a discussion, and so long as the respondent is protected through diligent confidentiality, I think this can be productive and empowering. One of the best mothering books I have been exposed to, Adrienne Rich's "Of Woman Born", explores tough issues like maternal rage and depression in a frank and honest manner. We are not allowed to talk about these things without fear of shunning or arrest, so to see these discussions in print does provide a shared understanding and experience. This thesis does not tackle anything particularly scandalous but there are quotes that are less than flattering and analysis which is critical and damning.

While I am often empathetic to the struggles and issues that parents and caregivers have to wrestle with, I have attempted to be skeptical of myself. Sometimes parents are way too particular and unrealistic around what to expect from a caregiver, at times expecting more than they themselves could offer. Other times parents are too 'flaky' and too 'politically correct' in

their hiring practices. In one instance I found myself really caught up in the gentleness of a father's world view, his compassion for an inept caregiver, and his seemingly genuine connection to the community. At the same time, however, I was thinking "Wake up, this person is going to care for the most important people in your life, they have to be perfect." And so, my bias looms large. This is, after all, a thematic thesis and a discursive analysis, and it is my best attempt to get at something that is an effect, a response, a feeling, more than a 'reality':

Women's lives are constructed in ideology-saturated cultural locations, and there are facts, open to analysis, about how ideological effects operate – even though there may be no ideology-free space from which to conduct such analyses (Code, 1991, p45).

That there is a need to discuss parenting and childcare was clear in the responses we had from the people we approached. Participation in this research project was marked by participants' own strategies and needs. Parents were often looking for tips on how to acquire good childcare - they wanted to know what other parents were experiencing, and just to have someone who is empathetic to their feelings of frustration. Parents began talking at length during the initial phone calls I made to explain the research and inquire if they would like to be involved. It seemed to me that many of the parents agreed to participate because perhaps the interview might have some explanatory power for their childcare crisis, or at least allow them to vent.

The nannies were harder to contact but were also interested in participating. I got the sense from the eleven nannies interviewed that they too needed an empathetic ear. They were often looking for job tips, or an assessment of what working conditions were like in different parts of Vancouver. In one instance a Slovakian nanny agreed to participate because she was keen to meet Canadians; she had not met very many even though she had lived in Vancouver for almost

four years. She told me she was quite lonely and isolated and was glad to have a conversation. She also used the interview to practice her English skills. She asked me prior to the interview that I not hurry her and offer suggestions for her English should she get something wrong. This is an important element for feminist research as it is a way that I as a researcher can give back to a participant (Reinharz, 1992, pp177-189).

At the time of writing this thesis I have received three calls from participants asking for my help around childcare issues. Two calls were from childcare providers, one from a parent, all asking about finding 'special needs' care and/or alternative literature for kids that do not fit into existing childcare options available in Vancouver. A lack of good, flexible childcare restricts parents' ability to be good parents. From my own experience, the interviews and the subsequent phone calls, it is clear to me that current childcare arrangements available in Vancouver do not meet the standards, needs or values of many families.

### **Mother geographies**

Feminist work in geography has sought to break down dualisms of public/private, production/reproduction, work/home, as well as show the complicated ways in which this separate sphere ideology is linked to gender. Everyday acts of mothering have provided a fertile entry point for much of this work as the daily expeditions and work of women who mother disrupts these dualisms, and points to another way to interpret geography (Tivers, 1985; Rose, 1993; McDowell, 1993a, 1993b; England, 1996; Pratt, 1997a).

Geographers have begun to direct their attention to the issue of childcare despite the continuing lament about the lack of investigation (England, 1996; Valentine, 1997; Holloway, 1998; Aitken,

1998). This lament is now concerned that childcare issues are identified as a 'women's issue' rather than an issue of class and argue that there are new social geographies waiting to be created (Gregson and Lowe, 1995; Holloway, 1998). This thesis follows their advice. I continue to view childcare as a social issue (involving issues of class), but this sample of parents suggests that childcare is still a women's issue. A review of the literature demonstrates that there is a continued need to explore 'mothering work' by expanding and re-examining the categories we use to explore various childcare scenes, and by including emotion in our social geographies.

In the mid 1980s geographers began to unpack a geography of women, and in doing so often linked women's issues to mothering issues. Early work looked at childcare through the lens of employment. Research by Jacqueline Tivers (1985) was groundbreaking in the field of geography in her dealing with the lives of women with small children. Tivers addressed the ideological constraints of gender and socio-economic roles on the activity patterns of women with young children, and how various constraints feed on each other. Societal constraints (gender and class) directly influence physical constraints (mobility and opportunity), which together effect activity patterns, preferences, attitudes, choices and ultimately quality of life. Her research indicated that in early 1980s England many women with young children wanted to work but could not because of the lack of good childcare. This research broke the conceptual links between women and the home, and of women being solely responsible for childcare, but Tivers maintains the link between childcare and maternal employment. This study was undertaken within a 'Get the women to work' framework, and also sought to uncover the constraints on women's mobility in public space.

Isabel Dyck's ethnography of late 1980s Greater Vancouver moves beyond social surveys to point out the constraints on women's lives. She asserts that women are 'creative urban actors' who also shape their spaces: "(A)lthough previous literature has emphasized the spatial and social constraints facing women, this paper focuses on women's active construction of their lives within such constraints" (1989). This was a significant shift in thinking; Dyck introduces agency, makes the local context important, and sees space as a 'negotiated text'. Dyck challenged the distinction between public and private by integrating them and extending the domestic sphere into the public, and arguing that women working outside the home still practice 'good mothering' by caring for their children's social and emotional well-being through the creation of safe spaces. She demonstrated how the extended neighbourhood environment is a mothering workspace that is conditional on the reciprocity and compatibility of parents with similar values and ideologies. Collectives of mothers 'work out' what motherhood should be, and assist one another in their daily lives.

In the 1990s there has been an expansion in the theoretical realm of thinking about mothering and maternal roles. In particular, Gillian Rose (1993) is critical of previous empirical research as not encompassing the emotional relationship between mother and child. Rose contends that contemporary masculinist frameworks were unable to capture and represent emotion in daily life:

It is these kinds of emotional and physical fusion between people that time-geography can not admit in its reduction of human agency to a path and its consequent masculinist, bourgeois and racist repressions of the body (1991, p33).

An acceptance that geography is indeed masculinist meant that the frameworks in which feminist inspired research is to be done required further consideration. The search for feminist geographies meant doing away with dualisms such as public/private, work/home, male/female; and unpacking various and shifting forms of power, with particular regard to race, class and

gender. This change in thinking and direction of feminist work has resulted in a movement to create local, situated, and critical accounts; which are meant to be simultaneously explanatory and disruptive.

As a result of this movement to create feminist geographies, work done in the early-to mid-1990s focuses our attention on difference, variance, and discourse. This research is done to explore the everyday and to imagine new geographies. Stuart Aitken's (1998) work is part of an emerging trend in geography to explore everyday geographies and the meanings and imaginings of the family in different contexts. Aitken combines Winnicott, Butler, and Lefebvre to suggest that places of play and care are transitional spaces that vary over time and space and which produce different patterns of behaviour and constitute what is deemed 'normal'. By introducing notions of intimacy and the construction and constitution of childhood through notions of a private home, Aitken is able to extend his theorizing to explain why those formative childhood years later reproduce divisions of race, class and gender. In doing this he underscores the relevance of discursive analysis to understand childcare and family life. It is the notions of a private home rather than the reality of a private (vs. public) home that matters. Thus, he argues, exploring difference has explanatory power beyond the masculinist dualisms of public and private. As such, Aitken goes beyond relying on a model of public/private, through his exploration of difference and opens up other geographies for consideration.

Recent work by Sarah Holloway continues along this path to look at how parenting decisions follow a moral geography (1998). Particularly important are access to different options, and the value placed on those options, be it education, ratios, or consistency of care. Holloway's work traces links between the discourses of parenting and the subsequent childcare options that are

available. Looking at childcare through the lens of a moral geography of parenting illuminates a larger social geography of childcare provision:

The two key components of these childcare cultures are what could be termed a moral geography of mothering, that is a localised discourse concerned with what is considered right and wrong in the raising of children, and a local social organisation of non-parental educational childcare provision (1998, p31).

Holloway thus unravels several class-based geographies, the material geographies of childcare provision and local discursive cultures. She continues the blurring of public and private. For example, daycare workers establish an ethic and standard of care that is often used as a benchmark by parents in their parenting. This is a significant contribution as it hints toward the professionalization of childcare and of parenting, and is a topic I consider further in Chapters Four and Five. Holloway's work shows how a feminist geography can be both explanatory and disruptive. Looking for moments of disruption in 'traditional' patterns demonstrates how feminism is lived. Her work continues the feminist desire to give evidence to the breaking of the ideological link of mother to home:

The private nursery sector has a contradictory relation to contemporary ideologies of child rearing. On the one hand an establishment may carry the status of a fee-paying nursery school, and private education is valued by some within the British class system. On the other hand the provision of extended hours care, which enables parents to work full-time, means some women can break the ideological link between motherhood and full-time mothering in the home (1998, p36).

Holloway argues that our analysis of childcare must move beyond labour issues to consider the educational provisions and class achievements gained through securing childcare. This is a major thread grounding this thesis: parents secure childcare for various reasons beyond getting to work. While chapter two explores labour and work issues involved in childcare arrangements I argue that this only part of the childcare story. Many parents are negotiating good parenting in



their childcare arrangements, and this is an intense, emotional process. The remainder of the thesis considers constructions of parenting, home, education and class as other parts of childcare equations.

### **Negotiating Place**

The active negotiation by parents of the location of their child's care necessitated that this research go beyond the nanny option to consider the parents' assessments of daycare, and to work toward viewing childcare as a negotiated activity that varies over time and space depending on the needs, commitments and values of the families and caregivers involved. So while this thesis considers how ideologies of home are re-worked by parents when opting for a nanny, and how ideologies of community and education tend to be more heavily valued when choosing daycare, I am resisting the temptation to cleanly separate the two forms of care into public and private options. I am trying to retain the complexity of the stories to express the confusion and disruption felt by the people interviewed. Both 'spaces' contend with ideologies of childcare as employment strategy, both 'spaces' are accountable to the needs of the children, and both 'spaces' actively invent themselves and the meanings of good childcare.

Because of this association with place, geography is well positioned to explore childcare with a view to unpacking the values, meanings and everyday practices that go into inventing and sustaining home. The following excerpt is from a former nanny who had nannied for four years, worked in a daycare for four years, worked for an agency for a year and has now run a home daycare for four years so she could be with her child:

EE4: I really didn't like daycare, the daycare situation at all, group daycare is, for myself, and I have only worked in one group daycare, so I can't really, I haven't got a lot of experience to say, I just have problems with group daycare situations,

I just think children, particularly young children, need more one to one, and more of home environment, I think they are happier...I realized that I did actually like working with children, they had to be in the right setting (nanny, British, 1996).

Her working through the different childcare options is informative because it shows how the decision is rooted in place. Over and over again it is the setting, the environment, the location that determines childcare choice. The moral geography of parenting is rooted in place but parents work with these notions in different ways. Perception is more than reality. This is explored in detail in Chapter Three.

Parents choose places of care which reflect their perception of good parenting. Often this was not stated explicitly in the interviews, instead we were offered scenarios of other families or stereotypes that reflect a parent's values and ideas of good parenting. The parents would negotiate their uneasiness by discussing the issue in relation to others:

Interviewer GP: I kind of bock at that notion of a nanny as a substitute parent.

ER1: I think you never get to that stage of being a substitute, I mean if the mother is working all day, but I wonder because at the place that I work there's a daycare there, and these kids are dropped at 7:00 o'clock in the morning, and they are picked up at 6:00 p.m., and that's a long day for these little ones. And then I think well, how much of their parents do they really get, because if they are picked up then, they have dinner and they go to bed, and it's a problem...but then I question the parents who don't need a nanny, I know a lot of friends, some of my friends have a full time nanny, but she's not a nanny, she's mostly a housekeeper. But I know lots of people that do have nannies, and they are just there for the kids when their mother is not working, and I have a problem with that (mother, west-side, 1995).

While the interviews are quite different in content, in each of them traditional ideologies or sentiments get re-worked and played out in parents' daily lives. Two families with the similar childcare scenarios interpret and express those scenarios quite differently. It is this disruption and interpretation that informs this thesis. I trace those expressions.

In Chapter Two I discuss further how research on childcare has focussed on employment issues and argue that emotion must be included in these analyses as many women are not getting out to work because of the trauma of failed childcare. This chapter provides a first look at the families who participated in the research project and begins to problematize the issues facing these families as they negotiate childcare.

In Chapter Three, I look at the different ways parents position themselves as mothers, fathers, and employers in their attempts to define and create a family, and to provide what is 'best' for their child(ren). I also look at the desire for home based care to see how separate sphere ideology gets re-worked through the employment of a nanny. This chapter ends by addressing how the nannies felt about their employment and their role in childcare.

Chapter Four looks at how parents negotiate class issues and 'public' childcare options. As with nanny care, parents expressed a variety of views on the benefits and problems with daycare.

Many of the parents would have liked to use daycare for an older child but did not use this childcare option because they felt daycare was inflexible, cost prohibitive and too regulated.

Daycare workers were asked to reflect on those issues and this chapter considers how good parenting is negotiated differently in this context. This chapter explores daycare as an institution, discusses the 'common agenda' of daycare providers in Greater Vancouver, and looks at how children are 'normalized' through systems of daycare and early childhood education.

Chapter Five concludes the thesis with some thoughts on families and childcare in Vancouver and suggests that other childcare options are needed to satisfy parents desire to be 'good parents' and for childcare workers to provide quality childcare.

The geography of good parenting is negotiated in a terrain of multiple discourses and ideological positions that vary over the course of a parenting career. The ideologies and philosophies that go into childcare decisions reflect social values and say something about where we live. Parents are linking notions of good parenting to where childcare will take place, and childcare workers also actively construct the spaces of good childcare, and the meanings of what is good parenting. What is significant is that, within these constructions and negotiations, notions of public and private are disrupted, contradicted, and re-translated suggesting that discourses of childcare are multiple, personal, and evolving and require intimate geographies.

## Chapter 2: Work

There are many narratives and partial explanations of what can take place in the relationships between parents, caregivers, and children. Themes that have emerged thus far from the domestic worker project center around maternal employment, exploitation of 'third-world' workers, criticism of Canada's immigration program, concerns about the lack of affordable and reliable childcare, and the construction of identities through discourses of race, class and gender (Pratt, 1997a, 1997b, 1998). This is in line with other studies on domestic workers and contributes to a larger discussion in feminist geography about domestic work relations. This chapter continues to explore some of the labour issues involved but works mainly to expand the focus of inquiry to include emotion. This analysis contributes to an understanding of the issues that are preventing women from getting out to work by directing attention to women exiting the workforce to 'go home'.

Research done in Vancouver contains similar themes as one done in Toronto by Bernadette Stiell and Kim England (1997). The similarity of themes speaks to the prevalence of race, class and gender ideologies involved in this kind of employment, as well as the blurring of boundaries of separate sphere ideology. Stiell and England argue that "live-in domestic work blurs the boundaries between 'home' and 'work' and 'public' and 'private' which, in turn, complicates the employer-employee relation" (1997, p341). Their work acknowledges that this employment relation is shaped by intimacy and affective labour which they argue can lead to exploitation, and for Stiell and England this theme is what is most significant -- the effects on the worker. But this intimacy is key to the relationship, not just a means to get more work out of the nanny. Their analysis, like Lowe and Gregson's in the U.K. (1994), explores in great detail the employer-

employee relation but they do not unpack the notion that this relation is often constructed as a family unit.

In framing their research questions Stiell and England do not include the parents, arguing that: “(G)iven the uneven balance of power in the paid domestic work relation, and as it is the domestic workers who most acutely experience this, it is their voices that are heard here” (1997, p344-346). Stiell and England also cite concerns about the confidentiality of the nannies as a reason why the parents were excluded from the research process; this could have been partially remedied by talking to parents other than those who are the employers of the nannies in the sample. To view the parents as oppressive at the outset is problematic. The parents we spoke to often felt they were powerless because it was their child’s health and welfare on the line. For the most part, parents attempt to create a good situation not an exploitive one. Our discussions with parents suggest that while it may be partially true that some parents use the closeness of the relationship to get more care, many parents enter this arrangement looking for a positive relationship with a caregiver, but struggle with limited knowledge and insecurity:

ER23: The whole interview process was really amazing, because you realize that you don’t know what you’re doing. You don’t know how to ask these questions, and you find yourself filling in the gaps (father, east-side, 1995).

This parent’s story ends like many that we interviewed. This family never did find that good, stable caregiver that would enable them to successfully engage in employment outside the home. Like many of the parents in our sample they had to give up stable work and arrange their work schedules because they could not find a childcare option that met their emotional needs. They had to settle for sequential scheduling, which meant the mother and father did not see much of each other, putting a significant strain on their marriage. Today, the mother is seriously

considering quitting work outside the home all together in order to satisfy her need to be a good parent.

What Stiell and England do not take up, and what is largely absent from the literature thus far on domestic work, is the active negotiation of what good parenting is, and how this is intimately connected to place. Not only has geographical inquiry seen childcare as an employment issue, it has tended to explore childcare options in isolation, looking at nannies *or* daycare/nurseries. Isabel Dyck (1989, 1990) and Sarah Holloway (1998) have addressed issues of good mothering and this thesis builds on their work by extending notions of good parenting to include public and at-home childcare. The relationships between parents and caregivers, and the movement between childcare options requires further inquiry. Parents do not always make their childcare decisions through notions of home and public care, even though as geographers we are trained to see the world in this way. Looking at how parents negotiate finding childcare to get out to work is a good place to begin exploring the emotional, financial and complicated path that is childcare.

This chapter looks at how childcare is an employment strategy but works toward expanding geographical inquiry on domestic work relations. As will become clear many parents, particularly mothers, are not getting out to work because of the emotional relations and class limitations involved in childcare, and because of various and shifting constructions of mothering.

### **Getting the women to work**

Research done on childcare in Canada tends to address the lack of a national childcare policy, and tracks the spatial variations in the types of care, availability, and the strategies parents use to secure care. This 'patchwork system' has been the focus of geographical inquiry into childcare

where “geographers can make clear the spatial impacts of policies” (England, 1995, p3, quoting Truelove). Geographers who have taken on this research area have often viewed it through a feminist lens and/or have seen it as a social justice issue. In *Who Will Mind the Baby?*, Kim England points out that the topic of daycare has been explored primarily at the national/international and local scales. She argues that further study is needed “across a variety of spatial scales” (p3) and should “always be assessed in terms of their implications for women of all classes, races and geographical locations” (p5). This leads to the two central themes of the book: “the government’s role in child care provision and the everyday geographies of working mothers” (p5). This is the reasoning and shaping of the ‘problem statement’ in most of the studies on childcare contained in this edited collection of childcare research. These studies are representative of the goals and aspirations of the ‘women’s movement’ and evolve from the desire to enable women from suburban homes to enter the workplace through government initiatives. These studies are framed within the context of policies, programs and initiatives that would enable women to gain employment and get out of the house.

This research is significant in that it underscores that for the most part Canadians make an ideological link between work and childcare, and that this has shaped the childcare scene but the meanings of childcare and of good parenting need to be incorporated into these studies. In discussing differences between North America and Europe, Kim England points out that “in Canada and the U.S. child care gets identified as an employment related issue rather than a family issue” (p8). Viewing childcare as a family issue provides another view and one worth seeing. As such, the stories need an even more intimate look and the children being cared for need to be part of that telling. There is also a need to understand how parents frame themselves as parents and make class identifications through childcare.



As researchers we have not abandoned the public/private dualism. Nanny care has been viewed as a private option (Gregson & Lowe, 1994; Stiell & England, 1997) and juxtaposed to daycare as a public one (Valentine, 1997; Holloway, 1998); indeed this was how I envisioned this research. I too was wanting to compare public and private options. But to do this is to reinforce the dualism and to inscribe a new one -- that of childcare/ employment. I now feel that framing childcare options as distinct, and seeing them as either public or private, misses the point that it is not always 'real' spaces that parents are trying to find. Parents are often looking for emotional, ideal and imagined places. The geography here is twofold. First, the notions of home which are significant and not the place *per se*, and second the arrangement and structure of childcare as an employment solution does not adequately satisfy the desire for good childcare and good parenting.

Current childcare options in Vancouver are symptomatic of dualistic thinking, and the treatment of them as public and private options, accepts this structure rather than disrupt the very idea of the structure. These views prevent further consideration of something outside the public/private options that currently exist. Interviews with parents and caregivers suggest that the current childcare options and ideologies behind them constrain parents' efforts to be good parents, even though they may allow them to be productive workers. The assumption that childcare is for work makes the emotional relations between the people involved tense: parents feel guilty about using their daycare if they are not working, daycare workers condemn parents for not picking up their children right after work, nannies (and some parents) condemn parents who do not work and employ a nanny.

Empathy, experience and understanding provide a more nuanced approach to what 'getting the women to work' means and the multiple ways women interpret this in their daily lives. This thesis only skirts issues of labour markets and employment (see Pratt 1997a, 1997b, 1998 for analysis) in order to explore the emotional issues in greater detail. In the following example a mother negotiates her politics, finances and her roles of mother and employer in her childcare decision:

ER4: When she was in Little Beach (daycare), I think it was \$43.00 a day there, and I was always a little bit amazed. I mean it is a huge chunk out of *my* wage. But these are my kids and I want someone to feel well-compensated for taking care of them and so I never... although I'd love to be able to pay less, I think these people are worth that and more (mother, west-side, 1995).

There is so much more than 'getting to work' for this mother. This mother wants her caregiver to be well compensated for her work, and to this end her approach is both emancipatory and empowering, but it ends up being problematic for her. The mother's ability to work is jeopardized by the wages she must pay, her desire to pay a good wage, her need for good care for her child, and the lack of flexibility in most childcare arrangements and employment situations.

Childcare as an employment related issue is not working. When I first worked as a research assistant for Geraldine Pratt, and had not even considered writing a thesis on childcare, I was overwhelmed by the conversations I was having with mothers over the phone. I was calling to find participants for the nanny project and what I found were incredibly frustrated parents. Those who did find some kind of childcare participated for the most part, but I also had conversations with mothers who could not participate because they never did find a nanny and they were now 'at-home'. I can not stress enough that the over-riding experience of the parents we spoke with is that there is not childcare out there that allows parents to be the kind of parents they want to be. Often parents are forced to accept less than they would like because of a lack of

flexible, good childcare or because they could not emotionally handle being separated from their children. I recall at least six women I talked to on the phone, none of whom are part of this research, who had to stay home because they could not find affordable, flexible part-time care that made their income financially viable, or because they felt the childcare options available to them reduced their ability to be good parents.

Daycare workers also voiced a concern about being perceived as part of an employment strategy, as they view their role as community building and an integral part of building better societies. They want to establish community roots and positive values: "I mean I have a vested interest in improving the lot of people in this world, and that is (being a childcare worker) one way that I seem to feel that I can do it" (DC1, west-side, 1998). This is explored further in Chapter Four.

### **Going home**

A consistent theme throughout the interviews is that many mothers are considering dropping out of the workforce to 'be at home' with their child(ren). Of the fifty-two families interviewed thirty families had changed their work schedules to accommodate childcare. Of those thirty, in twenty-four families a parent had reduced the number of days or hours worked in a week and in six of the families the mother was actively considering dropping out of the workforce all together (See Figure 1). This is significant because it points to the inability to secure adequate care and the ideological pull to be there for the child.

Many parents were shocked by the lack of childcare available when going back to work after maternity leave. It is not uncommon for daycare centres to have two year wait-lists for infant

care which of course means you have to get on the list before you have the child. Work is an issue because of a lack of flexible good care and emotional connections:

ER29: But here in Vancouver it is really bad, it's just horrendous. I've said for years in the bank we should start a corporate daycare downtown, because it seems that everybody that was really good, once they got pregnant, moved out to the suburbs, so we lost so many employees that way, so something's gotta happen. It's just been really difficult really for women to work, I think.

Interviewer GP: It's really depressing - I'm coming across people who say 'yeah, it is just too much'.

ER29: Too much money, too much hassle, too much frustration over the quality of what you can get, and then you get ragged on at work for the same thing. I went through all of that (19 nannies, 2 daycares) with people knowing that I replaced nannies, and I never missed one day of work because of a nanny, not one. That was an incredible hassle, but I work in a boy's club and it's just not acceptable, you've gotta keep to that and I don't want to hear about it, right?! It's a frustration I think a lot of women go through as well, because there's no understanding at all. Yet there's a man in my office, if his wife is sick, he can phone in sick and nobody even questions it - it's very strange (mother, Surrey, 1995).

**Figure 1: Parent Summary**

ER #	current occupation -location	kid age	childcare strategy -type/length	year	why ended	Parents' work: reduced days* quit to go home#, may 'go home'+
1	m: ballet inst. d: psychiatrist west-side	b,5 b,4	nanny,out,18mo. pre-schools	93-95 93-95	tension current	*mom p/t
2	m:teacher d: ? west-side	b,1	fam. daycare	94-95	summer off	+mom wants to quit working
3	m: healthcare d: admin. west-side	g,3 g,1	homecare, 4mo  daycare, 2yr nanny, 6mo, out	93  93-95 95	parents did not like current current	

4	m: dental rec. d: ? west-side	g,3 b,1	homecare, 1yr daycare, 1.5yr nanny, 5mo, out	92-93 93-94 95	care quit mom at home nanny quit	*mom .
5	m: physiothr. d: sys.analyst west-side	g,5 g,3 b,1	daycare, 1yr grandma, 1yr nanny,out,6mo.	91 92-94 95	2 <sup>nd</sup> child too tired current p/t	*mom now p/t
6	m: lawyer d: lawyer west-side	g,8 g,7 b,5	nanny,out, 7yr.  nanny,out, 5mo.	87-94  95	nanny too attached to children current	*mom p/t
7	m: director d:cameraman west-side	g,4	nanny, out, 6mo.	1995	current	*mom p/t
8	m:clerical. d: plumber west-side	b,1	nanny, in, 6mo.	1995	current	
9	m: massage d: prop.mngr. west-side	b,7 g,1	nanny, out, 1yr. out of school nanny, out, 2mo.  nanny, out, 4mo.	1990 91-92 95  95	quit current (boy) nanny too young current	
10	m: architect d: architect east-side	b,4 g,1	daycare,1yr homecare,4mo daycare, 2yrs nanny,out,1yr	91-92 92 93-94 94-95	strike want daycare 2 <sup>nd</sup> child nanny quit	*mom p/t *mom 3 days *mom 3 days
11	m:BCGEU d: technician west-side	b,1	nanny, out, 7mo.	1995	current	
12	m: dietician d: architect east-side	b,4 b,1	daycare, 1yr nanny, out, 1yr family daycare  daycare, 1yr	91-92 92-93 94  94-95	too expensive nanny quit parents did not like current	*parents each 4 days
13	m: linguist d: consult.. west-side	b,5	nanny, in, 9mo. nanny, in, 1yr. nanny, in, 2wk. nanny, in, 1yr. nanny, in, 6mo.	90-91 92 92 93-95 95	fired married fired back to Slov. current	
14	m: educator d: architect west-side	g,1	nanny, out, 3mo.	1995	current	
15	m: dentist d: ? west-side	g,3 g,1	nanny,out,2yr. daycare, p/t nanny,out,1yr.	92-94 94-95 94-95	nanny too old current current	
16	m: ? d: unemploy east-side	g,3	nanny,out, 2 yr.	93-95	current	*mom *dad home works p/t

17	m: oc.therapy d: teacher east-side	b,1	co-op daycare	94-95	could not find good daycare	*mom p/t
18	m:manager d:manager west-side	g,7 g,4	nanny,in,3yr. nanny,in,1yr. nanny,in,1yr.	88-92 92-94 94-95	tension tension current	
19	m:judge d: or. surgeon west-side	4	nanny, in, 4yr. nanny,in,new	91-95	tension current	
20	m: insurance d: publishing Coquitlam	g,4 b,1	nanny,out,2yr. nanny,out,3wk. nanny,out,2wk. nanny,out,1yr.	91-93 94 94 94-95	mom at home fired fired fired	maternity *mom part- time  #mom quitting
21	m: accounts d: computers west-side	g,2	nanny, in, 1.5yr. nanny, in, new	93-95 95	nanny quit current	
22	m: travel ind. d: hotels Burnaby	g,7 g,5 g,2	nanny, out, 3mo. family care, 1yr mom home, 2yr own daycare, 2yrs nanny, new	1989 1989 90-92 93-95 95	fired 2nd child   current	#mom !!took in kids *mom
23	m: media d: ? east-side	g,5 b,3	opposite shifts ext. maternity daycare, 6mo.  nanny, out, 1mo nanny, out, 6mo opposite shifts	90-91 92-93 93  94 94 95	mom at home parents did not like fired tension current	*mom *mom *mom  *mom *mom +going 'home'
24	m: bank mng d: ? Coquitlam	b,2 b,1	fam.daycare 6mo  mom helper, 3mo neighbour, 5mo grandmother	93  94 94-95 95	daycare closed mom at home sick current	*mom  *maternity  *mom & dad
25	m: legal as. d: sys.anal. Coquitlam	b,3 b,1	fam. daycare,4m  fam. daycare,1yr  nanny, out,5mo, nanny, out, 3dys nanny, out, 5mo.	92  92-94  94 94-95 95	parents did not like daycare closed nanny quit nanny quit nanny quit	*mom  *mom  *mom *mom #mom
26	m: speech pth d: business Coquitlam	b,5 g,2	nanny, 2yr, out neighbour, 6mo. nanny,out, 2mo. neighbour, 1yr.	91-92 93 93-94 94-95	nanny quit maternity tension current	*maternity *mom (4) *mom (4)

27	m: T.V.editor d: camera Surrey	g,5 g,3 b,n	nanny, out, 1yr. nanny, out, 2wks nanny, out, 7mo.  nanny, 9mo, out nanny, 1yr, out	91-92 92 92  94 94-95	nanny quit tension mom maternity tension mom maternity	*mom *mom *maternity  *mom *mom+
28	m: manager d: manager Burnaby	b,3	nanny, in, 1yr. nanny, in, 18mo.	93-94 94-95	nanny quit current	
29	m: bank mng. d: sales Surrey	12 g,9	19 nannies, out 2 daycares	84-95	total disaster: quit, fired, stole, moved, married.....	never missed one day of work
30	m: transit single parent Surrey	b,4	fam. daycare, 3m. fam. daycare, 2m nanny, out, 1yr. fam. daycare, 6m.  fam. daycare, 7m. fam. daycare, 6m.	92 92 92-93 93-94  94 95	care ended care ended nanny quit parents did not like care ended current	
31	m: lawyer d: lawyer Burnaby	g,3	nanny, out, 2yr. nanny, out, new	93-95 95	nanny quit current	#mom +mom
32	m: p/t writer d: banker (er 48) West Van	12 10 b,7	babysitters, in nanny, in nanny, in nanny, in	83-87 88 88-89 95	temporary temporary temporary current	*mom p/t
33	m: manager d: electrician Coquitlam	7 5	family, 4yrs. nanny, out, 5mo. nanny, out, 1yr. nanny, out, 1yr. fam. daycare, 1yr.	88-92 92 93 94 94-95	family moved family moved nanny quit nanny sick current	
34	m: teacher d: lawyer Surrey	3 1	nanny, out, 2yrs fam. daycare, 3m.  nanny, out	92-94 94  95	nanny sick parents did not like current	
35	m: manager d: manager Coquitlam	4 3	nanny, in, 3 yrs. nanny, out, 1yr. neighbour	91-94 94-95 95	tension nanny quit current	*mom
36	m. engineer d: ? Delta	g,2	nanny, 2yr.	93-95	current	

37	m: supervisor d: airlines east-side	g,4 g,1	Grandmother, 2yr  daycare 2yr.  nanny, out, 8 mo.	92-93  93-94  94-95	too much work parents did not like current	
38	m:entre- d: peneurs Haney	12 10 b,8	nanny,in,1yr. nanny, in,1yr. nanny, in, 1yr. nanny, in, 2yr. nanny, in, 2yr. nanny, in, 2yr.	84-85 85-86 86-87 87-90 90-92 92-95	nanny quit nanny quit    current	
39	m: manager d: pilot Surrey	b,8 g,4	home daycare, 4y nanny, 3mo, fil  sitters p/t	87-91 93  92-95	moved parents did not like current	*mom  *mom
40	m: lawyer d: lawyer West Van	b, 5	nanny, in,16mo. nanny, in, 2.5yr. nanny, in, 3mo. nanny, in,1yr. nanny, in, 1 mo.	90-91 91-94 94 94-95 95	went home fired fired nanny quit current	
41	m: shopkeep d: of.manager New West	g,5 b,1	family daycare nanny, 4mo, out fam. daycare, 1m nanny, out, 1wk.	92-93 95 95 95	family moved fired care ended temporary	#mom quit *mom *mom *mom+
42	m: lawyer d: developer West Van	b,7 g,4 g,2	own daycare, 3yrs nanny, in, 2yr. nanny, in, 8mo. nanny, in, 3mo. nanny, in, 1yr. nanny, in, 1mo.	90-93 91-93 93-94 94 94-95 95	closed it nanny quit tension quit travelling current	*dad works from home
43	m: teacher d: plumber Van?	g,2	home daycare	94-95	mom at home	+mom
44	m: teacher d: student Coquitlam	12 g,8	family, 1yr own daycare, 4yrs fam.daycare, 6m  nanny, 1yr	87-88 89-93 93  94-95	temporary  parents did not like fired	took in kids
45	m:of.manager d: carpenter Port Coquitlam	b,4 g,3	family, 1yr sitter, 6mo nanny,6mo sitter, 5mo neighbour, 5mo	91 92 93-94 94 95	maternity school nanny moved fired not available	*mom *mom *mom  +mom
46	m: clerk d: labourer Port Moody	g,5 b,1	fam. daycare, 2yr.  nanny, 1yr	91-93  94-95	parents did not like current	*mom  *mom+



47	m: banker d: banker west-side	g,5 b,4	family daycare	93-95	current	
48	see C32					
49	m: teacher d: banker west-side	g,2 b,0	nanny, out, 1yr. nanny,in, 8mo. nanny,in, 3mo.	93-94 94-95 95	nanny quit nanny quit current	*mom p/t
50	m: consultant d: banking south Van.	b,2 g,1	nanny, out nanny, in, 18mo.	1993 94-95	nanny quit current	* parents juggled 1 <sup>st</sup> child, needed nanny for 2 <sup>nd</sup>
51	m: realtor d: accountant west-side	g,4 b,1	fam. daycare, 6m  nanny, in, 1yr. nanny, out, 1yr. nanny, out, 6mo.	92  93 94 95	parents did not like nanny quit tension current	*mom home
52	m: accounts d: stockbrokr West Van.	b,5 g,4	nanny, in, 1yr. nanny, in, 1.5yr. nanny, in, 2yr.	91 92-93 93-95	nanny quit nanny quit current	

m: mother, d: father, b: boy, g: girl      The word 'tension' is being used to describe scenarios like: "she was burnt out", "I was fed up", "we couldn't take it anymore", "we got on each other's nerves", "we had really different approaches".

Most women with whom we talked were keenly aware of the complexity, cost and consequences of the choices they had to make around childcare. Unhappy kids, job de-skilling, loss of promotions, and marriage problems are apparent in many interviews. Often these mothers considered making work more flexible but their employers were unwilling to accept job sharing or allow employees to go part-time:

ER28: At that point they said they really didn't have any provision for part-time work, and they wanted me back full-time or I would have to resign... Many of the staff reps don't have children. They're either singles or in couples, but childless, and those that have children find it really difficult and there's a lot of interest in job-sharing and a lot of interest in the possibility of part-time work. And I was certainly the test case, and particularly they told me flat out that they were not interested in part-time. But they were considering job-sharing, and the union got involved and they were negotiating and they wanted to negotiate a pilot project around job-sharing for me and another woman, and it just didn't work out. So, I ended up resigning, and the other woman who also had a baby the following year, the one who was interested in job-sharing, she didn't have that financial

possibility, and she's gone back full-time – so that's the dilemma (mother, manager, Burnaby, 1995).

When mom does go part-time it often relieves the at home issues but then she goes to work and is frustrated by her lost career:

ER39: I still do the same work I did before, everybody still comes to me, I still do all the orders for the department because I know it so well. I just decided and the bottom line is that without having to pay the nanny and working three days a week at the same hourly rate, why would I want to kill myself? Prestige, ego, all that kind of stuff, as tempting as it is, and it's hard sometimes because of being a part-time. I'm seeing all these full-time people moving up and screwing up left, right, and centre, and I have to watch that instead of getting in there and doing it myself. And I still come home from work feeling very mentally exhausted, but now the biggest part of my life is at home (mother, manager, Surrey, 1995).

Many moms make the connection between the labour at home and the associated costs, after all they are paying those childcare costs now. In this example the mother desperately wants to be home with her child, and the costs of childcare make this even more tempting, but at the same time she respects the work that goes into that wage:

ER2: It is a female attitude, I'm hoping to do it as a full-time job one day, stay home I mean, I'd stay for \$5.50 an hour. And also just my own piece of mind about women and their pay, its value, so its defensive, it is hard for me to pay the bottom line (mother, west-side, 1995).

It is compelling that this mother is willing to stay at home for a wage that is less than she would pay another woman to care for her child. Her situation is perplexing because while she would like to be at home she cannot do so without a significant drop in her household income. At the same time her desire to pay a good wage also cuts into her earnings and makes the whole scenario frustrating.

The cost of childcare leads many moms to consider going home. This mother of three, an editor for a Television station, who has put 10 years into her career and has a position she enjoys, voices how the costs are sending her home:

ER27: There would be no point in me working if I had to pay more than that (\$12.00 an hour). Because the difference in what I was paying for childcare and what I earned at work, and gas to get to work and all that sort of stuff. And I thought about that to, y'know, comparing what I need to what I could afford to pay out, and if I stay home, how much... y'know the whole financial thing. But for me, I wanted to go back to work, because I need to work, I can't stay home full-time (mother, Surrey, 1995)

This mother has linked her salary to the cost of childcare, as most mothers do. She is considering going home because of the wage disparity, like many mothers do. She voices a preference to be working over being at home, and like many of the mothers in this sample, she is going home. This is not to suggest that cost of childcare is the only factor. This mother is pulled home because of discourses of motherhood, because of class-based assumptions on what constitutes good childcare, and because of the politics of what subsidized childcare means in a Canadian context.

Other mothers who were giving up their careers to 'be there' for their children would appeal to the safety and tradition of the at-home mom. This mother explains her dilemma of negotiating career and family and never seeming to get it right:

ER45: That's why I want it (childcare) in my house, I want to be part of it, that's why I'm in the parent participation and that's why I took a little bit of a pay reduction to work four days a week. Personally, I'd like three, but that's not going to happen, because I am a supervisor and I do supervise staff and for sure the one day is stretching it (mother, Coquitlam, 1995).

The typical result of this juggling of career and family is that the mother is often pulled home:

ER 41: I went home one day, and I was at the point where I was ready to, you know, sell everything in the store and give it up, I said I don't know if this worth

it. My kids are being shuttled around, I have 5 years into producing a very healthy child who is a great kid, and here she is, both of them, being shoved around. This [nanny] is number three in five months, how healthy is this, what kind of quality are they getting, what kind of days are they having, and I was just so frustrated I said: "I don't know Alex if this is worth it" (mother, New Westminster, 1995).

The incredible stress of finding good care results in the mother going home to provide this care. In the following passage I have pasted together key points from a very exasperated mother who discussed at length how problematic the childcare scene is in Vancouver. Her account is not uncommon. This woman is a legal assistant making \$40,000 a year and is going home with a plan that she will do homework:

ER 25: Yeah, I'm going to look after the children. We are going to move to a cheaper home.

GP: So you're in a position to stop working for a while and stay home, work at home?

ER 25: I have been working in the same law firm for six and a half years. I have a very good rapport with the lawyers that are working there. I've been working for eleven years in law and this is the longest I've ever stayed with one firm...there's something good going on there.

GP: So it's a job you obviously like.

ER25: It is. I very much enjoy it, I get very high job satisfaction out of it. I really have found that, it's funny because my girlfriends say to me that my priorities have changed. My priorities would not have changed this much if I had not been going through this much stress. They've changed to this point because we have not been able to find anybody that would've worked out...So I've resolved myself to the fact that I'm gonna give up my career for now. I'm hoping that once the boys are both in school full-time that I'll be able to do work from home. The nature of things are changing and we've got a computer, and modem, and fax machine...I think the saddest part about all of this, and I don't mind telling you this, my income as a legal assistant is \$40,000 a year. Out of what I pay to a nanny, I see about \$700.00 a month, that's how much I see. It's not worth it. I pay more to the nanny than what I get to bring home...I don't know what the answer is to our whole society system right now, where people are going through this. The only thing I can say is mothers or fathers stay home. One has to stay home. (mother, Port Coquitlam, 1995).

The following chapter looks at how parents imagine and create this place of home. The intimate connections between parent, child and caregiver require nurturing, respect and reciprocity to work. It is a constant balancing act. These subtle nuances shape the home and work environment for everyone involved. This research explores the emotional issues that come with working and childcare, and considers all the participants as reasonable people who are negotiating uncharted terrain. A discursive analysis and much reflection on these issues provide this intimate geography. Viewing childcare from the perspective of the family does not allow for a clean break between the public and private options; there is too much negotiation going on. The complexities and contradictions of the relationships between families and caregivers require that we look beyond employment issues to the more emotional, social and cultural geographies.

### Chapter 3: Home

The home as a site of childcare is linked to notions of 'good parenting' or moral parenting. The employment of a nanny is seen by many parents to create an extended family, which enables a child, indeed the whole family, to be nurtured in this private space. This attempt to construct a 'family unit' often does not work. A partial explanation for this failure is that some nannies view their employment as a 'bad' parenting strategy, and the nannies themselves are in a position of compromising their own ideals on appropriate childcare. What emerges from this research is that parenting and childcare 'on the ground' is fraught with crisis, confusion and guilt, and that multiple discourses play out in the identities and actions of the families and workers involved.

This chapter begins by tracking how parents mediate the discourses, expectations, and experiences of proper parenting in their childcare decisions. Focusing on parents who chose a nanny for childcare, I explore themes of home, maternal ideals, and family. I look at how parents frame their caregivers and themselves as parents, and how they work out their parenting style to provide what is 'best' for their child(ren). I also look at the desire for home based care to see how separate sphere ideology gets re-worked through the employment of a nanny. Why do parents choose nannies? What are their discourses of home? Do discourses of home differ for live-in and live-out situations? How do discourses of childcare and good parenting vary over time and space? This chapter ends by considering how childcare providers, in this instance nannies, view their employment and offers their thoughts on this childcare strategy.

## Home and At-home

Home is where parents root their family life and childcare decisions. To make those decisions parents draw on multiple sources, such as traditional ideologies and current fashions to shape their home and family life. Many of the parents interviewed in Vancouver reworked an 'at-home mom' ideal. While the appeal to an at-home mom ideal is the thrust of this discursive analysis, it is crucial to assert here that parents work differently with this ideal. It affects their childcare decisions in various ways. Parents who chose home care as their childcare did so for various reasons, such as convenience, costs, a sense of duty to their family, lack of other options, happiness of child and so on. Overall, what I want to stress is that making childcare decisions is a very complex, emotional process. Many of the parents expressed extreme anguish and uncertainty over their decisions.

The linking of 'at-home' and 'mom' provides multiple points of entry to dissect discourse. Gregson and Lowe persuasively argue that there has been a diversification of the meanings of home, and while there are identifiable dominant ideologies of this place, the explanatory power is in how these meanings are generated:

We hope to move the debate away from assertions concerning dominant and alternative ideologies of home towards an examination of how these ideas come to be constructed and reproduced through the lived practices and beliefs of individuals (1995, p227).

Locating home as a site of inquiry, this chapter explores how we imagine our families and our homes. There are blurred lines and nuances in choosing childcare and defining good parenting that fluctuate around feelings and concepts of home.

Conceptions of the home as a nurturing and safe place emerge from the interviews in different ways. Parents and nannies use words like “home environment” and “homey atmosphere” to describe why at home care is best, and it is through their choice of words that the sentiment of place is captured. Isabel Dyck (1990) identified good mothering as connected to an at-home ideal but what constituted good parenting with this sample is more complex. The at-home ideal is mixed up with other discourses of home, family, and career. It is sometimes abandoned all together. Home is not always conceived of an ideal space by parents and childcare workers. Some parents see the at-home mom ideal as oppressive not only for the mom, but also as limiting children’s opportunities as well.

Feminist analysis of western societies has, for the last couple of decades, pointed to the social construction of families in industrialized societies as being polarized around notions of public and private space: work/home, production/reproduction, male/female. Discussions of this separate sphere ideology tend to point to the Industrial Revolution as the birthplace of this dualistic thinking, and as such to a Victorian model as the framework for the construction of the ‘ideal mom’. Feminist analysis and deconstruction had destabilized the seemingly natural roles of ‘Mother’ and ‘Father’ as social constructions. Yet, many of us are still influenced by the basic tenets of those idyllic Victorian values: good mothers stay at home nurturing the home, the children and her husband. Good fathers take care of their families, work hard in the public realm and honour their family name. Forty years of second wave feminism and numerous economic expansions around the globe should serve to dispel this framework, yet the separate sphere ideal persists. Once becoming parents we often appeal to the tradition of the ideal mom, and the safety of home.



Feminists have also long recognized the debilitating effects of being trapped in the home and/or suburbia. Many of the women we spoke to struggled with issues of isolation or were aware that they were 'not built' for staying at home. These moms argued that their need for childcare was more than an employment strategy, they needed time and space away from home:

ER46: I could stay home part-time, but I couldn't stay home full-time, I need to have some space" (Port Moody, July 1995)

There is much discussion around the need for space, or the need to get out of the house and get back to work for the mother's own sanity: "She stayed home for about two years and it drove her bananas, right, she really wanted to work again" (ER51, father, west-side). It was common for the mothers to develop a schedule that gets them out of the house for their sanity, but not full-time. Many of the mothers needed time away from the kids. This is evident in the experience of the parents and in the work of the nanny. It speaks to feminist themes on mothering and feminist criticism of parenting in isolation:

ER41: So she was a very difficult infant, which stresses everybody out, and so I was really ready to run out of that house as fast as I could. I really, really wanted to get out of there, so when she was seven months old I put her in day-care. I can't even imagine doing that now, I am horrified that I did it, but I did, I needed to, I guess or whatever reason at that point I needed to do that, for the sake of my sanity anyway (mother, New Westminster, 1995).

The need to justify why she left her child is entangled with an honesty that allows this respondent to talk freely about her child stressing her out, and her need to leave. At the same time her troubles can be interpreted as being rooted in our cultural disdain for children, and that mothering (and nannying) still takes place largely in isolation. Finally, it disrupts the seeming naturalness of the maternal ideal.

### **Negotiating maternal ideals and good parenting**

Mothers are forced to negotiate, much more so than fathers, with what their role is once a nanny joins the family. The nanny becomes a major person in the child's life, she is not just a worker, the nanny is a caregiver. Mothers often have standards and expectations of care to which they expect a nanny to conform, or to which they deny the nanny access as they are a privileged part of the role of mother. Mothers need to work out what is their turf and what can be shared or taken on by the nanny.

Many of the moms spoke to notions of an at-home mom by indicating the reason why they could not do it, or by envisioning ways they would find their way home again. Women who qualified their decision not to 'stay at home' indicated that they just were not 'built for it': "...[I] thought I was going to be that wonderful at home mom making cookies and doing all those wonderful things. And realized soon into maternity leave that I wasn't a full time mom, that I really needed to balance career and home" (ER52, mother, West Van, 1995). Many mothers wrestle with social constructions of mothering when working out their parenting strategies and styles. In order to make childcare decisions they must mediate discourses of family and career and in doing this they negotiate feelings of guilt, frustration, and a lot of uncertainty.

In other interviews mothers felt they had to 'justify' their employment and portray themselves as good mothers who would be home more if they could be. They would argue that their work schedules were necessary, or spoke at length about how they were trying to work reduced days, or get extended maternity leave. Ways in which mothers maintain career and 'mom status' are worked out in complicated ways. In the following example the mother hired a nanny as "the second best option to her being at home" (ER13). She argues that her worthwhile career

legitimizes her working, whereas other moms can take years off without de-skilling and loss of career. What is most fascinating is that she links her breastfeeding to maintaining her mothering role:

ER13: If I did not have a career that was important to me, if I did data entry or was a waitress or something like that, where it wouldn't matter if I quit for a few years, then I'd probably wouldn't have been so concerned about going back to work...So it really was a question of how I could have the quality of care that meets my criteria, and not feeling like this child is missing out on anything, but also have my career...It was because I wanted the lifestyle

*later in the interview on the flexibility of the nanny*

ER13: I liked the flexibility, and I also continued breast-feeding him up until he was 18 months old. He was at home and if I came into work for a while, then I could still work my breast-feeding around that, and then finally I didn't breast-feed him during the day, I just breast-fed at night, I think all that kind of, you know, not giving up being a mother, but being able to do my work, that was a nice compromise (mother, west-side, 1995).

In some of the interviews you can see that notions of separate spheres are actively contested in the working arrangements and expectations of the nanny, but in many households the ideas of domestic sphere remain and are reinscribed through the employment of a nanny (see also Gregson & Lowe, 1994). When the at-home childcare relationships were described to us they were often done so by discussing the problems of having "two moms" in the house:

ER37: So I was home for those four months. So I was able to ease into the next stage. But that was the toughest time, because only one person can really be in charge and I just couldn't get my head around that for the longest time. I thought that yes, Judy's here, but really I'm in charge, but as you can imagine it was just awful and I was just in a rage most of the time and directed it at Judy...Then I realized there can't be two moms in the house. So I had to give her some more room, so then I backed off, either to go upstairs or out of the house so that I wasn't tempted to get involved. That took a little while for me to get that down – that this really was her space (mother, east-side, 1995).

This negotiation around housework and childcare responsibilities between the two women is instructive of how discourses of domestic work and childcare are conceived and lived. (This is decidedly between the women in the household, very rarely did a nanny perform a task that was part of the fathers role, nor did fathers ever comment that they felt the relationship between himself and the nanny needed negotiating. With this sample it is the mothers who defined and managed the nannies work day.) One outcome of this sharing of duties between the two women is that there is an expectation that the nanny will perform duties that the mother herself finds unmanageable. The nannies we spoke with agreed that they were often expected to accomplish more tasks in a day than what a parent might achieve under the same circumstances:

EE7: A lot of people think that taking care of kids is so easy, and all you have to do is put a video in, you know and then have a clean house by the end of the day. But if you think about it, a lot of moms and dads can't keep their house clean themselves. Because it is hard. So you expect this superperson to come in and do it twice as good as you can do it because you are paying them. That is completely unrealistic (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

Some nannies, in particular British nannies who could appeal to their professional child minding status, insisted that they only do childcare, leaving the housework to the mother or another employee. For the mother this might mean the amount of quality time she can spend with her kids is reduced, leaving the mother resentful of the nanny:

ER41: Your nanny gets to spend time with your children, and live in the house that you are paying an outrageous mortgage on, while you are never there for 11 hours a day (mother, West Van, 1995).

The next example also indicates how a mother might feel jealous of the nanny. In this case the mother explains that the live-out nanny she currently employs brings her own child with her to work, thus she does not have childcare costs, and gets a paycheque while caring for her children:

ER29: It is when you think about it yourself, and the fact that you could spend your own day with your own child, nobody else looking after them. She gets to

do all the stuff she does with him, and then gets paid on top of that (mother, Surrey, 1995).

Negotiating the relationship between mom, nanny, and child is often tenuous because the mother relies on the nanny to mind and care for her child. Sometimes the boundaries of time and space are breached. In this example the mother 'complains' about the extra hours her nanny is putting in:

That was a real point of conflict actually in our home, because I was getting so anxious because she just wouldn't leave it. She'd be here until 7:00 at night, and I have a fairly stressful career, working on fairly antagonistic grounds, and I just don't want to have to deal with being polite to someone... I don't want to be impolite! I mean I want her to be happy and be a good nanny, and treat our baby like I would treat her. But for me to be able to do that I need to have a certain amount of space to be stressed out. And then she became really protective of my child... it was necessary for there to be bonding, but we had to put limits on it. Sometimes we would literally have to leave the house in order to separate (mother, west-side, 1995).

Conversely some mothers *allowed* their nanny to organize her day in much the same way the mother might if she were at home during the day:

Interviewer GP: And does she connect with the other nannies?

ER36: Yeah, they meet each other in the park, they get together, and they come together and socialize a lot during the day I know, which is good. Can't discourage socializing.

Interviewer GP: I think it is interesting that you think that way, because some others don't. I mean I think it is interesting that you've seen the benefits of the networking and socializing.

ER36: We would do it if we were home!

Interviewer GP: I know, I know!

ER36: Someone would come by with their kids, and they would play. And I had that as a child growing up, so I think it is important that she (the nanny) be allowed to do that, and I've never experienced any problems.

Interviewer GP: It's interesting that you frame it in terms of what you would be doing if it were you at home, because for some employers, there's something different about when they're paying someone to take care of their child.

ER36: I think that's part of the respect thing. She is not just her nanny, she's a replacement parent is the reality. She's home with her most of her waking hours and her influence is pretty big (mother, Delta, 1995).

What is partly at issue is that the labour that is being contracted is what mothers have always had to do unpaid (Gregson and Lowe, 1994). One mother offered us this insight as it was something that she has to contend with as a labour lawyer:

ER31: I think it takes almost an analysis of housework and childcare as forms of production to be a good employer, because what many employers of live-in domestic workers want is to hand the keys over to the domestic worker and have them replicate what they would do, exactly the way they would do it, and they get upset if they don't (mother, west-side, 1995).

Many of the participants in this study incorporate feminism into their families and their work, but continue to struggle with issues of home and mothering. Many of the women who participated, both mothers and caregivers, were critical of the links between women and home on an intellectual level but often described bodily connections between mothers and children, and lived their daily lives in a way which is still 'traditional'. They articulate a feminist vision they do not live.

The image and appeal of the traditional at-home mom ideal is ever present in the interviews. Parents use this ideal to measure their own childcare arrangements and often see it as the optimum example of what they are trying to achieve with at-home care. In many (>20) of the interviews the parents discussed the desire to reproduce the at-home mom model through their

hiring of a nanny because they viewed the home as the ideal space for the caring of children. It serves to remind us how important the home is in the imagination, even if mom is not there. In this example a mother describes her leaving the home as a result of a marital separation; the children will remain in the home with their father and a live-in nanny was hired to 'replace' the now absent mother:

ER32: Because of the separation and because he was going to, my children live with my husband, and because he was going to be living with her in the long-term, we hired her in September, and I didn't leave the home, we wanted the nanny in the home, in the site so that we could both train her, I could train and she could see how it would work before I left the home, so that the kids would know and she would know that she had both of our support.... (later in the interview)...he was hiring someone that was going to help him very much so and I don't think very many men have to, *I think most men hire nannies to help their wives*. (mother, West Van, 1995, my emphasis)

This interview was fascinating because the nanny was quite clearly hired to come into the home and replicate the duties of a 'house-wife' and mother. The following example repeats this desire in a case where the mother is still living in the home:

Interviewer GP: So in thinking about hiring a nanny was that tied up with your needs as a working parent, or your child's needs, or both?

ER19: Entirely my needs as a working parent. Well, no I suppose too it was important in my point of view that since I can't be home with him, and my husband's schedule is too erratic to guarantee that he'll be home with him, we had to have what I thought would be a stable full-time caregiver who would be in the home, in our home. I didn't feel comfortable with taking him and dropping him off somewhere else.

GP: So as a geographer, I am interested in spatial issues, and the feelings people have about having care in the home...

ER19: I hadn't really thought about it. It is just the closest I can come to duplicating my own experience, and of course a whole duplication would mean that I would be an at-home mother. The next closest thing to me is to come up with a full-time individual who offers that care to the child in his home (mother, west-side, 1995).

This mother is attempting to provide a 'traditional' at-home mothering ideal through the employment of a nanny, someone to duplicate what she would do if she were to perform this task. She is assuming that because the replacement is at-home the environment is naturally conducive to nurturing. Both mothers work with social constructions of mothering to define what the nanny will do during her time in the home. Both mothers assume that childcare in the home is best.

### **Childcare at home**

While the ideological link between mother and the home continues to be successfully challenged, the connection between mother and child remains fairly solid, and children remain firmly entrenched in *the* home or at the very least home-like environments. Gregson and Lowe sum this up in regards to the childcare scene in Britain, but the same can be said of Canada:

(L)ong after John Bowlby's (1965) pronouncements about the importance of the natural mother and home based care to 'normal' child development, the best form of childcare in Britain is still considered to be that provided by a child's natural mother but that the *best place* for that child is still considered to be the child's home...Indeed, in this discourse, the parental home is presented as a safe haven for the child (1995, p230).

Gregson and Lowe found that in Britain home based childcare is "accepted in a normative sense" (1994, p230). They determined that there is very little questioning of this ideal by the parents or caregivers. Given that the parents involved in this research project wanted a nanny for their childcare needs it follows that many of these parents accepted home based childcare in a normative sense. In contrast to the dominant construction of the home as safe and nurturing, daycare is often framed as institutional:

Interviewer TB: Is that because home is important for you?

ER41: Yeah, I think it is important to keep the children at home until a certain age because even though, like some places are really warm and child friendly, it is



still an institution, and I don't think it is healthy for a child to be institutionalized (mother, New Westminster, 1995).

The age of the child is a significant determinant of whether childcare is in the home. Many of the respondents indicated a discomfort with having babies in childcare. This might partially explain why there are so few daycare spaces for infants in Vancouver, at the time of this interview there were only 40 infant spaces in the entire city of Vancouver<sup>5</sup>. The lack of spaces leaves parents without much of a choice, as such childcare is pushed home. Most of the parents we spoke to were content with the lack of infant spaces because they did not perceive any benefit from infants being in a group setting:

ER6: So then I looked a Granny Y's and it was just...erm, there were so many cribs in the napping room that I was quite overwhelmed by that and I just thought, wow, he's going from a situation where he's got one crib in his room to a situation where he's got 12 (mother, west-side, 1995).

Other parents conceived of the home as safe, a place with fewer germs and strangers:

ER 28: Rather than putting Ethan in daycare, we thought he was much too young, and we didn't want to expose him to so many kids and strangers at one time. We thought it would be bad for him (mother, Surrey, 1995).

The parents of Ethan linked their attitude toward childcare to their visions of family and good parenting, they were trying to use the minimal amount of 'outside' care as possible so they could be there for their son, particularly once he goes to school:

ER 28: I've found the lifestyle in Vancouver is very, very fast, and for two working parents to have children, some people they think that by having the same nanny for 10 years is a good thing for their child – I don't think so. I think that what should be the same should be the parents, not the nannies (mother, Surrey, 1995).

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<sup>5</sup> Westcoast child and family services

So while the parents had both returned to work, and had decided that a nanny was the best childcare option for them, their childcare arrangements contradicted their parental values.

Parents often wrestled with how much time they should spend with their child in order to be within the bounds of good parenting. These parents not only voiced this concern in regard to their own family but also in regard to the choices that other parents made. This was confirmed at the end of the above interview (ER28) when the father expressed to the interviewer that he felt that the Federal Government had ruined everything by subsidizing daycare because that signaled the end of the family unit.

The previous excerpts give an indication of how discourses and ideologies of home and family are linked in the framing and articulation of the participants' experiences with parenting and childcare. In particular, the age of the child dictates childcare availability and options. So while feminists and other social scientists have heralded the disruption of separate sphere ideology, the adherence to the basic tenets of 'public' and 'private', 'home' and 'work' is still formative to the way some parents and caregivers live their daily lives and view parenting.

### **Comfort zones: negotiating the separating of mom and home**

Parents, particularly mothers, frequently make identifications to their children in spatial terms in regard to the child's proximity to the parental (maternal) body, and in regard to the child's proximity to the safety and comfort of the familial home. The further away a child is from these seemingly crucial attributes to their well-being the more traumatic it seems to be for the parent. The beginning premises are that the right person to care for the children is the mother, and the right place is at home (Gregson and Lowe, 1995):

ER24: The whole process was tough anyway, and I didn't think the right person existed! The only right person was me, and that was impossible (mother, Coquitlam, 1995).

Many of the mothers expressed the guilt of 'leaving' their baby to return to work and wanted to compensate for their absence with at-home care:

ER20: I just wanted somebody there just for Molly, that one-to-one, and I felt more comfortable bringing somebody into my home as opposed to my taking my child elsewhere. For the child I felt that it was bad enough that after a year I was going to be leaving, so at least she would be here in her comfort zone, and that would be one less detachment to worry about (mother, Coquitlam, 1995).

This was a common explanation as to why parents hired a nanny for childcare - they were attempting to create 'comfort zones' for their children, nurturing spaces to replace the absent mother. Many mothers described their returning to work as 'leaving' the child, and assumed that irreparable damage was being done. In the end this particular mother returned home to care for her two children.

Conceiving that their going back to work is akin to abandoning their child, some parents felt that the 'least' they could do is maintain the child's home to make up for the 'trauma' of their absence:

ER23: Ivan was so young, Ivan was just over a year, and I sort of thought it would be nice for him to be in his home.

Interviewer GP: That's interesting, what is it about the home?

ER23: I thought if I was going to be going, at least he'd have Lianne (the nanny) and the house. The trauma would be less. (mother, east-side, 1995).

Feelings of guilt and the pull to be home can result in physical trauma for mother and child and in this case, as in many others, pulls the mom home emotionally:

ER43: Yeah, what you have to go through to return to work with a baby, it is quite trying. The whole thing, when it is time to go back to work, I found it really hard. I cried the first two weeks all the way to work, just cried. It was horrible. I just felt so guilty, you know "Oh I shouldn't be doing this" (mother, Coquitlam, 1995).

Parents often do not have a clear sense about what it is they are trying to achieve with their childcare decision, they are simply looking to find something that feels right:

Interviewer GP: That's interesting that you didn't feel comfortable there (at the daycare).

ER37: Yeah, but at the same time I thought it was the lesser of the evils that were available! I was still too scared to take that step into relying on a individual, I still felt safer having her there than at home with somebody I didn't know, so it was a real dilemma and I chose the daycare, still feeling uncomfortable, still feeling that it wasn't the best. And I justified it by saying that she had personal care from my mom and the two of us all the rest of the week, and she goes these two days, and that's really convenient for us, and like it couldn't be that damaging for her. Although it took me a long time to figure out why I never went (into the daycare). Al did most of the dropping off and picking up, and then I realized that I hated the place, well maybe that's too strong, but you know, I just didn't like it (mother, 1995).

Something is really nagging at this mother. I see her struggling to define her mothering, her parenting, her work, and herself. I offer this passage as an example of the struggle parents go through, the uncertainty of the childcare journey, and the fear of making the wrong decisions. I offer this passage because I want to stress how uncertain mothering is. While parents draw on traditional roles and models they work with constructions and discourses of mothering differently.

When considering their childcare alternatives a lot of moms conceived of their income as a 'secondary' income that is linked to an improved standard of living and as such is optional. (This is also a popular discourse in local politics and media.) In doing this many would describe their

motivations for leaving the home as 'selfish' and their hiring of a nanny the second best option to their being at home:

ER39: I felt in some ways it was sort of a selfish decision to go to work, because anybody could... I think there's a lot of families where maybe the mom does work that really wouldn't have to if they just compromised their standard of living a little bit, but I wasn't prepared to do that. So I felt if I wanted to make that selfish decision, my conscience could only handle it if I made as little disruption in their lives as possible, and so the answer was a live-in nanny (mother, Surrey, 1995).

Another parent thinking about the implications of hiring a mother to care for your child offered a class based analysis:

ER12: I felt strange about that, I felt really uncomfortable with the idea that I was so wealthy that I was employing someone to look after my children which then precluded her from looking after her own (mother, East Van, 1995).

Parents who decided to hire a nanny often wanted someone who did not have children of her own largely because of the clarity of the unequal class relations. Some respondents did not want to participate in the global movement of mothers away from their children. Most of the parents who offered an opinion on this issue were uncomfortable with the idea of a mother being 'separated' from her children.

Further, parents who opt for a nanny from somewhere else, with the assistance of the state through the live-in caregiver program, are often incorporating notions of home to reproduce 'traditional' gender and familial relations for their children (Aitken, 1998). The respondents tended to view the home as integral to good parenting and family life. In the following example the idea of hiring a woman from the Philippines who has children of her own actively challenges notions of good parenting on many levels, spatial planes, and time commitments:

Interviewer TB: And did either of them have children?

ER42: No.

Interviewer TB: Do you know if any of the people you interviewed did, did they have children, or did they bring that up?

ER42: I think we only asked in the first batch of interviews, back when we hired Abby, we asked some, just because we were surprised. I think one of the early interviews said that she had two kids back in the Philippines who were being looked after by a nanny, and we found that shocking, so we asked probably the rest of the group.

Interviewer TB: Would that have been uncomfortable for you?

ER42: It, I think it surprised us because what we wanted was somebody to come in and really, initially be part of the family, and take the kids on as their own, and we thought what kind of person would this be if she has two kids of her own and they are 10,000 miles away, and she never sees them. I don't think she'd seen them for a couple of years. We couldn't really understand how somebody could be a nanny, you know a loving, caring nanny on one hand, and be this mother that never sees the kids, I don't know (father, West Van, 1995).

During the interview I learned that this family required a nanny because both parents are frequently out of town on business, the mother was away on business when I conducted the interview, and he mentioned that he had just returned from a month in Pakistan. They wanted someone to "be part of the family", so that their three children would be comfortable with their numerous absences, and yet did not extend the same reasoning to the nanny's employment of a nanny for her children in the Philippines. They hired a nanny so that they could make more money away from the home, and the nanny has done the same thing (this is not to say this is an equal exchange). Yet the nanny is viewed negatively for leaving her children in a similar care arrangement they were contracting. It raises the question of how much time do you have to spend with your child to be a good parent, and does that time have to be regular or in chunks, i.e. quality time. It raises the question of what constitutes a good mother, and how does her proximity to the family home matter. This father's conceptualization of distance is that of

physical distance and separation, in regard to the 10,000 miles the nanny is away from her children, which he then assumes to be an emotional detachment of mother and child.

This family is looking for a nanny who will “take the kids on as their own” and develop an emotional connection to their children, a relationship which will come to an end at some point in time, resulting in a physical separation between the nanny and their children. In this father’s estimation, a nanny can be incorporated into their family, and his children do not lose anything because they remain within the proximity of the parents. The father had not thought through these issues or come to terms with the contradictions that arise. The nanny’s children are ‘at-home’ but not within her proximity, in this instance her absence over-rides her children being able to be at-home. It is this disjuncture between the attitudes expressed by the parents, and the actions that they took in their childcare decisions, that indicate that ideologies are themselves are localized and incorporate various and shifting discourses of what is good mothering. The double standard is obvious, but what is important here is that this family is unwittingly disrupting an at-home maternal ideal. Nonetheless, this example suggests that childcare choices and experiences are more than having care at home; the physical and emotional relationships are significant in the creation of these home-based geographies. Parents and caregivers negotiate multiple push and pull factors when organizing childcare in the home, and they have to wrestle with ideologies which favour an at-home mom ideal.

### **Like a family**

Many parents approach the notion of having the nanny as part of the family for the benefit of their child, and to build the ideal home:

Interviewer GP: So what did you consider in terms of daycare options?

ER11: We never really considered taking him to a daycare. We thought we'd look for someone to come into the house and look after him.

GP: And what was tied up with that kind of thinking about not going to the daycare but having someone come in?

ER11: Hmm, just more stability for him, make it more like a family. Y'know, if we get someone who's going to be long term instead of being in a daycare (father, west-side, 1995).

The ideal of home and of incorporating a nanny into the family is also often shared by the nannies themselves. The following exchange is between a Slovakian nanny and the 5-year-old boy she cares for:

EE6: After when I finish it is not like I have to leave the house or something, or that Pam doesn't want to see me, or that she does not like my company or something like that, I think we all enjoy our company. And sometimes my time off, and I just going for walk or something and I ask Billy if he would like to join me.

Interviewer TB: Right, so you feel comfortable.

EE6: Right, and she ask me "are you comfortable with him" and I say "yeah, I don't care", I can really take him and I don't care, no problem for me, *it means they are my family*.

Billy: Like you are my family in a way.

EE6: Yes, we are nice things to each other.

Billy: But only in a way, not really, but in a way, in a way.

This innocent exchange is quite telling about the intricacies and complexities of the 'like a family' arrangement. Attachments are made in this place, but this could also be interpreted as an 'exploitive' working environment as the nanny is taking on extra work voluntarily. It is also interesting that the young boy understands that the nanny is part of the family '*in a way*'. Being



‘nice things to each other’ is often what parents are actually seeking through at-home arrangements.

For families with childcare in the home the notions and discourses of home influence who it is they hire to care for their children. There is no discernible difference between families with a live-in nanny and those with a live-out nanny in terms of the ideologies of home care. The live-in nanny option was often more about convenience, logistics and expenses than seeking closer attachments. The level and desire for a familial relationship was equal between families with a live-in or live-out nanny. Differences come in to play around nationality of the nanny (live-in nannies tend to be from abroad) and issues of privacy because the nanny is living with the family<sup>6</sup>. For example, some of the nannies spoke about the parents’ surveillance of their living and working environments. Many disliked rooms or basement accommodations that did not have private entrances because their employers (the parents) know their comings and goings: “So if I go out they always know it, and when I am coming back, they always know” (EE8, Slovakian, 1996).

Tensions erupt around the parent being both parent and employer, and the nanny being employee and caregiver; this tension is heightened in live-in situations but is evident in all situations. Mothers often described their relationship with the caregiver as one where the mother feels the need to nurture the caregiver to ensure a quality of care, and to keep a good caregiver in her employ. Some mothers expressed that if there are problems they are afraid to bring it up for fear of retaliation on the child. Parents expressed concerns for their child’s safety regardless of

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<sup>6</sup> For more information see Pratt 1997a, 1997b, 1998.

childcare arrangements, but with a nanny, concerns emerged because of the lack of other adults to regulate and police the home. While none of the parents we spoke to mentioned that they had a 'nanny cam' they did make surprise visits home to check on the nanny, asked older children for reports, and considered daycare more seriously because of the added surveillance of multiple caregivers. This concern is often subtle but it affects the relation between nanny and employer in ways the parents had not considered before choosing this childcare option:

ER27: You know, if you brought up something and they (the nanny) took it the wrong way, they might be kinda sore at you, but they're still gonna come back the next day and look after your kids. Maybe that's it, I've never really thought about that, but maybe that is what it is that makes me nervous (mother, Surrey, 1995).

In other instances the parents stated that they did not want the nanny to be 'part of the family' because of space constraints, but found that the relationship seemed to gravitate towards a family scene because it involved caring about the children. In the following example the parents were not originally keen on having a nanny: "We didn't really feel comfortable having somebody being in a space that would make them a part of the family" (ER5). They decided that having a nanny made the most amount of sense in regard to their work commitments and because they had three children. What happened once someone came to their home on a daily basis, even though she was not live-in, shows how quickly things got complicated:

Interviewer GP: So is this like an employee-employer relationship?

ER5: No, I mean it is in some ways, I mean you give a paycheque and you give the directions, and she treats me as an employer, so right there the boundaries are set... *But I don't just treat her like an employee because how she treats my children is important.* If I treat her like a person then I think she's more likely to do things in a more caring and compassionate way. She is a person in the house, as opposed to just an employee. I don't know whether that makes sense. Well, she's almost part of the family, well no, she is part of the family in a way, because she's bringing the kids up during those hours (mother, west-side, 1995, my emphasis).

Once parents settle on the nanny option they must further negotiate the social construction of mothering and how these attributes apply to themselves, and their caregiver.

### **Roles, identities and boundaries: Social constructions of mother and caregiver**

A multiplicity of discourses comes into view when parents and caregivers describe their role or one another's role in this new family. Complex and shifting ideologies of family are shared by everyone involved; caregivers and parents are both active in constructing identity. What is interesting about the way people frame each other is how it seems to contradict their feelings about their own roles. The emotional nature of allowing someone else to nurture your child further complicates childcare arrangements. The guilt, trauma and anxiety of leaving the home can become jealousy, fear and frustration when your children form attachments to their nanny.

In most of the interviews mothers go back and forth about who the nanny *is* and what her place is in the family. For example, the following mother liked that her nanny was so close to her child that she had been mistaken for his mother:

ER13: [My nanny] was often mistaken for his mother, and other mothers would say to me, you know, when we first met Denise, we thought that she was Ronnie's mother, because she's so different from the other nannies, because she's so attentive to him (mother, west-side, 1995).

This mother is thankful for the closeness but many parents are fearful of the repercussions. She, like many of the parents who wanted their nanny to be part of the family, frames the nanny as a member of the family and this gesture brings with it intimate relationships and difficult endings.

The idea that the nanny is part of the family is portrayed in different ways. Parents describe their nanny as like a daughter, teenager, substitute parent, and grandmother. These references are

telling of both the role the nanny will play in the family, and how the family might value or respect her contribution:

ER29: This girl moved in and it was just like having a teenage daughter in a way (mother, Surrey, 1995).

Framing the nanny as a teenager says something about how the parents view living with this other person and how this person fits in the home. The way the following exchange plays out is reminiscent of how a teenager might live with their parents, but the nanny is not a teenager, she is a 29 year old woman:

Interviewer TB: Does she (the nanny) stay here on weekends?

ER50: Sometimes. Sometimes she does, sometimes her friend does, sometimes she doesn't, it's just different all the time.

TB: Are you comfortable with that?

ER50: Yeah. Yeah. So, and we never kind of know – it's like, I feel like it's like having like a teenager in your home. Someone who's pretty self-sufficient, but on the other hand when you come home in the middle of the day and the music might be on and it might be C-Fun and you might want the CBC, but, you just kind of recognize that there's another person sharing your space. And sometimes they're there on Saturday morning for breakfast, sometimes they're not.

TB: How old is she? Did you end up getting a mature (nanny like you wanted).

ER50: Experienced, yeah. But not mature. Yeah, I guess she is 29. (mother, S. Vancouver, 1995 ).

In talking about the first nanny who they came to feel was part of the family this parent discusses their current relationship, two years after she has left their employ:

ER42: I think it's this lingering part of the family business, I mean she is still part of the family, the kids still recognize her and go and give her a big hug. It's like a brother coming home from University, or something, almost the same thing (father, West Van, 1995).

Framing the nanny as youthful allows the parents to conceive of her work as baby-sitting, and her career as temporary. They could see themselves as 'helping her out' by enabling her to come to Canada, finance her vacation, or provide some pocket money. It could also lead to parents regulating the 'teen-agers' freedom to have a boyfriend spend the night, take the children on city transit or determine her own working conditions.

But not everyone wanted a youthful nanny. Some parents want an older nanny so they have someone to learn from and who can 'mother' them:

ER18: I wasn't too familiar with childcare or raising children, so I wanted an older nanny, but you know we need somebody who was willing to clean the house.

Interviewer GP: So by older you were thinking not 19, or you were thinking not 30?

ER18: Exactly, not 20, not 30, you know somebody in her 40s. And Mona was in her mid 40s, and also somebody that had had children. I expected her to be like *my mom!* That's what it was like with someone older than me, because I didn't know what I was gonna do. I had no idea. And of course it was the best thing in the world for us, because she did so much planning, the little things that I would not even have thought of in terms of children's clothing at the time of the year, she knew what to think of (mother, west-side, 1995, my emphasis).

Other parents wanted an older nanny because they did not want to 'mother' their nanny. This mother did not want her nanny to be part of the family, she wanted someone older and more mature for the job:

ER41: I don't want to have a nanny who wants to be quote 'part of the family' unquote, and who has those needs to be met...I didn't want to be in a situation of being like a second mother to a nanny. I don't have time for it. I knew that if I had an individual who was a bit younger, and wasn't connected here that there was a real risk that she would just 'lop' onto me....I am quite deliberately austere with my nannies because I want to maintain that separation (mother, West Van, 1995).

Parents seeking out a 'mature' woman to care for their children even went so far as to advertise for 'Mary Poppins' or 'Mrs. Doubtfire'. Generally their desire was for an older woman was to replicate a grandmother in the home:

ER16: We're so fond of her now. It's almost like we keep her on a retainer just because we, well not a retainer, y'know, but we like her so much, and she's great with Irene. My parents live in Saskatchewan, and Dan's parents are dead, so she (Irene) doesn't have any grandparents, so I think in a way Mary is almost a grandmother for her.

The use of the grandmother image acknowledges an emotional relationship between the child and the caregiver, and a desire to maintain a relationship outside and beyond the nanny's employment. Many explained that their own parents were in eastern Canada, or too old to care for their children, so hiring a woman in her fifties or sixties appealed to them:

ER22 mother: Louise is a grandma age, she has a daughter who is 31, but no grandchildren.

ER22 father: And she (the daughter) can't have children. And that's why Louise is so caring and loving of our children, because she thinks of them as her grandchildren because she can't have any (Burnaby, 1995).

The parents indicated at the end of the interview that they are no longer happy with the work that Louise does as their housekeeper, and as their nanny, but have chosen to keep her on because of the attachment between their child and the nanny.

Framing an employee in a familial manner can create problems when the parent feels they must 'manage' the nanny more. Relationships often fell apart when the line between family member and employee became too fuzzy. In the following example the parents had hired a 'grandmotherly' nanny and ended up feeling she was too involved, made decisions about the child without consulting them, and was 'set in her ways':

Interviewer GP: And because she was older, were there issues around, sort of, discipline that you wanted to negotiate? Or just parenting stuff, because there's that to managing a nanny as well.

ER15mother: Well, it wasn't so much working out how to, it was more concern about her managing the child!! She would go off with Elise on excursions, and wouldn't leave a note about where she had gone and things like that. So we would come home some days and we wouldn't know where they were but she didn't see the concept that we should know, so it was a struggle in that respect. She had her set way of doing things.

ER15father: She was set in her ways.

ER15mother: She was very set in her ways (west-side, 1995).

There are also a few references to a nanny being like a substitute parent, or being referred to as a spouse, or the relationship being described as a marriage:

GP: It's interesting that most people seem to switch (nannies) after a couple of years anyway.

ER19: Yeah? I think it depends on a lot of things. A lot of people say that it's for two years and that's all it works for. I don't think so. I think it's like getting out of a relationship, it has ups and downs, and if you treat a person really well, it's surprising how long they will stay, it's like being in a marriage (mother, west-side, 1995).

Of course this 'substitute parent' can be fired, and sometimes she is fired for getting too close and 'not drawing the line'. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a mother of three children, aged 4 to 8, who had recently fired her nanny of seven years because she breached the line between parent and nanny:

ER6: Now she left us in December, and that was a bit acrimonious too. Because I found, particularly after I went back to work 4 days of the week, *she was finding the line between being a parent and nanny harder to draw*, and I found that she was really being intrusive.

Interviewer GP: what do you mean by that?

ER6: Well it sort of came to a head, this is an example, it came to a head when I came home for Jon's birthday party last year. Almost a year ago exactly, and I came home during the day for the party and was made to feel like it was inappropriate for me to be here during her hours basically.

*later in the interview:*

ER6: When we split with Margaret it was almost like a divorce, you know? I thought it might be difficult but I didn't really realize quite how difficult it would be. I felt very strongly that I wanted her gone in May, but it didn't happen until December, and by then I was just a basketcase...you don't get that kind of emotion with someone who is doing secretarial work! Part of the reason was the kids. *I wanted to get them back!*

*later in the interview:*

ER6: I thought to myself if anyone ever asked me, I mean I wouldn't offer this gratuitously, but if someone who had a nanny for four years, I wouldn't say "well you should've switched at 2". But I would say to somebody that no matter how well it is going, you should keep adjusting it, and think about changing every two years. But someone said that to me, and I thought at the time that's interesting but it is kind of cruel to the kids, but maybe no. Julia [her current nanny] will only be here for a year (mother, west-side, 1995, my emphasis).

This mother felt that she had been replaced and she wanted her kids back. What is the right thing to do here? What is family? This mother was made to feel ashamed by her friends for letting her nanny go because of the affection her children had for the nanny, and because the friends thought that the nanny was a good nanny who was unappreciated by her employer. When I read the transcript I had a similar reaction, but upon reflection I am not sure she had any other choice. Parents try to do the right things but the terrain is problematic. This tension around length of time for maintaining the child-nanny relation is a re-occurring theme centred largely around an ideological barrier of two years, this length of time is both too long and too short in most interviews.

Negotiating being an employer and inviting a nanny to be part of your family require balance and good will. While each family, and each caregiver, had their own ideas about what would be an



ideal situation, most seemed to go into it with good intentions, and with an understanding that there needed to be flexibility. This is particularly well described by a mother who had an interest in domestic worker issues:

ER31: I mean, you really are the employer and I really strongly believe that a fair employment relationship is built upon not denying that you're the employer, but accepting it, and covering all the bases adequately, in advance, and straightforwardly, and then those other elements of being a family, or sharing a living space, you work out on whatever basis seems fair.

Interviewer GP: It's tricky.

ER31: It's really tricky, and I can't say I'm an expert at it or even satisfied with my solutions yet. I feel that what the DWA (Domestic Workers Association) needs to do is run orientation sessions for employers, because many people are well-intentioned, but don't see things from domestic worker's point of view, don't understand how difficult the dynamics are (mother, Burnaby, 1995).

The dynamics are terribly complicated and it is not just the parents who wrestle with the constructions of home and family, nannies need to contend with them also.

The nannies also familiarized their role, but unlike the parents who tended to describe them as teenagers or grannies, most of the nannies described themselves as being like a 'spouse' to the wife, or like a parent to the child(ren). In the following example the nanny discusses how the family she was working for was going through a messy divorce. The nanny was going to be called to testify about the absence of the father from the home during her employ. In the end the mother confided that she was mostly sad that she would be losing her nanny, as opposed to her husband, as a result of the divorce:

EE3: And I said: "Okay I will work for you still, but I can't live here no more, it is ridiculous". But that was another horrendous story, and in the end, I mean I even had to go to the Supreme Court to testify, it was terrible. But I mean she was really nice through it all and that is why I stuck with it, and they seemed like family, I mean I worked for them for quite a while. So in the end she just couldn't afford to have a live-in nanny, and had to get rid of me, she said she cried more over me going than she did over her marriage breaking up.

When asked to consider why the nanny is like a spouse to the mother, she replied:

EE3: I think a lot of people who really want to get chummy with their nanny, a lot of them it is because they don't have that in their marriage. Like when I was working for Kamala, I mean we did become very close, but it was all because her husband was never around, and I sort of filled that gap for her (nanny, British, 1996).

This spousal relationship described by the nannies can complicate the living and working conditions, but can also be a nice arrangement for the two women. The following nanny, who is now a mother herself, reflected fondly on her relationship with a previous employer as being collaborative and equal:

EE4: It was never just me doing housework, and me there as the cook and cleaner, and the wife looking after the children, no it wasn't that set up. What we did was together, we would do housework and then we would take the children out together and do things, so it was really equal. I never felt like I was being put upon to get on with it and that she was going out to have fun. I never felt like that at all, she was very nice, and I really enjoyed the company of another woman around, because her husband was out so much. So we would talk together, and sometimes in the evening, if I wasn't doing anything we would have a chat and relax together because she also really enjoyed the company (nanny, British, 1996).

When asked to reflect on what being part of the family meant to this nanny, even though she had had a positive experiences with all her families, she replied:

EE4: It is just a job, it doesn't work like that. It is so unusual to get a nanny that is tied to the family in any way, really, I have hardly talked to any nannies that want to be tied to a family, wages is the thing that is going to tie a girl.

From this perspective it seems that parents and nannies have diverse, and often divergent, ideas of the nanny's role, family, home and so on.

The following nanny, placed with a 'dysfunctional' family, stayed with the family longer than she would have liked because the family needed her to get through marital problems, and because the mother needed help mothering:

EE6: I stayed there because she needed my help. I wanted her to learn how to do things, and she really appreciated what I did for her. When I came I saw the situation, she cried because she is so busy, because she also have job, because she worked for her family, her mother when she was a little girl. It means *she didn't know what it means to have a mother, and I was for her like a mother*. Sometimes I gave her advice, how to do things the right way, and the easiest way (nanny, Slovakian, 1996, my emphasis).

This nanny believes that part of her role as nanny is to teach the mother how to mother because, according to the nanny, the mother did not have the proper experience for the job. The previous quote also hints at a second way that being 'just like one of the family' can be interpreted from these interviews. Gregson and Lowe's discussion on how the emergence of waged domestic labour duplicates women's unpaid labour in the home, can be further theorized with our sample (Gregson and Lowe, 1994). This research suggests that the family narrative being invoked in domestic relations is much richer than is typically explored when tackling domestic work relations. I have a strong sense that what is being substituted is not the mother's unwaged labour so much as the still absent father's 'supposed' participation in the home. In most of the interviews the mother is still active in running the home and organizing the children, she manages the nanny, discusses issues with the nanny, and often mediates the relationship between the nanny and the father:

Interviewer TB: Who manages your nanny?

ER40: I do exclusively. In that does my husband do anything? No. It is entirely my responsibility to the point that rather than him asking her to pick up orange juice, because his thing is freshly squeezed orange juice in the morning, he directs me to direct her (mother, West Van., 1995).

This theme of mothers mediating the relations between husband and nanny, was not specifically inquired about in the interviews but comes up often enough to warrant consideration. There are numerous examples of the husband's awkward relationship with the nanny; this was expressed by mothers, fathers, and nannies. In the following example, a single mom describes why nannies wanted to work for her:

ER7: They [nannies] said "Oh no, we'd much rather work in your household. You're the nicest person we've met! You know, no husband, one child!"

GP: Was the no husband an asset?

ER7: Yeah, yeah

GP: That's interesting!

ER7: Yeah, a lot of the girls said that a lot of the husbands seem very strict, like strict in terms of very formal and made them very nervous, which my ex-husband does too. My husband's like that. I mean I had a baby-sitter who was here who phoned me back and said that she really liked me and she liked my daughter, but she couldn't baby-sit if my husband was going to be coming back or whatever. She said he just made her too nervous (mother, west-side, 1995).

If some mothers are relying on the nanny's as co-spouses, as described by some of the nannies but not by the mothers, then this new relationship provides another view of family. This finding disrupts the cohesiveness of the nuclear family ideal. To look at the families on paper the vast majority (<95%) (see figure 1) are two parent, heterosexual marriages with one to three children. Yet to explore the heart of the family a different understanding emerges. Gregson and Lowe argued that the mother benefits from the labour of the nanny, and the nanny facilitates the parents working life and makes at-home time more leisurely and comfortable (1994). But the home does not seem very leisurely within households in this sample, and most of the mothers were still very busy. Managing, maintaining, and mothering the domestic space is still very much a part of these mothers' lives. The mothers are still mentally at home in the interviews.

They make calculations of how much they bring into the home and how much *they* pay the nanny. They measure the nanny's work against what *they* themselves would do. They feel the pressure to nurture both nanny and children. They feel replaced, or want to be replaced. When they come home at the end of a work-day, the mothers still have lots of work and parenting to do.

So rather than the nanny substituting for the mom, in some of the families interviewed the nanny works with the mom to facilitate the running of the house and maintenance of the family in the absence of the father. The husband may not be more absent than with other childcare strategies, or with a stay at home mom, but his absence in this scenario is given more legitimacy because the mother is presumed to be freed from the burden of childcare responsibility. As such his absence is read differently, or not read at all, in research on domestic workers.

Of the seven fathers interviewed, or involved in an interview, none of them expressed concerns that the nanny threatened their role as father and they drew blanks when asked to describe an average nanny day, what her wages were and so on. The fathers could separate their role as father from the employment of a nanny, her employment did not threaten their role as parents. The relationship between fathers and the nannies is often described as problematic by the nannies and sometimes by the mothers. What is of equal interest is that in many of the interviews the father is not mentioned at all.

### **Expanding and negotiating notions of 'bad' parenting**

Given the prevalence of the at-home ideal criticism of a family for having a nanny tends to be levied at the mother. The decision to hire a nanny seems to be a good childcare solution on the

surface as it best replicates an at-home mom ideal and enables a child to be nurtured in the home. But this decision was heavily criticized by nannies and their criticism was directed at the mothers. The nannies interviewed had a fairly similar understanding of the work they do, and the people who employ them. The nannies saw their role as educationing, civilizing, and nurturing the children in their care, but tended to feel that mothers should be home doing this for their own children. The nannies interviewed have an active role in the articulation of what at-home care means and should be about. Throughout the interviews with the nannies it is clear that many of these women are performing a task they do not believe in:

EE2a: I personally don't agree with it.

EE2b: Yeah I think if you are going to have little ones you should bring them up too, I feel that way too Kelly. Actually you brought this little being into the world so it is your responsibility to look after your child, and not have somebody else look after your kids. I know you would like to keep your career, especially now

EE2a: when you need the extra income

EE2b: and you've got your careers and stuff, of course, but whether it be the father or the mother it's your child and you should stay home and raise your own child (nannies, British, 1996).

Much feminist analysis on the home has tended to look at how familial ideology has situated women within the home and the private sphere (Rich, 1985; Glenn et al., 1994; Aitken 1998). This response by the nannies is fascinating because of their own adherence to a mother-child dyad. Women need not mother in their analysis, in fact they have no business mothering if they are not at-home with their children. So while 'woman' is not tied to the private sphere of the home, for these women the 'mother' remains tied to home and child. Further, many of the women working as nannies in Vancouver come from 'somewhere else' and have different cultural expectations and experiences from which they draw:

EE10: Yeah well actually before I came like I had no idea where Vancouver is, you know, and I was like *Nanny? What is that?* Right, because we didn't have it (in Slovakia).

*Later in the interview:*

Interviewer TB: Maybe you can talk about Nannyng as a job, and where it fits into... I will preface this a bit. With a couple of the nanny's I have been talking to, they don't necessarily agree with it.

EE10: As a job?

TB: As a way to care for children.

EE10: Me either.

TB: And so I am trying not to lead you, but at the same time I would like to hear what your thoughts are on that.

EE10: You see, because when you think about it, there is some stranger coming into your house, living with you, and taking care of your kids, you don't see them all day with the kids, right, you just have to trust, you know. So you know, but from my point, you can't really take it as a job, because I mean you are there all day... So you wouldn't do it if it was your job, you have to put your heart in it you know, and either you can do it or you can't, there is no medium way. So you know they expect you to love their kids, right, like when you are signing the paper, it is like that is what you are signing. "Okay, I am going to love them". But that can't happen. Either you do or your don't, and I think it all depends even on the employer too, how they treat you, and everything. You make a connection with both of them (nanny, Slovakian, 1996, my emphasis).

Some of the contradictions and clashes that come about can be partially attributed to cultural differences. A couple of parents complained that nannies from elsewhere were problematic when they first arrived because everyone had to contend with culture shock, and avoided sponsoring a nanny for this reason. Nonetheless, most of the nannies employed by the parents interviewed were from elsewhere and had a different perspective on what should take place. As such, there is also a negotiation that needs to take place if the nanny/caregiver and the parents are going to 'raise' the children together:

EE6: Yes, my job is a nanny, and I told her you are a mother but you did not tell him anything, and then I called him (the son), because I wanted it to be him, her and me. And then I told her that I think we should discuss this situation because I don't feel very comfortable in this. And *I saw that she always told children that they can do what they wanted to do*, she was *too soft* sometimes. And the father he was more strict, sometimes he was too strict. And I was the person who was in the middle of all of this. It means, two times we had discussions and I told them that if we really cared about those children, we should rule the same way (nanny, Slovakian, 1996, my emphasis).

The nannies must contend with Canadian parents who are 'too soft', 'have bratty kids'

(Valentine, 1997), and either need some parenting classes or ought to have their child raised by someone else:

EE3: I mean Canadians all live by these books, like *Your Baby and Child*. Like every Canadian house that has a baby has that book (both laugh), I mean they all live by these books but none of them seem to be able to use their own common sense. The Canadian kids, and sorry I know you have got one (TB laughs), but they are little brats... But Canadian kids, I mean everybody says that, all the British nannies say that. I mean my friend Nicky, she has gone back to England, she said, "well I don't want my child being Canadian". I mean you see them at the play groups and stuff, and you just roll your eyes, you know these parents, and I think a lot of them because they are older, I don't know, but it seems like the older parents are the worse (nanny, British, 1996).

This sentiment is shared by a Slovakian nanny, even though she has a much different background from the English nanny. She is able to articulate how things in Canada are strange:

EE8: But also it is different in my country you know

Interviewer TB: Oh how is it different?

EE8: Like um, I don't know anybody who has a nanny, like we went to daycare and kindergarten and here it is different because *you have to watch the kids all the time*. Like, they can't go somewhere by themselves and when I was little I just came home from school and my parents didn't even see me because like I lived in village so it was really small so they didn't have to worry about me.

*later in the interview*

TB: How do you deal with issues of discipline, like was that different from country to country?



EE8: Yeah, you know like sometimes I feel that they are not respecting their parents, sometimes they are not respecting me, but if they are not I say something to them, but I know that it doesn't really help because I don't think they know respect. Like I know when I was little I always respected my parents and it is different because here they let you do everything that you want. Like your parents do everything for you, so sometimes I feel like the kids they are not doing something for them (nanny, Slovakian, 1996, my emphasis).

So while these nannies are providing the services of the 'traditional' mother and their labour enables the mother of their charges to leave the home, these nannies argue that this is not 'good' mothering. These women expound the virtues of an at-home ideal yet their labour enables their employers to not be at-home. This finding is similar to Nelson's study of family daycare providers in the United States. Similarly, those caregivers expressed a discomfort about providing a service in which they do not believe. Margaret Nelson argues that "family day-care providers construct their work in a manner that draws from the nineteenth -century, middle-class ideal of mothering" (1994, p183). Nelson's description of these daycare providers fits the composite of many of the nannies interviewed:

(F)amily day-care providers in this study choose to provide family day care in order to enact a "traditional," at-home, mothering ideal. In doing so, they inevitably offer a service in which they do not believe. That is, to the extent that they have chosen *not* to seek employment outside the home because they feel strongly that a mother should be available to, and fully engaged with *her* own children, the family day-care provider offers to other people's children a service that she could not accept for her own. And, although she is acting from the position of a "traditional" mother - and seeking to preserve that ideal - she enables other women to alter and enlarge the meaning of 'motherhood' to include both paid work outside the home and substitute child care for at least part of the day (Nelson, 1994, p183).

Of the eleven nannies that were interviewed, nine directly said that they were or would be an at-home mother for their children, four of the nine currently have children and were indeed at-home

moms. This former nanny, former daycare worker and current at-home mom and home daycare provider argued that her experience has provided her with the proof that an at-home mom is best:

EE4: Well I am happy being at home with Hana. That is my most important thing because, after all this, at the end of the day, I have seen, as far as I am concerned, and this is my personal opinion, I have seen too many children left with too many for too long. And I won't do that to my child. I mean I don't care how poor I am. I just really, I want to be with her all the time. And as well as that, because she is going to be an only child, I mean I am *selfish* enough to make the most of it. So I will definitely keep doing this, as long as Hana needs me anyway, and if I can get back into pre-school I will do that, I would love to work with pre-school again. Hana goes to pre-school and I keep saying that if either of you want to leave you let me know because I want your job (nanny, British, 1996, my emphasis).

Earlier a mother described working away from her child as selfish, this mother sees staying at home as selfish: the politics of being a mother are hard to sort out. Given the contractions involved in what is a good mother from the nannies perspective one particular interview stands out in the way in which this traditional ideal is negotiated. 'Carol' chose to be a nanny in anticipation of having her own children, so that she could prepare herself for motherhood, secure employment that would enable her to 'be there' for her own children, and thus enact her notions of good mothering:

EE5: I knew that I was getting married and that I would eventually be having kids. And when I started this job I knew that if I was going to get involved with it, that I wanted to be committed, my intent was that with any job I started, because I don't think it is fair to leave. Because his friends, over the time I have been with him, other people like, they have had four or five nannies you know, friends of his, I never thought that was fair. I thought that I was going to start one job that I would stay provided they wanted me to, and they are excellent (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

She feels that children should be with their moms, although her mothering commitment extends to her charge, a four year old boy that she has cared for since he was born. During her four year tenure with this family she has had children, at the time of the interview her daughters were still

babies, one 17 months, the other 2 months, she worked through both pregnancies and took only 4 week maternity leaves.

Carol describes all three children as being a family, she describes her charge as being like her child, looking like her child, and says that he benefits from having her as a nanny because her children are like his sisters: "Jacob calls my daughters his sisters, like to him they are his sisters you know". Later in the interview she suggests that her youth (she was 28), is beneficial because his parents are 'really' old (mid 40's). With this job she was able to sustain her mothering ideal and 'be there' for her kids: "I just couldn't justify having kids if I wasn't going to be there".

This strategy has afforded her an income and opportunities for her children because her employer enables access to clubs and centres that would otherwise be out of her economic reach:

"Anything I want to do I have membership to, I have a membership to the Aquarium, I have membership to Science World, Maplewood Farm, a Ski Lift at Grouse".

'Carol' is similar to the other nannies in her belief that mothers should be with their children in that she is committed to being with her children during the day even though it is not their home. She has incorporated her employer's home as her family home and sees her charge as being like her child. Unlike other nannies, Carol felt that if you are going to be a nanny you ought to become attached to the child and stay. Her mothering commitment to this child further complicates where the boundaries to good parenting and good childcare lie.

The desire for a nanny to replicate an at-home mom ideal can be seen to enforce this ideology, but can also challenge and confuse it. Nannies who do not agree with this kind of caregiving are not only compromising their notions of proper parenting, they are at odds with what is best for

the child. Their belief that the parents should be caring for their own children meant that, to their mind, the child was disadvantaged and needed someone to 'bond' with. While 'Carol' was wanting and willing to risk attachment and commit to a child, most nannies were reluctant to do so. It is an untenable scenario for a nanny because to risk attachment makes both her and the child vulnerable to separation, and to withhold affection makes the work scripted and short term. Most of the nannies spoke of jobs where they had become 'too close' to the children. In order to avoid this they changed jobs and frequently withheld affection for fear they will become too attached to the children:

EE1: When I left I was really jealous of the new nanny, because I had been there for two years. I had another nanny job after that but I was never attached to those children as I was to the first family (nanny, British, 1995).

The nannies speak to this issue of attachment as one of the detracting factors to doing this kind of work:

EE7: But I guess in a lot of ways I get too attached, I mean I miss them a lot, I mean I miss them when I go away. That is one major fault of it (nanny) (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

Nannies also develop strategies not to become too attached to the children and therefore do not satisfy the parents desire that she be part of the family:

EE2a: But I never allowed myself to get really close to them. I did with one. There was a little guy in London. And the mother gave up the job after six months. And that was just heart breaking. Since then I haven't got really attached, and a year is the longest I have ever been with a family (nanny, British, 1996).

There were complicated discussions with the nannies around the appropriate length of time that a child should have a nanny as their primary caregiver, the length of time that a particular nanny should stay at the job, and the appropriate childcare arrangements that parents should make. The

consensus seems to be that to have many nannies is a bad thing: “and the kids had had so many nannies they were terrible, they were really unruly and it was sad, very sad” (EE5). At the same time most of the nannies admitted to switching jobs to avoid attachments. Most of the nannies, notably more so than the parents, voiced a concern of how this affected the children:

EE7: I had a lot of problems with how the parents, I mean if I was a parent and I had a nanny, or even a full time babysitter, I would feel really strange about having somebody be that close with my kid in a way, when they are that young. In that family Casey (the 4 year old daughter) wouldn't let go of me when I was leaving, and her mom had to physically pull her off of me, and I hated it because that is not how I would do it (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

While there is an overall concern by the nannies about the welfare of the children in their charge there are also situations whereby the nannies disapprove of specific parents and their choices. Having a nanny in the household provides an interesting view into the heart of the family, as the nanny brings in past experiences and values in which to judge what is going on in the home. The nanny's view of the family is mediated by her class assumptions, family values and what she sees as normal and her view is often expressly different from how the parents live their lives.

Most of the nannies had worked for families that were wealthy enough to not work, or work very little, and to employ a nanny for leisure activities. Some of the nannies felt it was abhorrent for parents to hire a nanny for leisure time. The following nanny went so far as to suggest that the parents she worked for should not have had children, that the children were just another acquisition:

EE2a: The family shouldn't have had children, neither of them worked, neither parents worked, and I would never, never work for someone like that again because parents who don't want to be with their children are the worst parents to work for, because the kids really suffer.

*later in the interview:*

EE2a: So those are exactly the people who shouldn't have children.

EE2b: Yeah so why do they have children in the first place?

EE2a: Why? I'll tell you why with my second job she had children because, well she had a boy so she got a mink coat for the first one, she got something for the second one, and I said "so are you telling me if you had a girl you would just get a raincoat?!" (nannies, British, 1996).

The children in this scenario are judged to be commodified as either objects from which to demand a higher wage, or as gifts to rich husbands who desire sons. Another nanny describes parents she worked for who, to her mind, hired a nanny to facilitate their social life:

TB: Why do you think they wanted a nanny?

EE10: Probably to clean the house, that is what I think, and I cooked, I don't know, because they were lazy probably. Because she partied a lot during the night and then she came home in the morning, like let's say 4:00 o'clock in the morning and she slept all day, and the kid is up at 8:00, and who is going to take care of him? And you know the grandmother, she was at home but she was mostly in and out, she was going shopping and meeting her friends, so she didn't care about the kid, so I think that is why (nanny, Slovakian, 1996).

The 'neglect' described by the nannies was almost always levied at parents who were absent from the home for most of the day, and who spent that time in leisurely pursuits. Many felt this put an unfair burden on them as caregivers because it necessitated a closer relationship to the children than perhaps the nannies would have liked, and because the nannies could not respect their employer:

EE7: I mean if you are not a good parent you see it right away in the kids, and it is hard to have respect for somebody that you know isn't doing things right in a lot of ways. I mean here I am their 18 year old babysitter and I feel like I am raising the kids in a lot of ways (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

This same nanny continues her assessment of the parent's worthiness of parenthood by discussing a six months absence by the parents as selfish:

EE7: Casey was a year old, and Mark was about three, and the parents left for six months to go to Japan, and China, and to go to Asia, and left them with the grandmother, but in so many senses I definitely felt that the parents had the kids for such a selfish reason and I don't think that is why you have kids, and that sort of, I mean if they care so much about their jobs and their career, and money. There was so much that they weren't thankful for (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

The financial ability to have childcare for leisure time opens up parents to another level of criticism from their caregivers. This nanny continues her assessment of the family she worked who she clearly felt were 'bad' parents, but her sarcasm points to something further:

EE7: I would cut up carrots, hundreds of carrots and put them in a little bowl so all the parents would have to do [when the nanny was not there] is just pull a little handful out for the kids. But it was just the effort that it took to chop, you know, that I had because I didn't have all the other motherly things to do, like play tennis and go out! (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

This nanny spoke through the interview about her thinking the parents did not adequately care for the children or provide enough nourishing food. But she also taps into issues of class because she was aware that her employment was in part to facilitate their social calendar because this was a "family that really wanted to live in Shaughnessy but couldn't, they were a family that really wanted to be more than they were". As it was they could 'only' afford the Dunbar community, an affluent community by most people's standards.

Her feelings as a Canadian nanny juxtapose nicely against this quote from an affluent mother in West Van who is describing how unique her Canadian nanny was compared to most Canadian nannies:

ER32: What made her work for us is that, and again which I think is odd in a Canadian nanny, is that she fully recognized that her job *per se* was taking care of the kids, and mom and dad go enjoy. She never felt "hey I am doing all the work here and you are hanging out at the tennis clubs", it was much more a case of "Denise go if you are going to go" (mother, West Van, 1995).

Later in the interview this mother goes on to say that the nanny is there to take care of her needs: “you are here to take care of me too, so you can have anything you want, you can come and go, you have got your car, and you’ve got this and take a course or do what ever, and keep the kids busy and *just be me*, only take me too” (ER32). By the end of the interview she acknowledges that hers is a privileged case : “we are sort of both unique people that can afford to do whatever we choose, so if you are able to do that then you can spur of the moment go for dinner”. This mom wants to have a nanny so she can leave at a moments notice. Wealth has afforded her the privilege to avoid childcare responsibilities and surprisingly? refreshingly? shockingly? she does not see this as a problem. Within this example the mother is freed from the burden of family life but I too kept thinking ‘what a bad mom’.

This kind of ‘bad’ parenting would be evident in this sample largely because parents who would want to maintain a leisurely life after having children would likely hire a nanny to take over the childcare duties. Most of the nannies were quite explicit about the ‘bad’ families they had worked for; all the nannies had a ‘horror’ story. This view and depiction of families in Vancouver is not flattering:

EE3: Yeah I really choose based on the age of the kids. A six month old is great because you walk in on the job and they don't give you any ‘backchat’, and you haven’t to deal with that.

TB: What is backchat?

EE3: When you go on a job when they are three, and they have had quite a few caregivers, and some have been better than others, and most of the three year olds are really cheeky, and sort of that way. When you get them at six months, *if you have brought them up yourself, then they are brought up the way I would bring up my own child*. And I can teach them please and thank-you, don’t run away from me, walk down the street with me, manners, but if you start a job when they are three then you have got a hard child to deal with.

Interviewer TB: Wow, really, what do you think that is from?



EE3: Oh, too many caregivers, and the parents just too busy with their professional life and not enough time spent at home.

TB: Did you think that that was common?

EE3: Yeah, I mean they all say "our children are the most important thing, and housework is definitely secondary" but at the end of the day they are all interested in having two cars in the garage and going to Hawaii, and going to Whistler. I would say pretty much all of them are like that ...it is the ones who do not spend enough time with their kids that it really shows (nanny, British, 1996, my emphasis).

This passage shows how complicated the relationships can become, how different values are brought together, and reflects the feelings of the nanny about her involvement in this family unit. It provides a fascinating glimpse of a Canadian family from a nanny's perspective, the roles she takes on, and her opinion of this family's decision to have children and employ a nanny. Finally it directs us to think about how class and wealth mediate our childcare decisions, and the kind of care we can expect to receive.

In the following chapter I will explore how parents negotiate class issues in their efforts to secure good childcare, and how they are located differently when contracting care outside the home. With some parents it was not always an attachment to home which determined their childcare choice, their views on early childhood education and the institution of daycare also influenced their childcare decisions. In this way, discourses of home and family gave way to discourses of education and socialization. Familial and employer/ employee relations become more structured parent/teacher relationships with daycare. Further, parents move from being able to determine the environment and times of care to having this determined for them. For parents, this means they must negotiate multiple meanings of what is good parenting which vary over time and space, and which affect their children's opportunities.

#### Chapter 4: Ideology, class, and daycare for where you live

What kinds of forces come into play with daycare? Are the discourses of 'good parenting' the same as with in-home care? This chapter continues the process of unpacking the discourses that influence childcare options and parents' choices. I take a closer look at how class plays an important role in what is seen to be 'good' childcare, what options are available to different groups, and how where you live determines what you get. What is good childcare is filtered through class-based assumptions and values. Daycare is a contentious issue municipally, provincially and federally, and all levels of government tackle the issues involved differently resulting in a 'patchwork' system of childcare delivery (England, 1996). Daycare is seen as a public option in Canada largely because of the regulation and funding that goes into sustaining it, and because of the spaces in which it takes place. Publicly-funded daycare can take place in a licensed centre or in a private home, but can not take place in the child's home<sup>7</sup>. Further, a child can not be placed in a licensed group setting in which an immediate family member works<sup>8</sup>. To this end, daycares have very different discourses of family at work in the delivery of childcare services. Nonetheless, emotion is a large part of the daycare story as well. The ways in which emotion is handled in daycare suggests that public spaces can be caring, and there is movement to make them so. At the same time, emotional children are often labeled 'special needs'.

In that it combines education, opportunity and care into its daily practice, daycare can be a very good institution for young children; but the fact that it is not available to everyone and the ways that it is regulated and accountable to other institutions are problematic. With a daycare option,

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<sup>7</sup> In actual fact all Canadians are entitled to receive government assistance in childcare with indirect subsidies through income tax deductions.

<sup>8</sup> This information was conveyed in three interviews, DC3, DC5 & DC8.

parents are under obligation to find a good daycare, and the good ones are expensive and hard to get into. This further complicates the dynamics of what is good parenting.

In *Who Will Mind the Baby?* (1996), Kim England notes that in Canada childcare is seen as an employment option not a family option (see Chapter Two). While this seems true on the surface, what parents and daycare workers want is much more than that. Daycare advocates are hoping to open up early childhood education to all children. There is a push for affordable, universal childcare (see Appendix 1), which has important consequences for getting to work, *and* for socialization, education, and good parenting. Here I explore the social construction of class, place, good parenting and childhood through the institutions and ideologies of daycare in Vancouver.

This chapter attempts to do many things. It addresses the attitudes that this sample of parents had about daycare (keeping in mind that this sample was chosen because they wanted a nanny). Of the fifty-one families that participated in this study twenty-five families had, at some point in their childcare career, care outside the home with varying degrees of frustration and success (see Figure 1, Chapter Two). Of those twenty-five families, ten had experienced licensed group daycare and so a significant portion of this sample were able to compare different childcare options. For the most part parents liked the idea of sending an older child (over three years) to daycare for socialization and early childhood education but did not like the institutional aspects of daycare. As such, daycare workers were asked to speak to these concerns and I have attempted to identify the issues involved. Second, this chapter offers a class analysis of childcare. Class figures prominently in the eventual childcare decision, and affects the people who provide this care. From the parents' concerns, and my own experience, I also look at Early

Childhood Education (ECE) and the professionalization of care in B.C. daycares; this influences what is considered to be good parenting and best for the child in unanticipated ways. This chapter is divided into key themes: daycare as an institution; the professionalization of childcare; daycare for where you live; and the production of typical and special needs children.

### **Daycare as an institution**

In British Columbia daycares are regulated by the Ministry for Children and Families, and they have strict licensing requirements which impose a general structure on group daycares in the province. First, children are determined to be either 'typical' (i.e., normal) or 'special needs' (this is addressed at the end of the chapter). Typical children under six are divided into three groups: Infant, 4 months to 18 months; Toddler, 18 months to 3 years; and over 3's. The ratio of caregivers to child is 4:1, 4:1, and 8:1 in each of the three groups respectively. There are further restrictions to the amount of children allowed in any one space. For infants and toddlers there is a maximum of 12, and for children over three years old 25 children can be in one centre. These ratios are meant to provide a certain level of care but also affect the cost of delivering childcare and available spaces.

Most daycares in and around Vancouver are members of one of six province wide organizations which lobby on behalf of, and provide support for, childcare services in the province<sup>9</sup>. These groups have recently formed a coalition to advance a "common agenda and vision" for childcare services in B.C.:

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<sup>9</sup> BC Association of Child Care; Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC; Early Childhood Educators of BC; School Age Child Care Association; Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre; and Western Canada Family Child Care Association of BC. All ten daycares I approached were members of Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre.

BC is well served by several dynamic, provincial membership-based child care organizations, each with its own mandate and priorities. Over the last few years, many of these organizations have come to see that we share some "common ground". In March 1999, representatives from six organizations met to affirm our commitment to a collective voice for child care... we agreed that without a common vision for child care, few of our long-term goals are achievable. We all share responsibility for advancing our common beliefs (see Appendix 1).

This coalition of childcare advocates is working to put all childcare options, including that of in-home care, under one umbrella and are working toward "the full inclusion of all children and families" in a system which would be funded according to financial need. These are significant goals largely because it acknowledges that currently some children and families are excluded from 'public' childcare services. The brochure (June 1999) endorsed by these organizations outlines important social goals as well:

Effective child care services meet the varied needs of families, communities and society. Child care services provide support to parents in their caregiving role, enable families to participate in work and study, contribute to women's capacity for a more equitable role in society and are part of a strategy to address societal concerns such as poverty, isolation and community development.

As it stands now, and what some families expressed and daycare workers acknowledged, is that many families fall through the cracks of the current system. This chapter takes a hard look at how daycare under its current regulation is involved in the production and re-production of good parenting and good childcare. There is a distinct departure from the maternal and home ideals explored in Chapter three in this more 'public' care and this influences what is good parenting. Finding good daycare that matches your parenting style can be as difficult as finding a nanny to be part of the family.

There are spaces available for children in the three to five centres in the city of Vancouver as a whole (although some centres have wait-lists), but a lack of infant and toddler spaces. This

makes daycare less of an option for many parents who might otherwise choose it. As for daycare operators, clearly it is most cost effective to run a daycare for children over three because you have lower staffing costs and a higher volume of children. But there is so much more to daycare than money and spaces. A parent choosing daycare knows that they are going to have to adjust to three different centres, work with at least ten different caregivers (although they may have 3 primary caregivers over the five years), and contend with tight schedules at daycares, which rarely open before 7:30 am or close after 5:30 p.m. (If parents do secure a spot in an Infant or Toddler centre the hours are even more restrictive). The rules and regulations and inflexible hours and days of care dissuaded many of the parents in this sample from using daycare, even if they would have preferred it to care at home.

Having trained professionals care for your children for eight to ten hours a day in an inspirational and educational environment is pricey even if you have twenty-four other parents to share the wage costs of four full-time caregivers. Below are median and range rates for group daycare as of November 1998, and subsidy rates as of October 1998 (provided by Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre and Ministry of Children and Families):

**Figure 2: Group Daycare rates and corresponding subsidy.**

	<b>West-side</b>	<b>East-side</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Subsidy</b>
<b>3to5years</b>				
Range	\$450-660	368-595	368-660	184-368
Median	575	465	490	
Number	35	34	69	
<b>Toddler 18-36mo.</b>				
Range	\$667-940	595-800	595-940	202-404
Median	845	660	790	
Number	17	9	26	
<b>Infant 3-18mo.</b>				
Range	\$835-900	775-850	775-950	292-585
Median	893	825	850	
Number	9	4	13	

Daycare is quite expensive, particularly on the west-side, and subsidy only pays part of the costs unless your child is in a special needs spot. Daycare is pretty much cost prohibitive if you have two children. Ironically, daycare is more expensive than having a nanny if you have more than one child:

Interviewer TB: The research question largely does have to do with the relationship between caregivers and parents, and through the child, and how things get worked out. A lot of parents choose the nanny option because of their ideas around the home and the value of the home as a place where childcare should take place.

DC1: (scrunches up her face) Yeah right! I think dollars has more to do with it for parents choosing nannies. You get more bang for your buck, because daycare is really expensive and if you have two kids, and you [Trina] saw what it was paying for one kindergarten child, you are paying \$450.00 per month, imagine if you have one more kid in school, now you are paying over \$800.00 a month [for afterschool care]. For \$800.00 a month you can have a nanny (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

The cost of daycare sent some families home. Many parents who had more than one child expressed that part of the decision to hire a nanny was because daycare was too expensive<sup>10</sup>. But the kind of childcare open to parents is not solely determined by their ability to pay, the families she (DC1) is referring to are middle-income families who do not qualify for government subsidy.

Demands that governments become more involved in daycare has resulted in some Ministry funds which are earmarked for certain families, for certain programs, at certain locations.

Ultimately the restrictions force families to comply with certain arrangements, take certain jobs, and live in or commute to certain locations:

Interviewer TB: Given my experience with the Ministry and childcare, to my mind there are a lot of restrictions.

DC1: Yeah, a lot of barriers, and that is absolutely true because childcare has, the option of service hasn't really changed since its inception. I mean I think Family Places sort of work on the west-side because you can present it that way [as a drop-in centre as opposed to a Ministry office] when in fact, you can get very deeply into places, it gives access if you choose to take it [assistance in parenting], it is also a gentrified way of looking at it. But you can just take the services too, and that is fine. But there are other options around, they are not common, and they are not well known, and a lot of the reasons hinge on finances, because if everybody knew that service was available then everybody would want it. So I don't know specifically of a program that is here now, but I have known programs that run, childcare programs that run for shift workers and run 24 hours a day.

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<sup>10</sup> I have not explored class issues with parents who employ a nanny in great detail in this chapter as this has been, and will continue to be, addressed by Geraldine Pratt (1997a, 1997b, 1998, forthcoming).



This daycare worker is using the word "gentrified" to describe childcare centres and family places that appeal to the middle classes because they do not want to be perceived as needing or receiving government assistance/welfare (England, 1996). She later describes gentrified care as one where parents pay a higher price for early childhood education, and pay for 'social services' otherwise provided the Government. Her covert explanation of these mysterious flexible childcare options is interesting too; there is care out there for those in the know. Being covert seems to be connected to the idea that people working should be entitled first, not people looking for cheap childcare so they can go out on a Friday night. And of course shift work its own class connotations. Other daycare workers confirmed that twenty-four hour daycare is available to law enforcement officers and doctors and nurses through their workplaces. Nobody knew what gas jockeys, 7-11 clerks, office cleaners, and factory workers did for childcare (Rose, D., 1993)<sup>11</sup>.

The length of time that a parent or caregiver spends with a child and the quality of that time is at the heart of many of these discussions and ultimately influences childcare choices. Some parents wanted to be able to spend mornings with their children without losing an entire day of care. Most daycares do not accommodate late drop offs, and virtually none allow for pick-ups after 6:00 p.m. Many parents who chose a nanny over daycare did so because it was more practical to their work schedules due to the inflexibility of daycare:

ER51: We decided to go the nanny route because we hated daycare.

Interviewer TB: Maybe you could talk about that experience. What was it that you hated about it?

ER51: The hated part of it was, it was like a struggle as to who was going to deliver the child and who was going to pick up the child every day. Right, you know. And it was almost like an inconvenience. You know, it sort of negated the

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<sup>11</sup> Damaris Rose (1993) takes this up in regard to daycares in Montreal.

positive effects of going to work if you had to rush home, getting out the door and more picking up actually. The regular schedule for dropping off wasn't that inconvenient because you tend to go to work at the same time every day, picking up was a different thing because you tend to not be. They want you there picking up a child around, between 5:00 and 5:30, not after 5:30 – *they'll get really mad at you* (father, west-side, 1995, my emphasis).

Daycare workers confirmed that there were fines for being late and expected parents to account for urban infrastructure problems, traffic delays, and just being late. Some daycare workers felt very strongly that parents need to be more accountable for the long hours children are in daycare:

DC7: One day I had twelve children by 8:30 a.m., so a lot of the parents seem to be working earlier, but then it is always those that come and pick them up late too, a lot of the kids are here 9 or 10 hours a day...it is a lot for us to handle, we need a break sometimes, we say "come, pick up your kids early, and then spend some quality time with your child to build up a better relationship with your child, a closer relationship", instead of pushing all the responsibility on the daycare (daycare worker, east-side, 1998).

All of the daycare providers felt that over nine hours was too long a day for a child to be in a daycare which is problematic for many parents who work at least an eight hour day and need to commute to and from the daycare. Unlike many of the parents and nannies, daycare workers expect both parents to be actively involved in bringing and retrieving children from daycare. This is a significant step in involving fathers in the care of their children. However, this assumes that there are two parents, and that parents can stagger their work schedules to accommodate early pick-ups. Ironically, the fact that most daycares do not allow late drop-offs (after 9:30/10:00) likely prevents many parents from setting their schedules to retrieve their children and relieve the daycare workers. Further, there is a class assumption to this request. If you manage your own time you can build this flexibility into your schedule, but if you punch a time-

clock and report to a manager chances are you are going to need at least nine hours of care a day; and if you are commuting on transit delays are inevitable.

A couple of daycare workers felt that parents were taking advantage of them when they did not pick up their children early, and framed parents who do not pick up their children right after work as 'bad' parents:

Hours TB: Some daycare workers think that nine hours is too long a day for children, what do you think?

DC8: Oh yeah it is. And some of them just use you because they know that the place is paid for, and they are not even working. They bring the child in at 10:00 and show up at 6:00 when the door closes to pick up their child. So sometimes you know that you are being used but there is nothing that you can do about it. You can't say "hey, come pick you child up early because you brought the child at 10:00". The parents like to have a nap or something, because they do. We had a couple of experiences last summer where the parent slept in and forgot to pick their child up so we were stuck with the child until 8:00pm. And you know with the regulations you can't take the child home, the only thing you can do is phone the contacts, and contact social services, and that is what we did. (daycare worker, east-side, 1998).

Some parents felt this anger and did not like being cast as bad parents. This mother argued this is why she would not use daycares, because they do not understand:

ER25: If she is one minute late, they charge her something like \$2.00 for every minute that she's late. I could not handle that kind of stress...it is gut wrenching stress... in the last three and a half years I have learnt every short cut there is, and few that we created that get people mad at you! I rush, panic, back and forth from downtown Vancouver, I speed because I'm in a panic to home as quickly as possible. It was the worst with the daycares because if you were stuck in traffic, they would not understand (mother, Port Coquitlam, 1995).

The inflexibility of daycare prevented parents from enacting their notions of good parenting.

The hours and times of care determined by daycare centres and societies do not reflect the work and life schedules of many families.

Parents who had tried daycare, and did not like it, tended to disparage the rules and regulations that, to their mind, suited the needs of the caregivers over the needs of the children and parents. This particular father laments parent participation daycares as being vehicles to relieve workers of cleaning duties, not of involving the parents in the care of their children:

ER15: In the daycares where they have to have the roster and the rules, in some ways it really impinges on their ability to give the children that extra care.

Interviewer GP: That's interesting, how do you think that comes up in the daycare?

ER15: Well, one example is that they want new parents to be involved, to be assured that everything is fine, and I think there is a lot of resentment around that. And when I went there I really had to focus as to why? Because the kids were all sleeping and the workers sort of had a break, and I was sort of busy cleaning up, and there were these three workers sitting there complaining about all the things that they didn't like about this system, and I was thinking, y'know I'm doing all the work that they should be doing!! My idea was that from being in the daycare I would get more of a sense of involvement with my child, and they don't seem to see it that way at all. So as soon as you bring that sort of relationship on it, you find you don't get all sorts of things that would really be good for the child. The other thing that we found in terms of what we wanted was that we wanted a flexible program, and at UBC you have to fit into their mould, and their mould is not bringing people in on a part-time basis. And I mean we didn't always want Erin at UBC, we wanted her to have like a half-day, and whatever, but that's not really available. (father, west-side, 1995).

Keeping in mind that the parents in our sample were advertising for a nanny, and that most of them had decided a nanny was the best option for them, not only did they not choose a daycare for their child some parents had ideological concerns about daycare. Further, there is an identification of a push to use daycare, what this mother described as a 'daycare movement':

ER16: And we've got a friend who was really involved in the *daycare movement* and they had their daughter in daycare when she was six weeks old or something like that. But we found her to be quite an uneasy, kind of whiney kind of kid. Again, we never really entertained that thought (mother, east-side, 1995, my emphasis).

There is clash of values about whether the institutional aspects are good or bad. Some parents had concerns about daycares dictating age appropriate behaviour, some felt early childhood education (ECE) was a positive thing, and some were ambivalent about whether actively encouraging a child's development was a good thing or not:

ER12: I don't feel like they are comparing Dennis (to the other children), but you feel like they always have the exact age appropriate idea which will stimulate them to get to the next step.

GP: So its a positive thing then?

ER12: Well it's positive except, it's positive but, maybe it's a bit programmed.

Later in this interview there is a discussion around why parents seem to prefer daycare to the nanny option; the discussion centres around the desire to provide a social space for children which they no longer receive because of smaller family sizes and fewer children in neighbourhoods:

Interviewer GP: You know, what I find interesting from these interviews is how positive parents are about licensed daycare.

ER12: Often in a home situation you don't have many kids, and if that's true then you might be a bit deprived. We are a lot more socially isolated I think, so maybe the parents are really happy with daycares because the kids are seeing other kids (father, east-side, 1995).

The grouping of children into age groups, which come with their own expectations, also confines socialization to one's own age group throughout childhood. Even siblings are cared for separately in most daycares. For instance this family (ER12) has two boys three years apart, and even though they are in the same general location, in the same daycare centre, they are placed in different spaces and do not interact with one another through out their ten hour day.

One daycare worker voiced a concern about the licensing requirements because they segregated children based on age:

DC5: I think it is nuts that we divide kids up so drastically, but I understand it some ways too. But I think that it is really quite unfortunate that a three year old can't stay with his one and half year old sibling. (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

Most of the daycare workers expounded the virtues of the regulations in daycare as good for the kids, and felt that parents who used their centres like the regulations too:

DC2: When they start in the infant centre, the parents just worry about their children, and they feel guilty about having this helpless bundle going to daycare. And they don't really want to leave the child here but they really don't have any other choice. And I think a lot of parents do like that it is regulated, it is regulated much more than a home daycare, even a licensed home daycare. We have a health inspector in all the time, we have the fire inspector, we have licensing officers, plus we are ongoing, evaluating the program (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

Further, most daycare workers argued that the educational and social aspects of this environment were best for childcare and supported formal education in public schools:

DC8: I think daycare is better than having a nanny at home. I think before the child goes to school it is very important for them to learn to socialize and to learn the basics so that it is not so much for the teacher, so they are self sufficient when they start kindergarten and stuff like that. Because if there is a nanny, and especially with Oriental children will have nannies, they will have their own kind, the Chinese or East Indian, I am honest with you. And what the child learns at home is just speaking the language or sitting and watching TV, so this is why I think it is a very big job. It is better for the school system because they don't have to have ESL in the school system (daycare worker, east-side, 1998).

The same daycare worker who thought it 'nuts' that children are segregated and felt that the industry is too regulated, also felt daycare needed to be more aware of the bodies connected to the space. She thought that parents might want a more emotional connection than is generally offered in daycare, and she strives to create this in her centre:

TB: Can you speak to this idea that daycare is an institution?

DC5: Oh gosh.

TB: Do you understand what people are getting at with that, what they might mean?

DC5: Well I think what they are saying is that an institution is something where there isn't a body connected to it, it is a place that doesn't listen, it can't listen because there are no bodies connected to it. They think their kids will only do what the teacher tells them to do, or that they will only be kept safe. And we have subs that go to other daycares and they say that their feelings about some other centres are: "that you do what the teacher says all the time; or that the teacher is the guard, a good traffic cop keeping you fairly safe". When people talk about institution I think that is what they mean, I think they want some person (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

This daycare operator has a strong commitment to introducing feminism into this daycare, to the women who work there, and to the families who use this centre. Unlike earlier daycare workers who felt that parents took advantage when coming late, she wanted parents to take time for themselves and argued this is part of her feminism:

DC5: [Some parents] want space, I don't think that is abnormal. I think they feel guilty and it takes us a lot to support them to say, "you know if you have got some time off today why don't you spend it by yourself". And I do say those things quite candidly and openly to people because if they don't get support, and I don't think they hear it from too many people, probably don't have too much contact with people who care about them. Some families they don't avail themselves that easy, but I am not trying to be pushy either, yeah I have to really work on some parents, I think that is the feminist in me that comes out, and my own need for space. (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

Daycare as a childcare option can be seen as contesting the isolation of the home because there are multiple caregivers, and because these caregivers tend to be women who think about feminist issues and have a vested interest in creating better spaces for childcare. In this way she is working to de-institutionalize this place. She envisions this place as very un-home-like and yet as a good place for childcare:

DC5: Yeah you hear that home is a good place for childcare, and I don't know about that. Because I think the home is very isolating and isolated a good deal of the time, and unless you have the money, and the time, and the support from other networks, and they are not easy to find, then it becomes a real isolating place, so I am not all mushy about it (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

In an effort to be more 'home-like' and caring spaces sometimes houses are transformed into 'institutions' to make way for childcare and family spaces:

DC1: Upstairs was the living room and the dining room, and three bedrooms. Two of the bedrooms became offices, and one of the bedrooms was the thrift store, the dining room was the resource library, and the living room was sort of a meeting room. And there was a great big kitchen that we put a washer and dryer, and stove and fridge, the whole routine, so people could go up there and warm things up, or check out the resource library because we wanted them to borrow stuff on parenting and that kind of stuff (daycare, west-side, 1998).

This daycare worker is describing a family place she was instrumental in creating. Family places are resource spaces for childcare workers and parents to have a refuge from the daily grind, and to have support in raising children. They also work as childcare advocacy spaces and as outreach centres where parents can learn about parenting from childcare professionals.

### **The professionalization of childcare and childcare workers**

Daycare workers in the Province of British Columbia must have Early Childhood Education training, a two year certificate and practicum program offered through Colleges and Universities in the Province. This training gives them the confidence and skills to work with children, but it also gives them authority of offer advice and suggestions to parents about the care of their child. This is expressly different from the nanny scenario. With daycare, parents tended to accord a professional status to their child minders, often referring to them as teachers. Further, they would ask the teachers for advice, and work with the teachers in the care of their child, in this way they are enacting good parenting. Everyone is working on behalf of the child. But with all



these people and institutions working together sometimes boundaries are crossed, and it becomes more complex about who is in charge – the parent or the professional.

The previous section argued that daycare workers feel very strongly about early childhood education and feel that daycare environments are good for children. The following example is indicative of the conversations I was having with women who work in the daycare industry. I think it captures the philosophies, issues and direction of what was disparaging referred to a ‘the daycare movement’ by a parent but which daycare workers have come to refer to as a “common agenda and vision” (see Appendix 1):

Interviewer TB: I am picking up a feminist theme whereby daycare workers want to provide good affordable childcare, and one aspect of that has been providing a decent wage and work environment, and not a hierarchical one, [so that people want to stay working in daycare].

DC6: That is why you won’t find men here. You find them all over the education system, why are men attracted to kindergarten to grade 13, and why aren’t they attracted to daycare? They have to be the same, they have to care, they have to love children to be in the school system. So why aren’t they here? Well, that’s because of the wage, and also because of the job description I think. The job description is beyond the scope of what you get paid. So, for example, in this daycare I am the grounds keeper, the cleaning crew, the receptionist, the principal, the vice-principal, head nurse, document anybody with learning difficulties, be a liaison with parents, it is too much to cope even with the money, and I am paid better than most. And on top of it daycares are generally in buildings that are not suited for daycare, they are in basements. I think this basement is quite nice, but generally basements are drab, outside areas are very inadequate especially for an age group that is learning to walk so they are tumbling over constantly.

Right from the beginning it is wrong. It needs a union, like a teachers union. It needs to have proper buildings all over the city, daycare has been here for so long and it is not going to go away. The reality of two working parents is a reality, even if you are a professional quite often you will have two parents that are working it is not even a luxury. For example, licensing is becoming more strict about where they will allow daycares to open, for example if I close this daycare down I could not reopen it.

TB: Because?

DC6: Because of the light level, because of the yard, because the bathrooms need to be changed to toddler bathrooms. So the feasibility of daycares opening is becoming more and more difficult, unless they have a contractor that is going in and they say: "Okay we will allow you to develop in this neighbourhood". But you must provide a centre, which is great for new neighbourhoods, but it is not great for old ones.

TB: What fascinates me as a geographer about this is that you have the Government going around saying that each daycare has to have the same thing. Modified a little bit maybe, but that there is a right shape and size and format, and it might be an agreed upon thing but how can you do it, and is it right for every family?

DC6: It is a wonderful idea that they go and say "okay in this neighbourhood they go in, right South Vancouver bang daycare, daycare, daycare, that is going to be developed", they make green land, school land, daycare land, and allot that land. But they aren't doing that because of the costs, for example, now I believe the license is that you have to have 75 to 150 square feet of outside space per toddler, think of the cost of that!!! That is a school yard! which is wonderful but really.

TB: That would be a couple million dollars of land to open up a daycare.

DC6: That's right and who is going to open up that daycare, and how are you going to get the neighbourhood to set aside that land. It is a great philosophy in an undeveloped site and you make your model, but I feel that licensing in a way works against us in the end. I understand their philosophy but there is difference between the ideal and having a bridge to get there as opposed to saying this is how it must go on. So a lot of centres are in a pinch now. A lot of Christian churches have been really charitable in the fact that they have housed daycares over the years. What we are seeing, and I don't know about other churches as well, is that as the population ages the church loses its congregation in the neighbourhood and then the church ends up selling their land. What happens is the daycares close, and then those groups can't get that same licensing again in a different space because it is deemed to small, and then where do they go? (daycare worker, east-side, 1998).

There are some really great things going on in the 'daycare movement' with women expanding the definitions of childcare and moving beyond viewing daycare as a place to house children while the parents are at work. Daycare also disrupts maternal ideals, and breaks the conceptual

link of children needing to be in the place of the home. This is in marked contrast to what is happening with nanny care. In many ways feminism is nurtured and lived in these places.

One of the benefits of working in a daycare, as opposed to nannying, is that you can hand off a child if he is driving you nuts, take sick leave, and mostly work in co-operative work environments:

DC9: We have four staff who can bounce things off of each other, if one starts to get frustrated we can call in, we can get relief, that way we can take care of ourselves so that we can be there for our children (daycare worker, west-side, 1999).

Daycares are also becoming good places to work and, as such, good examples to children about the value of care:

DC1: We also felt strongly about team work and about equal pay for equal work and all that sort of recognition stuff, and so we made the positions 'co' everything, including salaries and the work load and it worked out really, really well (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

The wages that are paid to daycare workers, in part because of their ECE training, is far superior to women who work as nannies. Wages in daycare, according to the nine group daycare workers interviewed, range from \$10.00 to \$18.00 an hour, which includes a \$2.00 wage subsidy from the provincial government. Conversely none of the nannies made more than what works out to be \$9.50 (and this was an exceptionally high rate) an hour, and most nannies made minimum wage (\$7.50) or less. The professional status accorded to daycare workers has enabled them to have better working environments but this can work against others who do childcare, and who are not seen to be professionals and are thus unable to find work. For example, one parent who went with daycare did so because they were concerned about what kind of person would nanny for so little money (i.e. what is wrong with her) and consequently opted for daycare:

ER 45: One of my biggest questions is when someone is interested, we talk about it and they're interested in doing this. The one thing that keeps running in the back of my mind is *why*? You know, like why is this good enough? (mother, Coquitlam, 1995).

The nannies felt this discrimination and agreed that the job does not get much respect:

EE2b: Well because people really put it down [nannying]. They think it is a really minor job and you should get yourself together and do something else. I really enjoy it and I have done it for years and years, but I am always getting that comment "why don't you do something else". And I say: "it is because I do quite enjoy it and it gives me a lot of freedom, and I have always been very happy at it". And maybe I should do something else but I don't, I am quite happy doing what I am doing (nanny, British, 1996)

There is an assumption that she should move to a daycare, a pre-school, a more 'professional' childcare job. The nanny job certainly has less status than a caregiver in a licensed daycare.

In very wealthy communities the nannies seemed the most uncomfortable with fitting into the community. In the following example a father explains why his Canadian nanny had such a hard time fitting in. She did not socialize with nannies from other countries, nor could she socialize with Canadians of a different class:

ER42: That was one of the problems that Mary had, the one from Chilliwack, she felt in West Van, she felt like a second class citizen. Taking the kids up to Hollyburn Country Club where they (the children) have lessons, you know she'd say 'hi' to the other parents, just 'hi' and that's it.

*later in the interview*

Interviewer TB: You had mentioned that one of your nannies had felt uncomfortable because of issues of class, do you think that that happens with your other nannies, do you think that they felt that too?

ER42: No, I don't think so because the others were, I guess I am now thinking for them, but whether they see nannying as being a step toward something else, landed immigrant status or a way of earning money on vacation, you know it is kind of justified by "well I am doing nannying because I want this". Whereas for the Canadian one, she was being a Nanny because she was being a nanny, and all

of a sudden you kind of hit your career peak, there is no where to go. Whereas the Filipino nannies, when Alice or Rema would take the kids out to Hollyburn, there would be all sorts of other Filipino Nannies that they would go over and chat with, I mean they would never go and try and sit with the Hollyburn moms, like Mary did (father, West Van, 1995).

TB: Mary was feeling in-between, she didn't feel like she could sit with the Filipina nannies, and she didn't feel she could sit with the moms.

ER42: She wasn't part of the nanny crowd, and she wasn't part of the mom group, she was in the centre.

This passage is informative of the class issues that surround nanny work in Vancouver, that it is a stagnant career, a second class job, a step toward something else and one where different nationalities are placed differently. It also has something to say about me, the participant, and our understanding of class relations. First, we both acknowledge that, of course, the Filipina nannies would not speak with the Hollyburn moms. Second, we both have great empathy for the poor Canadian woman who tried, but failed to, connect with the rich moms. Finally, we place Mary in a middle position in an assumed but unspoken dichotomy. Of course Mary would attempt to sit with the moms because she is somehow socially closer to them, and of course the Filipina nannies would not dare, and of course the Hollyburn moms would be aloof.

Parents tended to be much more attentive to issues of class when their nanny was Canadian.

This is explained by the parents in intriguing ways, first they tend to relate much more to the class struggle the nanny encountered, and second they tended to defend the Canadian women's qualifications which should lead her to leave this work:

ER19: She's [her nanny] a young, 23 year old, born and raised in Port Moody, her mother owns and operates a Montessori school, and she spent some time helping her mother in school. She's got three years towards a psychology degree, and she's doing her fourth year by way of correspondence, which will take probably 18 months to 2 years at SFU, the downtown campus. And she lives, interestingly enough, with two other Canadian nannies. And all three girls share an apartment in False Creek, one of the nannies works for a couple in Coquitlam

and the other nanny works for a couple of doctors at UBC. I questioned her, we've had a lot of talks, and she said one of the biggest problems was trying to explain to people why she's chosen to do this, because there's such a tremendous stigma, and devaluation of people who engage in childcare.

GP: Yes there is. And it's interesting to understand that labour supply and the live-in Caregiver Program. The numbers coming through that program are dwindling certainly.

ER19: I think that the reason that's happening is that a lot of those women are probably working in daycare, as opposed to going into homes, I think because they feel there's more status involved in an institutional job, as opposed to going into a home (mother, west-side, 1995).

Nannies often acknowledged a discomfort in socializing with their employer, or recognized class issues amongst the parents of the children for whom they cared. The value placed on nannying limits job prospects and familial connections. When asked about whether they were part of the family many nannies cited class limitations to their being truly accepted as one of the family (see Chapter Three):

EE1: I did feel part of the family, and I didn't. I was always invited to stay for Sunday lunch and stuff, join in and be part of the family and stuff, but sometimes you kind of get the feeling that its time to sort of bow out. And if they went to parties, you know like barbecues and things, I was always invited, like their friends would invite me, but then I would end up looking after everybody's children.

TB: You keep falling into that role?

EE1: And I don't know if it was me or them, you know, I was a little out of my league sometimes, I mean like hanging around with a whole bunch of lawyers and things, so "okay I'll go play with the kids" (EE1, British, 1995).

The class struggle experienced by nannies is in part because they tended to occupy a different class position than their employer. However, some of the parents interviewed were also tentative about their class position. Sometimes they would be reluctant to say what they did for a living,

or explain that they rent their home. Other times they explained that they did not know how to be a good employer to a nanny because the act of hiring a domestic worker was foreign to them:

ER9: It is really hard, because I mean for me, I never grew up having someone around, so I have a hard time asking her y'know: "Can you clean the bathroom today". I just find like, I don't know, I know I am paying her for it, but somehow I guess I'm not comfortable telling her those things (mother, west-side, 1995).

Another partial explanation for nanny work being "put down" is the assumption that if a person wants to make a career out of childcare they should move into daycare. ECE training and a movement toward more professionalization and standardization has consequences for other women who engage in childcare work and either do not have the qualifications to work in daycare, or would rather nanny. Parents might also be influenced by this professionalization and this has consequences for what is good parenting. The following mother (ER3) consistently refers to her childcare providers as teachers and explains that they not only educate her children, they have taught her how to parent:

The other reason I was interested in a group setting is that I was hoping that it would be a source of support for me as a parent, and it has been. And I have learned ... almost everything I know as a parent has been from the *teachers* as the daycare (mother, west-side, 1995).

This discursive transition from daycare worker to teacher seems connected to the goals and aspirations of the 'common agenda and vision', and is actively supported by the trained professionals engaged in this industry. For example, when I phoned a west-side daycare and explained that I was doing research on childcare *workers* in Vancouver and was wondering if I could send along a letter outlining the project, I was abruptly informed that they are "teachers, they are early childhood educators". This says a lot about how this childcare centre views itself, its role in the community, and the kind of families it is trying to attract. If indeed graduates of

ECE programs are teachers, and children are being educated in some daycares, then how come this is not available to everyone?

U.B.C. daycare looms large on the daycare scene in Vancouver; it is seen as desirable by many, elitist by some, and awful by others. The centre(s) comes up in many of the interviews at least partly because both researchers had a relationship with the daycare society and with the University that supported it<sup>12</sup>. U.B.C. daycare is the epitome of what most of the daycare workers interviewed would like to have childcare be, although some parents thought the rules and restrictions of the place were not conducive to their needs. This daycare society enforces its philosophies and values system on the community through its hours of operation (8-5, 7:30-5:00), and by not providing flexible care. They select the children who may attend first through a process of affiliation with the University, then through age of the child, then through desire of daycare supervisor to accept the child, and then finally through the temperament and behaviour of the children. Parents are attracted to the centres because of the ECE program, but many families are excluded from this opportunity.

Daycares are places that offer 'good childcare' but they are also spaces that generate normalities of childcare, and where workers instruct parents on how to better do their jobs as parents:

Interviewer TB: Do parents ever come to you for advice?

DC7: Yes, sometimes and that is why we have the family workshops. We talk about behaviour problems, health issues, as well as child rearing, like discipline, I find that is most popular -- behaviour management.

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<sup>12</sup> I have not used a pseudonym for UBC Daycare in this instance for a few reasons. First, both researchers used these centres and made reference to them many times in the interviews. Second, most of the daycare interviews referred specifically to UBC daycare because this research comes out of the University. Third, because UBC daycare is used as a benchmark to judge other centres I think the University is accountable to the standard it is setting for the rest of the city. Finally, I use myself as an example of a student who had a class advantage to gain access to this 'quality' centre and had it subsidized by the University and by government.



TB: Why do you think that is?

DC7: I don't know. Especially if they are single parents, they are sometimes overwhelmed by the child's behaviour, and they are all by themselves. They can't deal with some of the behaviours, they need other ways to discipline the child. I think if everyone had ECE training than mothers would be better parents. (daycare supervisor, east-side, 1998).

Most daycare workers speak to how they educate the parents on parenting and use the catch phrase "parenting is the hardest job in the world and there is no training" to legitimize their involvement in the parenting process. While some parents enjoy this support, after having experienced this kind of support and advice to detrimental effect, I fear that this might undermine other parents' ability to make decisions for their child as they are influenced by this 'expert' who knows their child:

DC9: Our hours of operation are 8 to 5, we chose that many years ago for toddlers because we feel that 9 hours is the maximum that they can tolerate. When you are open longer they have a tendency to stay longer. The 3 to 5 centres are open from 8 to 5:30, so an extra half hour in there, and that was to accommodate the parents who had two children. Our fees are \$775.00 for toddler care for full time.

*later in the interview:*

TB: The length of day seems to be the most contentious issue with parents saying: "daycares are completely inflexible, they don't consider traffic or my commute".

DC9: I agree with the parents, it doesn't meet their needs, but this where we lean toward being child centred. We meet the need of that child, and if the parents are away longer than the 9 hours, then *I don't feel that they have got that time they need for their family situation, so that is why we are really strict with our time.*

TB: And do you share that with the parents?

DC9: We do, but then they have got their reasons too, like "I can't find daycare close to where I work", "my classes end at 5:30, why can't you keep my child for another half hour so I can finish my class, now I have to leave class early". You know, *it a sacrifice for the children that the parents have to make here, if they want this care*, then this is the sacrifice that they have to make. And we will admit that it is a sacrifice for them, we don't make it too easy.

TB: And to that end do you think that nine hours is a long day?

DC9: Well, yeah it is a long day, and we do say that to a parent 'if your child comes in early can you arrange for an early pick-up'. But no, some of them come in later. And again, I really feel that during that little portion of the day that their children bond, and of course if the parents are five days a week, 8 to 5, you have to think about what kind of time they have with them, an hour in the morning, maybe three at night, and that is all you have got with your child for that day. And you are the one that is providing for them, you are their core, their trust. So again, that is why we do still like to bring parents in here, because it is their life (the children) and we want parents to be part of it as well. We try to be open with parents about how we can *help them out*.

TB: Do you find that you do that as a daycare worker that you help parents out in their parenting?

DC9: Oh yes, very much so. Oh, yeah with aggressive behaviours and such and how normal it is and that, oh yeah if parents are finding it tough. *Parenting, again, is one of the most difficult jobs, with no training.* But they are struggling, we are struggling, we all struggle. Being a parent is a very guilty experience. We do a lot of reassuring, we say "if you need to talk we are available between 1:00 and 2:00 when the children are sleeping" (daycare worker, west-side, 1999, my emphasis).

This is where daycare as an employment strategy falls apart. Who has work schedules that allow for these kinds of restrictions? Further, who can meet with their childcare provider in the middle of their workday? Some work environments are not conducive to employees having a break between 1:00 and 2:00 to phone or drop by the daycare. Further, should daycare workers be the ones deciding when parents bond with their children and during what hours of the day this should take place? Should daycare workers be the ones determining what kind of help parents need? Do parents need training to be parents? There is a big difference between a parent approaching a childcare worker for support and a daycare dictating what is appropriate parenting. Granted, daycare workers do see these children on a regular basis and have some good ideas, and many parents value their support, but the problem is that they are making these decisions and

sacrifices for the parents. After this interview (DC9) I asked the next participant if this compliance is required to secure a daycare place in Vancouver:

DC10: Depending on different daycares, and different daycare's styles, I have been in daycares where certainly they told the parents and guardians what was happening. Never mind how intimidating that can be for children, but if adults are intimidated, you can probably picture that children will very often be towed along. It is not a guided thing, you are told. My heart goes out to parents, it is very difficult to figure out, and very often peoples' backs are against the wall (daycare worker, east-side, 1999).

Early childhood education is presented as being the best thing for the child, and my more recent experience suggests that the school system is beginning to presume this early education, in particular because it relies on the E.C.E. component of daycare to facilitate schooling. Given that daycares get to choose who's in and who's out some children are gaining this early childhood education and have an advantage once they enter the school system. Given that daycares that have an ECE component tend to be on the west-side, in particular in and around the University, and also because these centres are more expensive, there is a class advantage to this educational opportunity. For example, UBC students have a class privilege to get their children into an ECE daycare, as opposed to a regular group daycare (which may have some curriculum but this is not its focus) and have it partially subsidized (the first \$368.00 for a 3 to 5 spot per month) by the government. The wages of the daycare worker are subsidized by the provincial government (as are all daycare workers), as well most daycares receive operating grants from all three levels of government. The patchwork distribution of these grants make this space problematic. The 'public' daycares are not for the public, numerous children are excluded because of location, economics (the amount a family must pay after subsidy), cultural background (DC9), behaviour and age of the child. Even what time of year you are born

influences the opportunity a child has to acquire this early childhood education<sup>13</sup>. Providing more of these spaces is part of the solution, and is one advocated by the coalition of daycares. In the meantime early childhood education is geared toward those families who are in the know, can afford it and live near the centres that provide it.

Formal group daycare can be seen as a way to normalize children. Daycare providers describe their role as teaching appropriate behaviour and preparing the children for school. This standardizes how children spend their 'early education': they learn schedules, become accustomed to group situations and watch no TV. Advocacy, self-promotion, and daily practice combine to create spaces where ideology is lived and reproduced.

Many parents shared a philosophy with the daycare that they attended and this is good for them, but what about those who do not, and are left without this 'public' care? Some parents are attracted to the professionalism of their daycare provider, particularly on the west-side, and they want to provide the social and educational opportunities provided by these centres for their children. Ironically this push for professionalism has made daycare less attainable for many families because of restrictive hours of operation and prohibitive pricing.

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<sup>13</sup> Most daycares take in the majority of their children at a certain time of the year, generally in the summer when families move around. Children born at the end of the year may be too young to be placed at this time and so wait another year for placement but will start the school year with the children from the previous year. UBC daycare remarked that they have an imbalance favouring children born at the beginning of the year.

### **Daycare for where you live**

This thesis has argued that participants wanted to be included because they were searching for solutions for their childcare crises, were looking for care and support, and because they identified with the research question. Daycares around the university and on the west-side agreed to participate because of their on-going relationship with the University through practicums, ECE observations, and their clients who work or attend the University. This speaks to the large size of their community and what they recognize as their in-take territory. Having had such success with parents, nannies and west-side daycares I headed east anticipating differences: that childcare would be arranged differently and that different cultural and socio-economic realities would need to be accommodated. I care and identify with east-side neighbourhoods: my child ended his daycare stint at an east-side daycare, and I felt my inquiry would matter here. Half the daycares I contacted on the east-side refused to participate. The reluctance to participate perhaps was a suspicion about what I would be observing and asking, but it is more likely that they did not identify with the research question. From the responses from east-side daycare workers that did participate it is clear that daycare 'on the ground' is different east to west. West-side daycares are program and education-based whereas east-side centres seem more socialization and play based. Further, it is clear that parents are thought of differently in the east; they are not a big part of daily planning or routine. Daycare on the east-side seemed much busier with workers having more to do and fewer resources than their west-side counterparts. West-side daycares charge higher rates and put this money toward better resources (computers for example) and/ or to hire an extra teacher:

DC5: Our ratios are better than other centres typically, so we do charge more than others, although we are the average on the west-side, west of main, we are average. If you look east of main it is \$465.00, west of main the average is \$575.00. A \$110.00 difference per month, per full time space, so if you multiply that by 25 kids, there is your extra teacher (daycare, west-side, 1998).

Daycare workers did not have as much to say about parents as the nannies because they are exposed to so many parents for so little time. That said, one daycare worker knew enough about the families to frame east-side families as savvy for securing government resources, and west-side families as self reliant:

Interviewer TB: I am still thinking about the family place, why a house?

DC1: Well, good question actually. It seemed, one of the problems that some people had with using our facilities, especially with west-side people, is they wanted to make clear that "they didn't need any help thank-you very much", they were just fine, "this doesn't have anything to do with the Ministry does it?", "I hope nobody thinks I am getting any assistance here because we are fine, we are fine". Do you know what I mean?

TB: I think so.

DC1: "I am wrapped so tight I can hardly speak, but we are fine", so the stigma of getting any kind of, or asking for help, is a really big problem on the west-side, at least in my estimate. Those people have the same problems as people on the east-side do, as far as family and inter-personal relations, the same common problems, they are compounded perhaps more on the east-side because of a lack of funds. But that is not really true though, *on the east-side their options are different that's all, they use the Ministry options, on the west-side they use their chequebook options*. But it comes down to the same thing, same kind of support, same kind of problems, but on the east-side they are encouraged to ask for help, everybody asks for help, it is okay to ask for help, asking for help shows that you have some hutspa, and you know how to use the system. On the west-side that is not an option, people are embarrassed to admit they need help.

*Later in the interview:*

TB: The east-side / west-side split is that evident?

DC1: Yeah, you see, we found out that when we went fund-raising. We found we had some real restrictions, we had some real barriers to money that wasn't available to us because we were on the west-side, 'so we didn't need any help'. I mean most of the Ministry's money is crisis intervention (daycare worker, west-side, 1998, my emphasis).

This is in keeping with Kim England's arguments about Canadian ideas on childcare and the 'welfarist' approach identified by Cromley (1996, p8). But this daycare worker, like most interviewed, does not shame parents for using government resources because, to her mind, daycare should be fully subsidized.

There is more formal daycare space on the west-side, particularly for infants and toddlers, than on the east side (see figure 2). From the respondents there seems to be more informal in-home childcare on the east-side. Women doing childcare work on the east-side are often presumed to be unprofessional, on welfare, and 'working under the table' in unregulated spaces (unlicensed home daycares):

ER16: Yes, that's what we were looking for someone older, grandmotherly, but we got a lot of calls from young girls, I'd call them girls, they were all under 19, and they all had kids, and they sounded like they were on welfare, and they wanted to be paid under the table (mother, east-side, 1995).

Finding childcare on the east-side is more of challenge largely because the parents are not as wealthy, and the 'good' options are not as plentiful. Further, the physical space must match the imagined esthetics of what is home. On the east-side this is harder to come by as there is much more diversity in culture, wealth, and lifestyle than on the west-side. How the home is set up matters too, a lack of space is frowned upon:

ER17: So my requirement was that it had to be within walking distance, so I could drop Sam off and then get to the bus to get to work on time. So I went to three places. First of all I phoned a lot and most were not taking kids Sam's age (8 months). I mean, they were only allowed to have two other kids for that kind of age. So there were several, I think, and I went to three, and was appalled actually.

Interviewer GP: Really?

ER17: Yeah, I though boy, if these are the ones that are approved, I would hate to go to the ones that aren't approved. I actually did go to one those, but that's later on.

GP: So what was it that was appalling?

ER17: Well, the one that I went to, they were on the main floor of a house and there was the grandmother, the woman that was providing the care, her two boys and her sister. And the grandmother and her sister didn't speak English, her English was pretty good, but there was only one bedroom and the grandmother had that, and she needed a walker, so her mobility wasn't very good. And then in the living room there was a bed and that's where the woman, her sister and the two sons slept!! And then there was this other small room that had no furniture in it, just a carpet and that's where the kids were going to, that's where their sleeping area would be. (mother, east-side, June 1995).

The reality is that people who live on the west-side do tend to have higher incomes, better educations, and professional careers:

TB: Do you deal with poverty?

DC9: So seldom, we have subsidy, all the students are pretty much on subsidy. So they are not wealthy in what they own right at the moment but they are wealthy in the opportunity to be a student here and having the resources to have care. I mean when you look at the quality of children's clothing in here, nobody is suffering. No we don't deal with poverty at all here, it is a different class. (daycare worker, west-side, 1999).

Subsidy has a different connotation when it comes to University students needing care--they do not give up status in their need for government assistance. It would also seem that west-side children are 'not suffering' as is evidenced by their clothing. What seems to really matter is that 'west-side' daycares benefit by being able to charge higher fees and because they can draw on the professions of the parents in creating a parent board. Most of the daycares I talked to on the west-side had a parent board, none of the ones on the east-side did:

DC2: The majority of the families are from two parent professionals, I think that is where we get a lot of parent involvement. We are fortunate with our board that we have people on our board who are lawyers, accountants, you know, whereas other daycare centres don't have that. (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).



When families from the east go west they sometimes find themselves unable to make the transition:

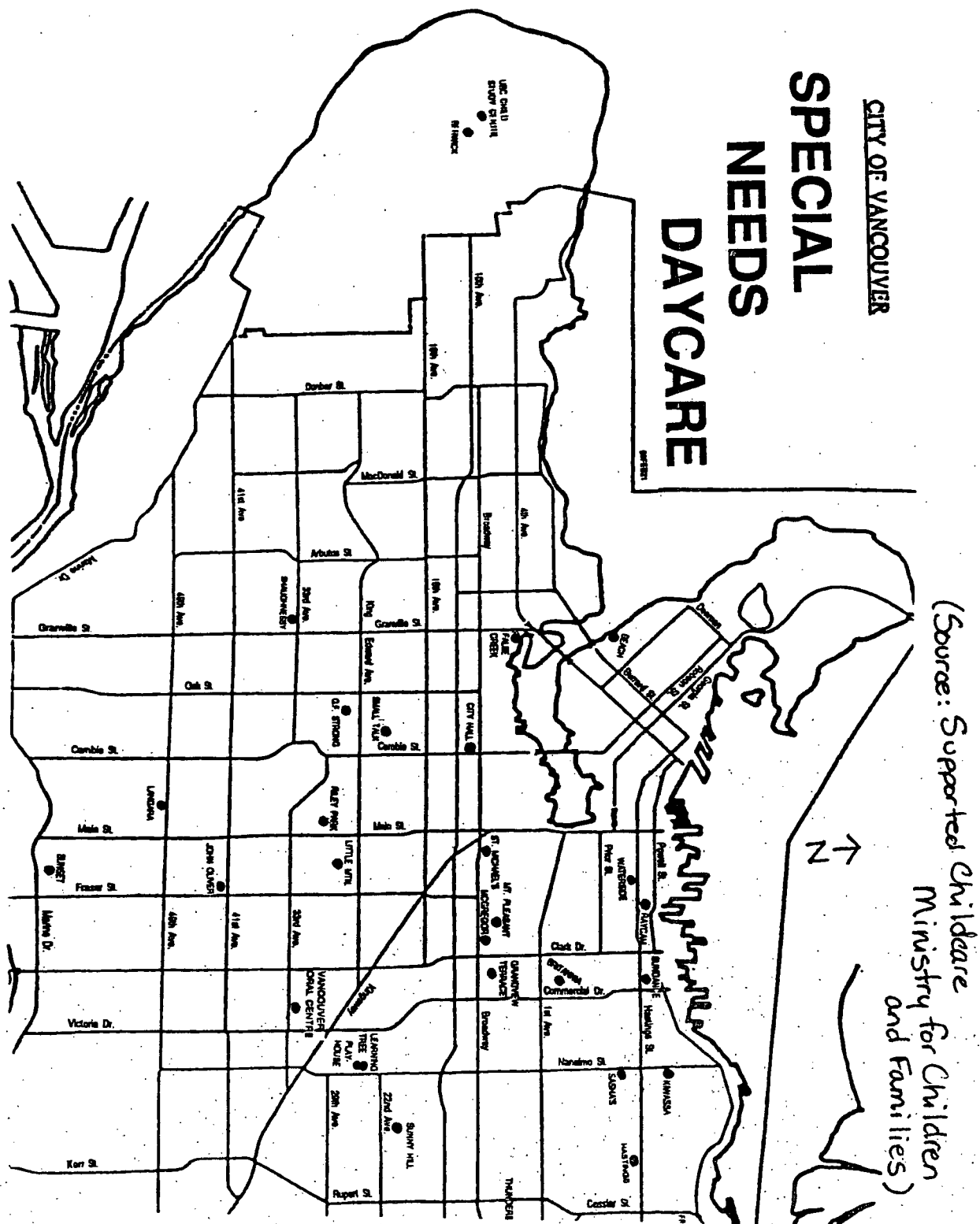
DC2: Most of the special needs kids have been in the catchment area as far as I know. But we have had children who have lived in other neighbourhoods and this was the only place that they could get into. And it has been the reversal that they have come over from East Van and the parents have felt really intimidated by coming into a centre where the majority of our parents are professionals. I would say maybe only 10% of the families here are subsidized. Like it is such a difference from an east-side daycare. And the parents found that quite difficult. And as soon as a spot in the east opened up they went there because they just really didn't feel comfortable in this setting, even though they liked the setting itself, it was the intimidation factor, and it was sort of like they were out of their own league. (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

This west-side daycare (DC2) is one of nine daycares on the west-side with special needs space; they have three spots. On the east-side twenty-one centres have special needs spots. This is where daycare and the Ministry for Children and Families come together in assisting and helping 'special needs' children and their families.

### **The production of Typical and Special Needs Children**

The most distinct difference from being on the west-side and on the east-side is the availability of Government funding and the determination that a child requires a 'special needs' spot. The map of available 'special needs' spaces in the city is a graphic reminder of how the city is segregated and who gets and needs 'help' (see Figure 3). There are more than twice as many 'Supported childcare' spots on the east-side and these spots are fully subsidized by the Provincial Government at a cost of \$900.00 to \$2000.00 per month per child and are mostly restricted to the

Figure 3



hours between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.<sup>14</sup>, Monday to Friday. Parents are not responsible to pay any of these costs.

Parents trying to find care for their “special needs” children are at the mercy of the Ministry of Children Families and the average year long waitlists at centres willing and funded to take these children. As a result parents whose children are not visibly disabled might try to ‘sneak’ into a typical spot and foil the caregiver into caring for their problem child:

DC4: Sometimes they are transferred from one daycare to another and that is very bad...It affects the child, you know transferring them one place to another. Sometimes I get them when they are four years old and you don’t know the background and then suddenly “oh my God he is like this”, and maybe it comes from, it doesn’t come from here [her centre]. Sometimes you have to open up spaces, you have to get people, kids from outside, that are four years old, that is not good. Because sometimes they have a different background, and then their background affects the other children, without you knowing it, even if you are quick you don’t know because the parents, of course, don’t divulge what the problem is.

TB: There is not that communication.

DC4: No because they think “oh this is just a family daycare”, in a good daycare they know these people are qualified to assess their child, because there is a group of caregivers who have ECE, *and they know what the child is* (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

This family daycare provider is describing a situation where an ‘emotional/behavioural’ child came to her centre and was a problem. She felt that the parents had taken advantage of her because she is family daycare provider; she felt the parents would not have tried to do this, or have gotten away with this in a group daycare because the trained professionals would have noticed what the child is.

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<sup>14</sup> Supported Childcare bulletin

One of the consequences of fully funded special need spaces is that it makes the spots appealing to low income families who might have a child who is on the border of what constitutes 'special needs'. A couple of issues are involved here. First, west-side daycares send 'special needs' children to the east-side because there are not enough spots in the west, and because west-side daycares tend to have waiting lists and can choose who is in and who is out. Second, east-side daycares work with so-called 'special needs' children in typical spots because they have them available and because most of the daycares on the east-side have a trained 'special needs' professionals to deal with 'problem' children. All five centres that I spoke with on the east-side had anywhere from six to ten children that they felt qualified for Supported childcare but they kept them on site:

TB: Do you try to accommodate children here who are considered special needs but do not have the funding?

DC7: We try to, very much so.

TB: Do you feel committed to dealing with the issues here?

DC7: Yeah, and we get support sometimes too from the Alan Cashmore centre... you know Mona as well right.

TB: Yeah, I met Mona through UBC daycare because they were very clear that they were not open to supported childcare being in their daycare so Mona had come in for a consultation with me and one of the supervisors. She [Mona] called the centres on the west-side that do offer supported childcare and they all had a least a one year waitlist. She is the one who said I would have to go east, that most daycares on the east-side are able to work with all children even if they did not a placement position.

DC7: Yeah, I know we have quite a few children that get rejected by other centres, but we took them in.

TB: Well that really infuriated me, because it is a devastating thing to have happened to you, and it takes over your life.

DC7: Yeah, I know, because my son also has a short attention span, and he also has language delay, and he was going to go to a private school and they didn't give him much of chance at all, and they turned him down. It really hurts me

because these children, they need help, and here they are turning them away like that (daycare worker, east-side, 1998).

The four daycares on the west-side that did not have Ministry special needs spots argued that they did not have the resources to deal with special needs children, and that the needs of the larger group had to come before the needs of an individual child. It was further explained by these centres on the west-side that children prone to disruptions interfere with the educational curriculum and thus jeopardize the programs, this feels similar to the private school described by DC7.

Many of the children determined to be special needs are classed as being "emotional/behavioural" indicating that emotion is not always acceptable in daycare. Childcare workers actively participate in this categorization by not caring for the children who are 'special needs' in their 'typical' centres because of the needs of the 'other' children, and by those who work with special needs children and see the label before the child. Beyond the spaces that are available west-side to east-side, it is also compelling that east-side daycares take 'emotional/behavioural' children into typical spots. The philosophy is that typical kids need to learn how to cope with a range of behaviours, and that no child should be excluded:

DC10: We take special needs children as well, yeah, in this area. Because it is a very low-income area, and so we have a lot of parents on subsidy, and lots of them are ESL children. And we have quite a few children who have special needs, you know short attentions spans and emotional/behavioural problems. That is basically what the kids are like, pretty multicultural, really diverse group of children, we have 25 in total.

Interviewer TB: And how many special needs spots do you have?

DC10: We have half a contract spot, we only have half a spot but we have so many children that are not diagnosed yet, but we have a couple of them that we referred to Supported Childcare (daycare worker, east-side, 1999).

Notice the links between ESL, low income and special needs. Given my experience with "Supported Childcare" in Vancouver the process of determining and helping 'special needs' children is very problematic, and the diagnoses are damaging to children and families.

Turning our attention from the family's feelings about daycare to the daycare's view of the family provides another avenue to explore. Daycares can now operate as surveillance sites on how the family is doing. As one respondent indicated of her job: "working in daycare opens you to the heart of the family" (DC1). The childcare workers I spoke with view it as their role to ensure that the parents are doing their job, and that the children are safe. Further, they often see their role as diagnostic of the mental and physical care of children in their centres. Childcare workers get a view of 'the family' and it how works that is very intimate and very revealing. This runs counter to Kim England (1996) who said the family is conceived of as private in a Canadian context:

DC1: It [daycare] has turned out a whole information highway that was never available before, it is a total information highway right into the heart of the family through their kids, and that has advantages and disadvantages too.

TB: Yeah, and I think families have changed so much, and what constitutes a family has changed.

DC1: Well, yeah, and that is another reason why, I mean when you take that family out of that little, that tight little nucleus that they were in, locked away at home, in a little house, with a little yard, mom and the kids waiting for dad to be the emissary to go out into the world and come back and bring the information he chose to bring to his home, it is his home. Now you have got television and daycare, I mean everybody is out of the house first thing in the morning, and that what happens to our communities? No one is in our communities any more all day long (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

Of course this view has some troubling side effects. Daycares are being used by the Ministry of Children and Families as a site from which to apprehend children who are being abused, or neglected, and as a place to house children as they make their way into the foster care system. In the following example a daycare worker explains about a child who has recently joined her daycare. She has never met the child's parents but she knows that they are 'drug addicts' and that the child needed to be removed from his home:

DC8: I still haven't got subsidy for one child who has been put in my daycare by social services and is in a foster home, and it hasn't been approved yet, but they are working on the paperwork, they will eventually pay. The child is only two and a half and the parents are drug addicts and the child has to be removed from that situation. (daycare worker, east-side, 1998).

Why does she know this? Does it affect how she will care for this child? How will she treat the parents should she ever meet them? Most of the daycare workers I spoke with felt very strongly that their training as early childhood educators gave them authority to make judgements about how children are cared for outside the centre. The parameters of abuse and neglect are problematic. I am not so much concerned about the subjectivity involved in these assessments, as this is likely assumed in the investigation, what concerns me is that there is a conceptual framework of a typical child and a typical family that is used as a benchmark to determine what is abuse and neglect. It is ultimately a process of normalization and diminishing differences that is taking place. For example, most providers mentioned they would suggest dietary changes to parents, suggest counseling and parenting classes, and sometimes they would suggest that the parent bring the child to daycare more so they would have a bigger influence on that child:

TB: I had a daycare worker suggest to me that some children are better off in daycare for ten hours a day than being at home, do you also experience this?

DC7: Yeah, we have a child like that. He is in foster care, but the foster mom is really good. She knows that a daycare setting is better for him, because he will benefit a lot more because then that way he can learn things, learn the social skills, and so prepare him to go to kindergarten (daycare worker, east-side, 1998).

The professional status afforded childcare workers legitimates this intervention in the family, and apprehensions by Social Services can begin with a report from a childcare worker. But that original suspicion often starts with a daycare worker who is making judgements about a family life she never sees. Most of the daycare workers said they had made reports to the Ministry of Children and Families, and all are reliant on the Ministry for licensing and at least some kind of funding. These acts of intervention, no doubt at times good for the child, force families to comply with certain moral and behavioural standards dictated by what is seen to be normal:

DCX: Sometimes you become attached and then there will be jealousy between the mom and you, I think I have heard about that sometimes. I don't know if it is true. And caregivers who are single [nannies] see something and they go "oh he is being abused", you know, a little bit of something and they call the Ministry, and tell them "this child is...". And of course anonymous, and the parent doesn't even know what is happening, and then they take the child out to foster parents. Who is better to take care of the child?! A foster parent or a mother who at least is trying her best to get the child a caregiver and is working at the same time. I don't know. I cannot understand the Ministry sometimes. I have never really reported, although sometimes I am tempted to. But then it sometimes happens in the daycare sometimes, you know, they are really hyperkinetic [hyperactive], some kids are like that, so who am I to decide. But sometimes, it is like, they are already three and they are still in diapers, you know there is something wrong with that too (daycare worker, west-side, 1998).

Given that my child was labeled 'hyper' as a three year old, and given that he was 'in diapers' at the time, I was flustered after this comment and did not pursue it, but I am glad he did not end up in this centre (although the centre he did enter was not much better). When this conversation began I had high hopes of where she might be going, that she might be critical of the hotlines to the Ministry, but no, she upped the ante of what is neglect. Daycare workers are an important part of childcare delivery but their view of the family, and the judgements being made need some accounting for.



In Chapter Three I worked through the discursive framing of parents and caregivers as a way to explore those relations. With a 'special needs' designation children are not only framed, they are labeled and defined in clinical and official records. The daycare teachers know "what kind of child he is" (DC4), and they determine in what kind of place he should be. How can parents negotiate good parenting when there are experts telling them there is something wrong with their child? No one I spoke with working in daycare considered there may be something wrong with the places and structures of care to which children are meant to adapt. Early childhood education is reinventing childhood through the production of infants, toddlers, three year olds, five year olds, emotional/behavioural children, multicultural and ESL children. This production of children locates (physically and conceptually) and defines who these children are in society, the opportunities they will have in their early years and likely the opportunities awaiting them in the future. Do we want to expand primary education to early years? If so, will it be mandatory? Will there be tax breaks for those who opt out? Will all the centres follow a similar model and be regulated by government? In the push for universal childcare, advocates have presented a plan that calls for funded early childhood education in daycare. In considering this attention must also be paid to what universal means and the ramifications if difference is lost.

## Chapter 5: Negotiating Family

This thesis is meant to testify to the complex terrain that is negotiated in attempts to secure childcare. I have demonstrated how notions of good parenting factor into childcare decisions and conversely how caregivers, parents and children are framed and located by that choice. I hope I have conveyed that there are limited options, and that the crisis and frustration of the negotiation is a big part of parents' everyday lives. Families are forced to work within what is currently available and there is little discussion amongst parents around other options. The subject of children and of childcare is not part of our daily discourse:

ER14: I must tell you that the whole issue of daycare and child rearing has become really fascinating to me, because of this whole sort of subsection of society that is not part of the mainstream. We deal with our children's daycare needs and then we go out and work, we don't talk about it, we probably think about it, but we don't deal with it and then we kind of switch on again when we're driving home. It's very interesting (mother, west-side, 1995).

We do not discuss, debate or imagine other ways of caring for children other than increasing the spaces of what is currently offered. Again this is tied to seeing childcare as being related to employment, in particular maternal employment. The parents we talked to did not think too much about changing the system, only lamented that the system did not work for them. Daycare workers recognize the problem but did not see a way to deliver childcare in working conditions they would like to be involved in. Discussions on public daycare require further discussion and debate. The common vision outlined by childcare organizations in British Columbia is an important place to begin the debates, but these discussions need to incorporate difference into their visioning of what is family, and in their view of children.

In looking for and contracting childcare, parents are not only looking for a way to get out and work, they are looking to find care. The choice of caregiver is often influenced by parents' efforts to compensate for their own limitations or reinforce their values; many parents are not confident in their own abilities to parent; there is a lack of social and familial support for families in Vancouver. Parents are often looking for care that matches their philosophies on childcare and family dynamics. What they are often finding are caregivers who frame them as 'bad' parents, and inflexible and regulated care "that doesn't understand" (DC5). In seeing childcare as an employment option, not a family one, this element of care is often lost. Most everyone interviewed is looking to provide and receive care, but are often confronted with bureaucracies and formalities that prevent that care from materializing. In imagining and creating new childcare systems, attention needs to be paid to the varied and complex emotional issues involved in asking someone to care for your child, and the devastating effects of failed childcare.

Discourses of proper parenting do indeed appear to be intimately connected to place, but there is a fluidity to the boundaries of home and daycare which does not allow these places to be determined solely as public and private spaces. Movement between different childcare options and the lack of consensus amongst parents indicates that there is a re-defining and a personalizing of what is good parenting on behalf of the parents. While parents work with place differently, childcare workers are located by the places in which they deliver care and this requires further consideration. Childcare options are fixed in place and do not accommodate the flexibility needed by many parents to enact good parenting.

We are so cognizant of a middle class family that we tend to frame our stories and our understandings around that model, even when we are working to disrupt it. Childcare has been

framed as a 'get the women to work' option and, as such, assumptions about the family are brought into the structure and ideologies of childcare delivery. What is more, such framing dictates what resources should be made available for a typical family with typical children. Daycare has most profoundly been a response to the needs of this typical scenario, its hours and days of operations and the services provided. For the purposes of this analysis, class issues were of interest in the way that parents' public childcare options are limited by socio-economics and location. Current daycare options reflect the needs of traditional families even though these are the spaces in which this 'norm' is subverted; there is a welcoming loss of the maternal ideal but a disturbing loss of difference.

This research project, and its continual expansion, has provided rich opportunity to explore issues of social and family relations. The same is true of class analysis and culture. The transitory nature of nanny work, where nannies in Vancouver are often from somewhere else, and have been elsewhere too, provides a fascinating glimpse into Canadian society. The following nanny is going to take her experience nannying in Vancouver abroad, but this is what she learned from home:

EE7: The best way to possibly learn about a culture is to go and nanny for them I think. You learn so much about a family, their rituals and things, even that they didn't have a real Christmas tree, it was plastic, that sort of shows you a little bit about the family (nanny, Canadian, 1996).

To her comments I add: The best way to learn about a society is to look at how it cares for its children. I am left wondering about children. There was a surprising lack of discussion about how these childcare options facilitate the needs of children, or how children might be part of a decision making process. Somehow children need to factor in the determining of what is good childcare. The interviews with daycare workers suggest that the world of childhood is not so

private and that groups and organizations have a vested interest in children's health and welfare.

I believe there is something worth exploring further in this loss of family privacy.

In conclusion, I am not satisfied that I have said everything I want to say here, but I hope I have provoked further discussion and expanded the view of what constitutes good parenting and childcare. Further, I hope this thesis is always read in the context in which it was written, and that the emotionality and situatedness of the words within are explored and considered in time and place.

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## Appendix I

### *Where's the "Good News" in Advancing this Vision?*

Today, there are some promising trends and initiatives that support our vision.

At the national level, the new Social Union provides a renewed opportunity for the federal/provincial/territorial governments to cooperate on a child care program for all of Canada's children.

At the provincial level, advocacy groups for children and youth identify early childhood care and education as a fundamental "key to success" in ensuring the well-being of our children.

And, the province of Quebec has embarked on a landmark family policy which will provide, by the year 2002, a regulated, non-profit child care space for every child under the age of 6 at a minimal cost to parents.

### *Taking Action!*

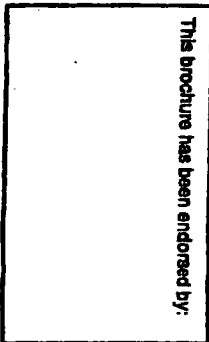
We encourage you to:

- share this vision and agenda in your community
- make this vision and agenda a priority in your work
- Have your organization endorse this brochure
- let your local, provincial and federal politicians know that you are counting on them to act!

If you want to endorse this document or if you have questions, please contact us c/o Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
3rd Floor, 210 West Broadway  
Vancouver BC V5Y 3W2  
Tel (604) 709-5661 / Fax (604) 709-5662

Support for this brochure gratefully received from Status of Women Canada, B.C./ Yukon Division

This brochure has been endorsed by:



### *Who are the organizations endorsing this document?*

**BC ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE SERVICES** is an association of child care employers from across BC.

**COALITION OF CHILD CARE ADVOCATES OF BC** is a voluntary organization working for a non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS OF BC** is the professional association for early childhood educators in BC.

**SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION OF BC** is a province-wide organization offering a support and communication for the school age child care field.

**WESTCOAST CHILD CARE RESOURCE CENTRE** enhances and supports the delivery of child care services in Vancouver and throughout British Columbia through a variety of programs, projects and services.

**WESTERN CANADA FAMILY CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION OF BC's** mission is to promote, support and advocate for quality, inclusive family child care.

### *Child Care Services in BC*

### *A Common Agenda & Vision*

*June 1999*

*This document is endorsed by:*

B.C. Association of Child Care Services  
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.  
Early Childhood Educators of B.C.  
School Age Child Care Association of B.C.  
Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre  
Western Canada Family Child Care  
Association

It is well served by several dynamic, provincial membership-based child care organizations, each with its own mandate and priorities. Over the last few years, many of these organizations have come to see that we share some "common ground". In March 1999, representatives from six organizations met to affirm our commitment to a collective voice for child care. While we recognized the importance of working on our own priorities, we all agreed that without a common vision for child care, few of our long-term goals are achievable. We all share responsibility for advancing our common beliefs.

## *What are Child Care Services?*

Child care services describe a broad array of programs and services that facilitate the growth and development of all children.

These include:

- full and part-time programs for children from birth to 12 years of age
  - centre, family and in-home care
  - family resource and support programs
  - programs that support the full inclusion of all children and families
- And the Child Care Resource and Referral programs that support families and services.

Effective child care services meet the varied needs of families, communities and society. Child care services provide support to parents in their caregiving role, enable families to participate in work and study, contribute to women's capacity for a more equitable role in society and are part of a strategy to address societal concerns such as poverty, isolation and community development.

## *What is our Child Care Agenda?*

We are committed to an agenda that:

1. Enables all children to access quality early childhood experiences and programs, regardless of their families' economic or employment status.
2. Honours and respects the diversity of B.C.'s children, families and communities.
3. Places child care within a comprehensive family policy which includes extended parental leave and progressive family/work policies.
4. Offers families choices from a range of coordinated, quality child care programs and services.
5. Expands public responsibility for child care beyond a targeted approach.
6. Provides a new, comprehensive funding approach that is affordable, accountable and financially sustainable child care services, and offers caregivers wages, benefits and working conditions that reflect the value of their work.
7. Moves child care from the current user fee system to one funded, like other public programs, through the tax system.

## *What Does the Research Say?*

Our vision for a quality child care system has been powerfully stated and affirmed in a number of research studies.

- A 1998 Environics survey of Canadians found that:
  - 79% of respondents believe governments should spend more money on child care.
  - 93% believe that training must be a requirement for every caregiver.
  - 81% agree that caregivers are the most important factor in ensuring quality child care.
- A cost-benefit analysis of child care in Canada concluded that for every \$1 invested in high quality child care for all children, there is a \$2 benefit to children, parents and society (*The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care*, Cleveland and Krasinsky, 1998).
- The most comprehensive study of the child care workforce in Canada, *Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration* (1998), points to the need for respect and appropriate remuneration for those who care for our children.

- Brain development studies tell us that early childhood is the most important time of growth and development in a human's life and that quality child care has long lasting impact on competence, coping skills and human development.

- Population health studies highlight the importance of positive early childhood experiences in determining healthy outcomes for all areas of children's development.

The case for high quality child care has been well documented and articulated by respected leaders from both inside and outside the child care community.

The needs have been identified.

The challenges and concerns are clear.

The solutions are achievable.

**Now, it's time for action!**